

**King Edward VI
College,
Nuneaton**

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

King Edward VI College, Nuneaton

West Midlands Region

Inspected February 1999

King Edward VI College, Nuneaton is a voluntary-aided sixth form college. It recruits mainly full-time students aged 16 to 18, most of whom follow courses at GCE A level. The college offers courses in four of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. The inspection covered two of these areas, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college produced a detailed self-assessment report that covered all aspects of the college's operations. The process of self-assessment was thorough and included the opportunity for contributions from all staff and the governors. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements. Some strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors did not appear in the self-assessment report.

Most teaching is of a good standard and none is unsatisfactory. Achievement and retention rates are mostly high. There are well-organised procedures for pre-entry guidance and for admissions. The monitoring and reporting of students' progress is effective. The standard and availability of resources to support learning are good. Quality assurance has improved significantly since the previous inspection but quality procedures are not consistently monitored. Governance is good. Governors carefully monitor students' academic

performance. The college has effective internal communications and an open, informal and responsive management. Strategic planning is a strength. The college should address: the limited use of IT in the curriculum; the declining achievement and retention rates on a few courses; the inadequate additional learning support; the lack of communal space for students; the underdeveloped use of performance targets and standards; the unsatisfactory monitoring of policies for equal opportunities and health and safety; and the absence of a college-wide approach to course and curriculum development.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	2	Support for students	2
Biology, chemistry and sports studies/ physical education	2	General resources	2
General studies, government and politics and history	2	Quality assurance	2
Modern languages	3	Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 King Edward VI School was founded in 1552 and in 1974 became King Edward VI College, a designated voluntary-aided sixth form college. It is situated near the centre of Nuneaton, a town with a mixed industrial and commercial economy which is within commuting distance of Coventry, Birmingham and Leicester. Unemployment in the locality has fallen to 3.9% but is the highest of any of the districts in Warwickshire. In 1998, around 24% of year 11 students in Nuneaton transferred to the college.

2 In November 1998, the college had 796 full-time students, most of whom were between 16 and 18 years old. At the time of the previous inspection in 1994 there were 695 students on roll. Most students follow general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses and are full time. A small number of students take a one-year general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) course and others return to repeat GCE A levels. Some students also repeat GCSE qualifications, mostly in English and mathematics, while studying GCE A levels. In November 1998, there were 43 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 30 full-time equivalent support staff.

3 The college recruits in partnership with North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, a large general further education college located about a mile from King Edward VI College, Nuneaton. Recruitment is principally from nine 11 to 16 partner schools in Nuneaton and north Warwickshire but also extends to Coventry and the western fringes of Leicestershire. The college enrolls a small number from the four schools in the area with sixth forms. North Warwickshire and Hinckley College also recruits students from the area to GCE A level courses.

4 Teaching is organised within 14 subject departments. The college offers GCE A level courses in 25 subjects, GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses in 18 subjects and

GCSE courses in seven subjects. The partnership with North Warwickshire and Hinckley College enables this extensive choice to be maintained. There is an additional studies programme. The college is piloting a key skills programme in the application of number, information technology (IT) and communications; all first-year students pursue at least one of these three elements.

5 The college mission is 'to promote the maximum personal, intellectual and social development of each student through the provision of high-quality learning experiences'. The strategic plan supports this mission through 11 'guiding principles'.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during February 1999. The inspection team assessed the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about 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 1996 and 1997. The college submitted student achievement data for 1998 which inspectors checked against primary sources, for example class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors and an auditor working for 36 days. Inspectors observed 50 lessons and examined students' work and a range of college documents. They held meetings with governors, managers, college staff and students. They also consulted representatives of the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise about their 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 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 64% were outstanding or good, and no lessons were less than satisfactory.

Context

This profile compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	8	24	18	0	0	50
Total (No.)	8	24	18	0	0	50
Total (%)	16	48	36	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
King Edward VI College, Nuneaton	11.8	85
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 12 lessons at GCE A level and GCSE. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some further weaknesses that were not recognised in the report.

Key strengths

- well-prepared lessons
- the careful setting and marking of homework
- effective subject support for students
- good retention rates for GCSE courses
- high pass rates on most GCE A level courses
- results for students at GCE A level higher than predictions on entry
- effectively-organised courses and good schemes of work
- good accommodation and resources

Weaknesses

- some weaknesses in classroom management
- the lack of appropriate variety in teaching styles
- insufficient use of IT
- low retention rates on some GCE A level courses

10 The college offers an appropriate range of mathematics courses that includes GCE A/AS level in mathematics, further mathematics and statistics and a GCSE in mathematics. The courses are managed and taught by well-qualified, experienced teachers who work well together. As the self-assessment report noted, the management of the curriculum and the organisation of staff in the mathematics department are effective. Communications are good and there are regular departmental

meetings to discuss course planning and delivery.

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that teaching is well planned. Teachers cover the examination syllabus thoroughly. They encourage students to make an active contribution in lessons. They routinely set and mark work and return it to students promptly. Marking is thorough and fair and all teachers make detailed, helpful corrections to students' work. Students are aware of course requirements and assessment criteria. Working relationships between teachers and students are very good. Teachers have high expectations of students and most respond positively.

Inspectors did not agree that teaching always sustains students' interest. There were a few examples of inappropriate behaviour in lessons during the inspection and some instances of teaching that was insufficiently demanding. Most lessons do not include practical work or the use of IT. The college acknowledges that the use of IT in the curriculum is inadequate. Statistics packages effectively support learning for students on mathematics courses where the statistical analysis of data is required. Students are encouraged to wordprocess assignments.

12 As the self-assessment report recorded, most students do well in external examinations and a significant number progress to courses in higher education that include the further study of mathematics. Pass rates in GCSE and GCE A level mathematics have been higher than the national average for sixth form colleges for the past three years. In GCE A level further mathematics, pass rates have been 100% for the past two years. Students of mathematics and further mathematics achieve higher grades than predictions based on their GCSE results suggest. Retention rates on GCSE courses are above the national average. The self-assessment report identified as a weakness the retention rates for GCE A level mathematics and further mathematics in 1997. The standard of students' written work is high. Their coursework files are well organised, assignments are well presented

Curriculum Areas

and there is clear evidence of the progress that students make during their courses. Students' attendance and punctuality are good. In 1998, seven students from the college were offered places at either Oxford or Cambridge University. All seven were mathematics students and three had applied to read mathematics.

13 Mathematics teachers have recently undertaken training in IT and use their skills effectively to produce worksheets and handouts of high quality. The accommodation for mathematics, which is of a very high standard, consists of a suite of bright and well-furnished classrooms, a stockroom, a small office and a learning resource area next to the classrooms. Students benefit in their studies from this

provision. Teachers encourage students from other subject areas to use the learning resource area and many take up the offer, particularly those who need guidance on statistical analysis. Teachers help students who are experiencing difficulties in their work by offering a combination of support during lessons, one-to-one tutoring and workshop sessions. Students are able to arrange specific times at workshop sessions, when they can consult their teachers about work problems. Teachers are often available to provide support outside the allocated times. Students are very appreciative of the support they receive and the availability of the resource area as a place for private study.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in mathematics, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE mathematics	2	Expected completions	91	105	86
		Retention (%)	89	87	92
		Achievement (%)	58	*	47
GCE AS mathematics	3	Expected completions	12	41	25
		Retention (%)	60	68	83
		Achievement (%)	73	62	52
GCE A level mathematics	3	Expected completions	123	117	103
		Retention (%)	90	73	79
		Achievement (%)	90	85	93
GCE A level further mathematics	3	Expected completions	10	13	13
		Retention (%)	80	62	100
		Achievement (%)	88	100	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data inaccurate

Curriculum Areas

Biology, Chemistry and Sports Studies/Physical Education

Grade 2

14 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. The inspection covered GCE A/AS level and GCSE courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings of the self-assessment report. They found a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- good pass rates in most GCE A level subjects
- the well-planned courses and lessons
- careful marking of the work of biology and chemistry students
- the effective integration of practical work with teaching schemes
- good individual support for students
- the high quality of resources for biology and sports studies

Weaknesses

- low pass rates in GCSE science
- low pass and retention rates in GCE A level human biology
- insufficient use of IT in students' work
- some inadequate marking of the work of students on GCSE science and sports studies courses
- the poor quality of outdated chemistry laboratories

15 The college offers a narrow range of science courses. Management of the science curriculum is undertaken by each of the subject departments. While this approach is effective for the organisation of subject teaching, it impedes the strategic development of science. The departments plan their teaching well and analyse examination results, retention rates and

students' individual performance. These analyses have resulted in changes to the organisation of teaching programmes which have improved students' performance. Teachers are effectively deployed and their skills are well matched to the courses that they teach.

16 Inspectors agreed with the college that most teaching is good or outstanding. The organisation of lessons is effective. Teachers and students work well together. Teachers use questions appropriately to check that students understand the work and to extend their understanding. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects. They respond well to the wide variety of questions posed by students; this was a particularly strong feature of outstanding lessons. A GCE A level biology lesson combined practical work, stimulating questions and excellent use of a video. Students enjoyed the lesson, understood what they had to learn and found the topic challenging. Students taking a foundation module in chemistry were treated to a demanding and well-focused lesson on chemical bonding that made good use of balloon models scattered around the laboratory. Students on the GCE A level sports studies course benefited from a well-planned lesson on the all-weather pitch that encouraged them to develop their skills and analyse their activities. A few less effective lessons failed to cater for the wide ability range of the students in a class. In a number of practical lessons, students were not sufficiently encouraged to work hard and organise their work effectively. In one lesson, the students were distracted by the noise made by other students gathered in the corridor outside the room. Students' work is marked carefully and fairly in biology and chemistry. In GCSE science and GCE A level sports studies and physical education, marking and correction are less thorough.

17 Students of GCE A level biology, chemistry and sports studies and physical education perform well in examinations. Pass rates are consistently at or above the national averages. Most results at GCE A level are in line with

Curriculum Areas

predictions based upon students' GCSE grades on entry. Many students progress to higher education to study subjects related to the courses they are taking. Retention rates often vary significantly in a subject from year to year. Overall they have shown some decline over the last three years. Pass rates in GCSE science and GCE A level human biology are below national averages, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Students' written work is generally good. Their note-taking is effective and their files contain good records of the work covered. Some students achieve high standards in essay writing but others are less effective at organising and presenting their arguments. A few have underdeveloped practical skills. While some students use IT well, there is insufficient

use of IT in students' coursework, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report.

18 Technical support is effective. There are some large teaching groups that are reaching their maximum manageable size, especially in biology. The creation of a fitness room and a new pavilion has improved the sports facilities. Students also benefit from the extensive and high-quality sports facilities available in a nearby leisure complex. The poor quality of the chemistry laboratories was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. They are large, have poor acoustics and inadequate heating. Despite teachers' best attempts to use effective displays, the laboratories present an outdated image of the subject.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in biology, chemistry and sports studies/physical education, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE science	2	Expected completions	12	18	*
		Retention (%)	83	83	*
		Achievement (%)	40	27	*
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	66	88	89
		Retention (%)	82	67	74
		Achievement (%)	87	86	88
GCE A level human biology	3	Expected completions	41	33	47
		Retention (%)	76	67	53
		Achievement (%)	77	59	64
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	61	68	76
		Retention (%)	82	66	71
		Achievement (%)	90	87	86
GCE A level sports studies/ physical education	3	Expected completions	16	44	29
		Retention (%)	94	70	79
		Achievement (%)	93	97	91

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*course did not run

Curriculum Areas

General Studies, Government and Politics and History

Grade 2

19 Inspectors observed 13 lessons at GCE A level in general studies, government and politics and history. They agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report and noted that some of the weaknesses identified for general studies had been remedied by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- most teaching of a high standard
- the high quality of students' written work
- good examination achievements
- effective departmental management
- the high quality of accommodation
- good learning resources
- the success of general studies courses in broadening students' skills

Weaknesses

- the declining retention rate in history
- some failure in a few lessons to meet the needs of all students

20 The college offers full-time courses in GCE A level government and politics and history and some GCE AS provision. About a third of the college's second-year students take the one-year GCE A level course in general studies. Departments have sought to encourage recruitment to the subjects by offering humanities 'taster' days to local partner schools. As recognised in the self-assessment report, course management is particularly effective. Students' achievements are thoroughly analysed. There are clear aims and objectives for each subject. Minutes of departmental meetings are carefully recorded. They focus on key issues relating to the improvement of teaching and

learning and to students' achievements. The well-drafted departmental operating plans are effectively implemented. Inspectors noted that the weakness recorded in the self-assessment report relating to ineffective teamwork in general studies had been successfully addressed by the time of the inspection.

21 As the self-assessment report recognised, most teaching is of a high standard. All courses have well-developed schemes of work and carefully-prepared subject handbooks. Teachers use an appropriate variety of effective teaching methods, including group work, analysis of primary sources and some computer-assisted learning. There is careful marking based on clear assessment criteria. Teachers' comments help students to improve their work. Students of government and politics visit the House of Commons each year and history students visit places of historical significance. The departments pay careful attention to key skills. The best lessons saw a lively response by students to skilful questioning. For example, in a lesson about the religious controversies of the sixteenth century, students displayed a good understanding of Catholic and Lutheran views of the sacraments. In a few lessons, students were less responsive, and teachers sometimes failed to cater for the wide ability range in the class. The outcome was that students achieved less than they could have done in the time available. Examination of students' coursework, observation of lessons and discussion with students confirmed the claim in the self-assessment report that the general studies course broadens students' skills and understanding.

22 Most student retention rates and examination achievements in government and politics and general studies are at or above the national average. Students' examination performance exceeds predictions based on their GCSE results. As the self-assessment report recognised, retention rates in history have declined and the pass rate fell in 1998. The college is aware of these shortcomings and has

Curriculum Areas

taken action to improve retention. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the changes.

Second-year students in government and politics and history can argue skilfully and have a good understanding of complex issues. Most students' written work is of a high standard and, in general studies and history, some work is outstanding. Most students wordprocess their work and some make successful use of graphs and images.

23 Both history GCE A level and government and politics GCE A level are taught in an attractive new building which has good-sized,

well-equipped rooms. This provision has removed the overcrowding observed during the previous inspection. There are attractive displays of students' work and posters. A useful learning resource workshop has computer-aided learning packages in history and government and politics. The self-assessment report recognised as a weakness the absence of a link between the computers in the workshop and the college's computer network. The library support for history is good and that for government and politics is adequate.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in general studies, government and politics and history, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level history	3	Expected completions	56	84	62
		Retention (%)	91	76	77
		Achievement (%)	96	92	81
GCE A level government and politics	3	Expected completions	15	12	11
		Retention (%)	80	92	91
		Achievement (%)	91	100	90
GCE A level general studies	3	Expected completions	63	181	121
		Retention (%)	81	78	96
		Achievement (%)	88	89	86

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Modern Languages

Grade 3

24 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in French, German and Spanish. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found some weaknesses understated, particularly those relating to students' achievements.

Key strengths

- carefully-designed teaching programmes
- well-prepared lessons that sustain students' interest
- good support for individual students
- appropriately varied and up-to-date teaching materials
- attractive classroom displays

Weaknesses

- failure of some teaching to meet the differing needs of students
- declining student achievement and retention rates
- lack of clear departmental strategy to deal with areas of weakness
- shortcomings in equipment and accommodation
- insufficient monitoring of students' independent study

25 The department offers courses at GCE A level in French, German and Spanish and GCSE Spanish. Latin has recently been added. Student numbers, especially in French, have fallen over the past three years. The range of provision at GCE A level is good and includes opportunities for students to enter for GCE AS courses. However, few students take up this option and there are no courses, other than GCSE Spanish, for students who wish to study a language below advanced level. The department

lacks a clear strategy for dealing with these and other areas of weakness. The small team of teachers meets frequently on an informal basis and has formal meetings twice a term. Teachers know their students well and maintain thorough records of their progress. They organise a range of additional activities, including a recent study visit to France, exchange visits to Spain and France, and an annual 'taster' day for year 10 pupils from local partner schools.

26 Inspectors agreed that teaching programmes are carefully designed to help students make the transition from GCSE to GCE A level. Teachers are enthusiastic and experienced. They prepare lessons carefully to develop students' language skills and to improve their understanding and use of grammar. Up-to-date teaching materials enhance students' awareness of social, cultural and political issues. Teachers use the appropriate foreign language for most of their lessons and encourage students to do so. In an outstanding lesson, students discussed the qualities of a good teacher with enthusiasm and fluency. They were helped by their teacher's expert use of gesture to remind them of relevant vocabulary and to avoid the use of English.

27 As the self-assessment report noted, the department admits students with a wide range of prior attainment. Teaching does not always address their differing needs adequately. Teachers mark work carefully and give advice with specific problems, but lessons are largely aimed at the whole class. Insufficient demands are made on the more confident students and the less confident make little contribution. The pace of lessons is often too slow and the volume of work achieved is inadequate. Most students are attentive, take care with their written work, and have good comprehension skills. They answer questions and undertake simple speaking tasks with some confidence and accuracy, but few volunteer answers, ask questions or express personal opinions.

Curriculum Areas

28 The college employs foreign language assistants to provide conversation classes in small groups and teachers hold workshops to give individual support. Some students make good use of these opportunities. They are expected to undertake five hours of independent study each week, but the department does not sufficiently monitor their use of this time. A resources room is available for study but no students were seen using the room during the inspection.

29 There have been some good examination results, including 100% pass rates in GCE A level German and Spanish in 1996, but achievements have declined in the past three years. In 1998, GCE A level pass rates at grades A to E were below the national average for sixth form colleges and passes at grades A to C were significantly below average in German and Spanish. The department has a good record of

pass rates for GCSE Spanish, 100% in 1996 and 93% in 1998. Retention rates fell in 1997 but recovered slightly in 1998.

30 The department has an appropriate variety of up-to-date teaching materials. Classrooms are of good size and enhanced by attractive displays. However, the accommodation is split inconveniently between two areas of the college. The classroom housing the language laboratory has severe acoustic problems, which were noted in the previous inspection, and are only now due to be remedied. The satellite television system was out of use until recently; its video recorder has broken down. There is only one usable overhead projector in the department. Use of IT is underdeveloped. There are some grammar programs and CD-ROMs but students make little use of them. A few students have used the internet for research and some have wordprocessed their homework.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in modern languages, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE Spanish	2	Expected completions	12	4	18
		Retention (%)	92	75	78
		Achievement (%)	*	67	93
GCE A level French	3	Expected completions	56	46	23
		Retention (%)	79	72	74
		Achievement (%)	90	70	82
GCE A level German and Spanish	3	Expected completions	21	22	29
		Retention (%)	76	73	72
		Achievement (%)	100	88	71

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data inaccurate

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

31 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective collaboration with local 11 to 16 schools and the neighbouring further education college
- effective pre-entry guidance and admissions procedures
- a well-designed tutorial programme
- good-quality careers advice for higher education
- effective monitoring and reporting of students' progress

Weaknesses

- inadequate provision for learning support
- underdeveloped guidance for students seeking employment
- uneven quality of group tutorials

32 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college provides prospective students with good and impartial pre-entry advice. The joint admissions system run in collaboration with the neighbouring college of further education ensures that students can be placed on the most appropriate course. The two colleges offer guidance and interviews and enrol students on courses at both colleges. The college has effective links with schools. College staff attend school careers events and open evenings, and visit schools during the year to give advice on courses. Attendance at college open days is good. An induction day in July provides further opportunities for obtaining advice. At enrolment students retain their entitlement to choose courses in either college.

The two colleges collaborate in the provision of a number of GCE A level courses. A free bus service operates between the two colleges. Arrangements for changing courses within the college are effective.

33 Students value highly the tutorial time that provides an opportunity for discussion about personal progress with their tutors. The system for monitoring and reporting on students' progress is effective. Subject workshops to support advanced level courses have improved the high levels of informal support given to students by staff. The college organises regular evenings for parents where they receive and discuss reports of students' progress with teachers. Students are encouraged to develop and complete records of achievement and tutorial time is set aside to ensure that this is done. In 1998-99, first-year tutor groups are participating in a pilot project designed to enhance their key skills. As the self-assessment report stated, the monitoring of students' progress in key skills has provided additional benefit and structure to tutorial time. The effectiveness of group tutorials, however, is uneven, a weakness the self-assessment report recognised. Attendance levels at group tutorials are lower than in GCE A level lessons. The college has no successful system to ensure a consistent standard is maintained.

34 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college's career guidance for higher education is a strength. Each January, as part of the tutorial programme, the college launches a careers programme for advanced level students, which leads to the development of an individual action plan by each student. There is a careers convention in July that places an emphasis on higher education and an evening meeting for parents on higher education issues. The college works directly with Warwickshire Careers Service to provide advice for students who intend to go into employment. However, as indicated in the self-assessment report, the college does not pay enough

Cross-college Provision

attention to the needs of this group of students. The careers room has relevant books, and appropriate videos and CD-ROMs are available. Personal counselling is available for students from the Health Store, a local confidential service for young people. A range of opportunities is available for work experience and community service. Around 70 students each year undertake weekly placements in local schools.

35 Learning support for students with specific learning difficulties is inadequately resourced. While the college has plans to develop this provision, it provides only minimal teaching contact time. The initial diagnosis of requirements for additional learning support is limited to scrutiny of the level of students' individual GCSE point scores. While the college has developed an effective system for monitoring the progress of those students who receive additional learning support, procedures for referral are ineffective. There is no college-wide system for assessing the additional learning support needs of students.

36 There is a well-organised and effective student council which provides a forum for students to air their concerns. Its executive committee organises student social events and manages projects to raise money for local charities. A wide range of sporting activities is available to students and additional studies courses broaden the curriculum. Few opportunities are available for students to take part in art, drama or music activities.

General Resources

Grade 2

37 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Action has been taken to rectify some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the number and quality of recent improvements to the learning environment
- the availability and quality of the learning resources
- close monitoring of room usage
- the high standard of maintenance of most areas of the college

Weaknesses

- the lack of communal space for student use
- the lack of access to parts of the college for students with restricted mobility

38 The college is located within a conservation area. Some buildings date from the nineteenth century and are grade 2 listed. As recognised in the self-assessment, there have been significant improvements to the accommodation since the last inspection. They include: a refurbished refectory; a new building for history and politics; a learning centre; a relocated staff room; an IT centre; and a refurbished computer suite. Further improvements are under way and others are at the planning stage. Classrooms are carpeted and enhanced by relevant wall displays. Subject resource rooms are a feature of most areas. The college has recently created a new student common room. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this area requires further development. The common room and many circulation areas are overcrowded at lunch and break times. There is a nearby sports field with a new sports pavilion. The pavilion does not have enough storage space for sports equipment.

39 The college makes effective use of classrooms within its current timetabled day of six hours. Subject teams are located in designated areas and have first choice for teaching purposes of the rooms in these areas. Rooms with low usage are reassigned or

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redeveloped for other uses. The self-assessment report did not indicate that the close monitoring of room usage is a strength.

40 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the learning resources in the computing suites, library, and the subject resource rooms are of high quality and readily available to students. There are 100 computers for student use, giving a student-to-computer ratio of approximately 8:1. Most are linked through a network and have a high specification. Modern commercial office software is available, together with a good range of other relevant software.

In the learning centre there are computer and paper-based learning materials to support the use of the software packages and the teaching and revision of some academic subjects. Only one computer, which is not connected to the network, provides student access to the internet. The self-assessment recognised this weakness and better access is planned through a link with a local university. The library has a relevant bookstock as well as other material, for example, newspapers, journals, information packs, videos and CD-ROMs. Six networked computers are available for general computer work. Two additional computers give access to the computerised catalogue. The separate areas for silent study provide seating for 80 students which, combined with the study spaces in subject resource rooms, provide an appropriate amount of study space for the current number of full-time students. Computing facilities and relevant learning materials are readily available in subject resource rooms.

41 Most areas of the college are clean and well maintained. Substantial funds have been set aside for a planned maintenance programme that includes initial work on upgrading the heating systems. Caretaking staff carry out minor maintenance work. Performance standards and cleaning specifications have been set and are regularly monitored. The self-assessment report did not identify this strength.

A further strength that the self-assessment did recognise was the effective modification to the catering services in response to students' requests.

42 Almost all ground-floor accommodation is accessible to students who use wheelchairs. There are no lifts to upper floors and some curriculum areas, for example physics, are particularly difficult to reach for students with restricted mobility. These shortcomings were not identified as weaknesses in the self-assessment report. The college relocates classes to more accessible areas for students when necessary. The college disability statement states clearly that certain areas of the college are not accessible to wheelchair users.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

43 The self-assessment report gave a realistic assessment of quality assurance. Inspectors found a few strengths and weaknesses that had not been identified in the report. Since the report was produced some issues that the college identified as weaknesses have been successfully addressed.

Key strengths

- the significant contribution of the governing body in quality assurance
- the overall improvement in students' achievements
- well-planned and well-structured self-assessment process
- good management of staff development

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of targets and standards of performance
- weak action-planning
- inadequate monitoring of quality assurance procedures

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44 Quality assurance is significantly stronger than at the time of the previous inspection. The college's overall performance has improved. The college's commitment to quality assurance is clearly stated in two of its key strategic priorities and demonstrated through the achievement of all relevant operational objectives over the past three years. Quality assurance activities are clearly linked to the annual planning cycle. The governing body, through its strategic planning and quality committee, is closely involved with assuring quality. A governor and senior managers review action plans arising from departmental reviews. The outcomes are reported to the strategic planning and quality committee. Each member of the committee has well-established links with several departments.

45 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college's quality assurance arrangements provide a coherent and comprehensive system for quality assurance. A key factor that has contributed to this achievement has been the effective self-assessment process. However, quality assurance activities are at varying stages of development and the implementation of quality assurance arrangements is inconsistent. All teaching and support teams maintain files containing documentation for quality assurance and self-assessment but the content and quality of the files varies widely. There has been inadequate monitoring of the files and of other aspects of quality assurance. As the self-assessment report identified, performance standards for a number of cross-college areas are insufficiently clear to enable monitoring of those standards to take place. While teachers are fully involved in agreeing standards within their departments, there has been insufficient attention to agreeing standards that are applicable to all departments in the college. The effectiveness of many reviews is weakened by the lack of well-defined action plans to remedy shortcomings revealed by the reviews. Where such actions are specified, there is no subsequent monitoring of outcomes.

46 Departmental teams closely scrutinise students' achievements. The college subscribes to a national agency that provides a comparison of students' examination results at GCE A level with those predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades on entry. Most subject teams use this information effectively. Based on this comparison, the college has improved its overall performance in 'adding value' to students' achievements over the past three years. Not all departments are as rigorous in dealing with issues relating to retention. The college has set demanding targets for its overall performance in terms of student retention and achievement but few targets have been set at department level.

47 Most departments use surveys of students' views to help improve their provision. As the self-assessment report identified, improvements have also occurred in some cross-college areas in response to concerns raised by students in surveys. The self-assessment report did not mention that in a few cross-college areas there have been inadequate analysis of and response to surveys. The college's charter is comprehensive and most of its standards are clear. The self-assessment report noted a need to review the charter. A revised version is planned for next year. It is to include improvements in presentation. The college has clear procedures for considering complaints and deals with them efficiently. A summary of complaints and the action taken is reported regularly to a committee of the governing body.

48 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the third produced by the college. The self-assessment process was effectively planned and managed. It was thorough and well documented. All staff have a clear understanding of the process and were able to contribute to the self-assessment. The relationship between the different aspects of self-assessment was carefully planned. Senior managers reviewed the final draft of the report and discussed amendments with heads of teams. There was no independent moderation of the findings. Graded observations of lessons

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contributed to the process, but the quality of the observation reports was uneven. Some reports had detailed comments that provided clear evidence for the grade that was given, but other reports provided little explanation of how conclusions were reached.

49 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff development is highly effective. There are clear and systematic arrangements for identifying staff development needs. The planning, implementation and evaluation of staff development is thorough. For example, training needs identified in the administration team were met by enabling staff to study for courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The college has a well-established appraisal system that staff value. It is based on a two-year cycle that includes self-assessment, review, target-setting, identification of development needs and evaluation. The college obtained Investor in People status in 1995; this status was reconfirmed last year.

Governance

Grade 2

50 Inspectors found many strengths in the governance of the college which confirmed judgements in the self-assessment report. However, governors did not assess themselves against all relevant quality statements and inspectors identified some weaknesses that were not included in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been addressed before the inspection.

Key strengths

- the expertise and commitment of governors
- the good working relationships between governors and senior managers
- the effective contribution by governors to the development and monitoring of the mission and strategic plans

- the comprehensive monitoring of students' academic performance
- the effective monitoring of college finances
- the open and efficient conduct of governing body and committee business

Weaknesses

- the inadequate monitoring and review of policies for health and safety and equal opportunities
- the limited effectiveness of the audit committee
- some delay in the establishment of key policies for openness and accountability

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

52 The college is a designated college and has an individual instrument and articles of government. A board of trustees owns the college buildings and the land. The governing body consists of 16 governors. A group of nine which includes trustees are foundation governors. The principal is a governor and there are two business members and two parent governors. The governing body also co-opts two members. The instrument of government explicitly excludes student governors. However, the governors invite two students, the chair and vice-chair of the college council, to meetings as observers and they produce an annual report for the full governing body.

53 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors are strongly committed to the college and have a wide range of appropriate experience that includes education, estates management, business and financial

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management, marketing and legal practice. Governors use their experience to conduct the college's business effectively. Current vacancies include a parent governor and a business governor and governors have recognised the need to recruit a member with expertise in personnel management.

54 The full governing body meets four times each year and attendance is usually good. On the two occasions when there were quoracy problems, appropriate action was taken. A calendar of full governing body meetings is set for the year ahead. Senior managers attend all meetings to provide information. The chair and principal meet fortnightly. Governors' working relationships with college managers are effective, a strength that is recorded in the self-assessment report. They are clear about the distinction between governance and management.

55 Governors are closely involved in the preparation and review of the college's mission. The strategic planning and quality committee plays an important and effective role in monitoring issues connected with strategic planning and policies on quality assurance. As the self-assessment report noted, governors pay close attention to students' achievements, retention and attendance rates and curriculum issues. They are well informed about a national system that measures students' achievements on entry against their subsequent performance in external examinations. There has been no formal review of equal opportunities and health and safety policies since 1993 and little monitoring of the policies.

56 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors monitor the college's finances effectively. Management accounts are considered at each meeting of the finance and general purposes committee and the accounts receive detailed and informed scrutiny by the full governing body. The full governing body also receives financial reports from the committee at each of its meetings.

57 The self-assessment report identified the effectiveness of the management of the business of the governing body and its committees. Governors receive a high level of support. Clear agendas and comprehensive papers are distributed in good time for meetings. Governors particularly value the very helpful summaries of key points that accompany these papers and the clear recommendations arising from the summary of action that needs to be taken. Governors' committees undertake much of the detailed work for the full governing body. Each committee has approved terms of reference. The governing body routinely receives minutes and supporting papers from committees. The full governing body regularly gives approval to the actions, decisions and recommendations of committees, but the minutes do not record the specific decisions and recommendations that have been approved.

58 The audit committee has operated with limited effectiveness. The self-assessment report did not record this weakness. The committee did not meet for nine months before autumn 1998. The audit committee's terms of reference are not comprehensive. Co-option of an external member with audit and financial expertise has strengthened the committee. The remuneration committee is clerked by its own chairman.

59 A register of interests is completed annually by governors and senior postholders. Governors also confirm their continuing eligibility to serve. The establishment of many key policies for openness and accountability has only occurred recently. Standing orders and a code of conduct have been approved, together with the establishment of a search committee, induction procedures, and a policy on access to governor business. Governors have begun to use the committees of the board to evaluate thoroughly their own performance and formally report the conclusions.

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Management

Grade 2

60 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some weaknesses identified by the college were less significant than others found by inspectors.

Key strengths

- well-organised and effective strategic planning
- well-developed systems to monitor progress against operational objectives
- an open, informal and responsive management style
- effective financial reporting and monitoring
- good internal communication
- productive links with a range of external organisations and other education providers

Weaknesses

- the number of management responsibilities of senior managers
- the lack of an effective forum to promote curriculum development
- no contingency plan to meet rising staff costs

61 The college's mission is based on clear guiding principles. Staff understand and support the mission. Strategic planning is well organised and effective. All staff, as the self-assessment noted, have the opportunity to contribute to planning. The three-year strategic plan is implemented through the annual operational plans that are reviewed effectively by managers and governors. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that senior managers pay careful attention to the deployment of resources. These managers have

compared the college's performance with other colleges to measure efficiency. Staff teaching hours and average class size have moved towards national benchmarks for the sector. However, costs remain slightly above benchmark averages.

62 As the self-assessment report recognised, the range of individual responsibilities for the five senior managers is considerable. Despite this, four of the five senior managers, including the principal, have a substantial teaching commitment. The weekly senior management team meetings are poorly minuted. Curriculum areas are well managed.

63 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The senior management team receives clear monthly financial reports supported by a commentary. However, the college does not prepare monthly balance sheets and the cash projection statement does not extend beyond the year end nor detail items of income and expenditure. There is close monitoring of the college's company, which supplies the catering services. Budget holders receive timely reports on expenditure, including commitments and a detailed transaction list for the month. An experienced assistant principal heads the finance team. This key role within the finance function has limited support. The college has successfully maintained its financial health. However, the latest financial forecasts predict operating deficits, with staff costs set to rise further. The college has yet to formulate detailed contingency plans.

64 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the management style is open and responsive. Staff clearly understand their roles. Communication with senior managers is good. Managers hold regular meetings with staff. A helpful weekly newsletter and daily and monthly bulletins are published. Staff committees and working groups are chaired by senior managers and have clear terms of reference. In every case

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they report to the senior management team and there is no intermediary group to share the load. The academic board has not been effective in promoting curriculum development. There has been no opportunity for the cross-college co-ordinators who have been appointed recently to meet to work together on curriculum planning, a weakness not recognised in the self-assessment report.

65 The college has effectively monitored year 2000 compliance for its IT systems. It is upgrading its student records, finance, and library management systems. The existing arrangements produce comprehensive data about staffing and students. Access to on-line data is restricted to some senior managers but there is a comprehensive list of standard reports available from the system. ISR and financial returns to the FEFC are timely.

66 The college partially fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. The college has a Christian union and provides opportunities for religious education but there is no opportunity for students to participate in a weekly act of collective worship. A health and safety committee meets regularly but there is no equivalent provision for equal opportunities.

67 The college has no marketing policy and makes no provision for market research. There has been little research by the college to obtain views from employers about the character, type and level of provision the college offers. These weaknesses are not recognised in the self-assessment report. The need to consider a marketing policy has been recognised through a recent initiative to explore ways of diversifying the college's high level of dependence on FEFC funding.

68 As the self-assessment report recognised, there are good links with a range of external organisations and other education providers. The college is fully involved in jointly-funded projects with local colleges. It belongs to a partnership for the development of learning

materials which involves the nine Coventry and Warwickshire colleges. The college has good links and compacts with higher education institutions, the Warwickshire Careers Service and the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise.

Conclusions

69 The college's approach to self-assessment is well organised and effective. Inspectors found that the self-assessment report was thorough and provided the inspection team with a good basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. They concluded that the report understated or overstated a few strengths and weaknesses and that a few more were overlooked. The college's grades for the curriculum areas were similar to those of the inspection team. In one area, inspectors considered that the college was generous and, in another, the inspection grade was better than the self-assessment grade. Inspectors agreed with all the grades given in the self-assessment for the cross-college areas.

70 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 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	86
19-24 years	14
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	0
Intermediate	3
Advanced	97
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	284	0	36
Business	47	0	6
Art and design	41	0	5
Humanities	424	4	53
Total	796	4	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 8% 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 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	41	2	0	43
Supporting direct learning contact	9	1	0	10
Other support	19	1	0	20
Total	69	4	0	73

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£2,252,000	£2,333,000	£2,269,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.23	£18.13	£17.96
Payroll as a proportion of income	76%	73%	72%
Achievement of funding target	103%	101%	100%
Diversity of income	4%	7%	9%
Operating surplus	£62,000	£100,000	£112,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	7	5	89	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	86	100	67	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	17	67	52	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Expected completions	267	240	237	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	93	89	87	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	47	77	81	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	Expected completions	–	1,503	1,732	–	6	4
	Retention (%)	–	81	75	–	67	100
	Achievement (%)	85	86	86	33	75	50
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	0	0	–	0	0
	Retention (%)	–	n/a	n/a	–	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	–	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Expected completions	134	98	52	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	100	89	90	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	57	64	71	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	158	162	161	0	1	1
	Retention (%)	100	91	70	n/a	100	0
	Achievement (%)	45	32	42	n/a	0	n/a

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

n/a not applicable

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