

# Walsall College of Arts and Technology

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**2000-01**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

*Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT  
Telephone 024 7686 3000  
Fax 024 7686 3100  
Website [www.fefc.ac.uk](http://www.fefc.ac.uk)*

© FEFC 2001 *You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.*

# Contents

Paragraph

---

## Summary

---

### Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	7

---

### Curriculum areas

Engineering and electronics	10
Business studies and management	15
Hairdressing	20
Health and care	25
Art and design	30
English, history, psychology and sociology	35
Basic skills	40

---

### Cross-college provision

Support for students	46
General resources	53
Quality assurance	60
Governance	67
Management	78
Conclusions	86

---

### 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 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

## Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

# Summary

## Walsall College of Arts and Technology

### *West Midlands Region*

#### Inspected October 2000

Walsall College of Arts and Technology is a general further education college, which offers courses in all FEFC programme areas. The college was jointly inspected by teams of inspectors from the FEFC and the TSC. Work in six of the FEFC's programme areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. The self-assessment report was the fifth annual report produced by the college. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, but considered that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with four curriculum area grades, and awarded a lower grade to three areas. In most cases, insufficient weight was given to weaknesses in teaching and learning and students' achievements. Inspectors agreed with three of the cross-college grades, awarding lower grades for the other two. Some weaknesses were understated; others were not identified.

The proportion of lessons judged good or outstanding is similar to that for the whole of the sector, but slightly more lessons were less than satisfactory. During the period 1997 to 1999, overall retention rates have been steady and achievement rates have improved. On many courses, retention and achievement rates are at, or above, the national average; on some, however, they are low or declining. Most

curriculum areas have a broad range of provision and good links with the community. Punctuality and attendance are problems in a number of areas. Provision in hairdressing is outstanding; it is less than satisfactory in humanities. There is effective liaison with schools and prospective students receive good pre-course guidance. Support in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent and there is a good range of support services for all students. Learning resources, including IT resources, are good. The college has secure, well-furnished accommodation and maintenance is well managed. The framework for quality assurance is comprehensive. Staff appraisal and staff development are effective. Corporation and committee business is conducted effectively and there is high-quality clerking. The college's financial performance is well monitored. Strategic planning is sound. Collaboration with external providers is productive and equality of opportunity is promoted effectively. Management, including financial management, is good. The college should address: students' attendance and punctuality; the quality of teaching in some areas; student retention and achievement rates on some courses; the quality of tutorials; literacy and numeracy support; the development of key skills; sports facilities and recreational areas for students; the quality of course reviews; the monitoring of quality assurance procedures; and governors' identification of the actions required to improve students' performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering and electronics	3	Support for students	3
Business studies and management	3	General resources	2
Hairdressing	1	Quality assurance	3
Health and care	2	Governance	2
Art and design	2	Management	2
English, history, psychology and sociology	4		
Basic skills	2		

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Walsall College of Arts and Technology is a general further education college serving the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall and the surrounding area. It was formed in 1992 following the merger between the college of technology and the college of art. It operates from four main sites close to the centre of the town. Provision is also offered in 24 community venues. In 1997, the European Design Centre was opened. It houses computerised learning facilities, graphic and product design studios and a learndirect centre. The college offers provision in all Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. There is a broad range of vocational courses and programmes extend from foundation level to higher education. Special entry programmes are available for disaffected young people. Adult 'taster' courses, access courses, higher national certificate and higher national diploma courses are available in a range of subjects. The college's sixth form centre was opened in 1996. It offers a range of vocational and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) subjects. The college is open seven days a week in term time.

2 Walsall has a population of 263,000. Minority ethnic groups comprise 9.5% of the population. The borough is in the 10% of most deprived districts in England. Thirteen wards in the borough are classified as being among the 20% of most deprived wards in the West Midlands. There are few large private sector employers and most local businesses are small. Despite a decline in manufacturing, 38% of the population are still employed in this sector. The increase in service sector and distribution jobs is not keeping pace with the decline in manufacturing. The unemployment rate is high. Recent estimates by the local training and enterprise council (TEC) put the rate as high as 17%.

3 There is one other further education college within a 5 mile radius of Walsall College of Arts and Technology and two external institutions offering adult education provision. There are 20 schools in the borough with post-16 provision. The college is the largest provider of full-time education for 16 to 18 year olds. In 1999, the staying-on rate in Walsall schools was low, at 46.5%. The college has played an active part in supporting single regeneration budget consultation and delivery, and the development of the 'health action zone'. It is a founder member of the Black Country Partnership For Learning.

4 In 1999-2000, the college enrolled 10,214 students, 3,022 of whom were full time; 20% of students were aged 19 to 24 and 52% were over the age of 25; 20% were from minority ethnic groups. In 1999-2000, 718 students were provided with additional support. Those with self-certified disabilities accounted for 7% of all students. The college employs 532 full-time equivalent staff of whom 338 are teachers and 194 support staff. The senior management team comprises: the principal, deputy principal, finance director, assistant principal and three faculty heads. Curriculum areas are managed by programme managers, the sixth form centre manager, and standards managers. The college's Broadway Training Unit provides full-cost training provision.

5 The college mission statement states:

- 'we believe the college must serve the needs of the individual, the local community and well being of our local regional and national economy'
- 'our aim is for student success, and individual personal development to enable all students to play an active role as citizens'
- 'the distinctive nature of our mission is equality of opportunity with its focus on student achievement at all levels'.

# Context

6 The mission and underpinning value statement match the objectives of the Walsall Lifelong Learning Alliance and the college is committed to supporting its development in collaboration with local stakeholders.

## The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 30 October 2000. Before the inspection, inspectors studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. For 1998 and 1999, data contained in the FEFC individualised student record (ISR) were used to provide information on students' achievements. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 2000. These were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. In most respects, the data were found to be accurate. In a few instances, withdrawals had not been accurately recorded. Most of the inaccuracies were rectified by the time of the inspection. For some two-year GCE A level programmes the ISR data were also found to be inaccurate. The curriculum area table for humanities includes revised data, based on the ISR and agreed with the college. The revision has had a small effect on some of the level 3 figures in the overall data, and these have not been included in the summary table. The college was notified in August 2000 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 14 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 66 days. The inspection team also contributed to the Walsall area-wide 16 to 19 inspection and 11 of the days were allocated to this activity. The inspectors observed 87 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students. Six inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college

inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training in construction, hairdressing and engineering. They observed 12 training sessions and four key skills sessions, interviewed trainees, employers and staff, and visited 22 work placements. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

# Context

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	1	5	4	4	0	14
GNVQ	1	7	4	1	0	13
NVQ	3	9	6	0	0	18
Other vocational	6	10	6	3	0	25
Other*	2	8	6	1	0	17
Total (No.)	13	39	26	9	0	87
Total (%)	15	45	30	10	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

\*includes access to higher education and basic education

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Walsall College of Arts and Technology	9.0	71
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*



# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering and Electronics

### *Grade 3*

**10 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in engineering and electronics. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment reports but found that significant weaknesses in teaching and learning and students' achievements had not been identified. TSC inspectors visited eight trainees in the workplace and observed three training sessions.**

#### Key strengths

- good practical teaching
- high retention rates on City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) level 2 and 3 programmes
- good achievement rates on national certificate programmes
- good information technology (IT) facilities

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate attention to individual learning needs in some lessons
- declining and low retention rates on C&G level 1 and national certificate programmes
- low achievement rates on C&G level 2 programmes
- weaknesses in course management

11 In engineering and electronics the college offers national certificate and diploma programmes together with a range of C&G courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. Over 90% of students are employed and attend the college on a day-release basis. The college's self-assessment report failed to identify weaknesses in course management. The minutes of course team meetings do not include action plans, and where poor student

performance is identified it is addressed inadequately. Course documents for student assessment are not standardised and some are dated. There are satisfactory arrangements for tutorial support. Day-release students receive an individual tutorial every six weeks. Progress is discussed with the course tutor and an action plan produced. Teachers monitor attendance and punctuality carefully. An engineering advisory board meets once a term and provides a forum for industrialists to comment on the engineering provision. It is chaired by the chair of the corporation.

12 Practical teaching is good. Students are fully involved in the work and are well motivated. Staff and students are careful to observe safe working practices in the workshops at all times. In an electronics practical session the lecturer explained the theory behind the practice in well-planned stages, drawing effectively on the students' knowledge and experience. The students then built and tested an electronic circuit and produced a test report. In many theory lessons, teachers talked to the class for far too long and some students quickly lost interest in the subject. Students also spent too much time writing up notes. Teachers made little use of visual aids and rarely used actual engineering components to highlight key points. Some lesson plans were good; others lacked clear learning objectives.

13 Retention rates on C&G level 2 and 3 programmes have been high for the last three years. In 1998, retention rates on C&G level 1 and national certificate programmes were above the national average, but in the last two years they have been below this average. Achievement rates on national certificate programmes have improved significantly, but rates on C&G level 2 programmes have ranged from 20% to 52%, consistently below the national average. The college's self-assessment report does not identify trends in achievement and retention rates. An awards evening is arranged to celebrate students' achievements.

# Curriculum Areas

Prizes are sponsored and presented by local industry. One student won the top final-year apprentice award from a field comprising some 1,200 Midlands companies.

14 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the range and standard of IT facilities in engineering are good. The European Design Centre is used as a 'drop-in' centre by students needing to use computers. Within the main centre there is a suite of computers for advanced, three-dimensional, computer-aided and product design. By using the most up-to-

date software and technology this equipment enables students to see the end products of conceptual design models. In the engineering section, there are two dedicated computer-aided design suites and a fully upgraded and networked personal computer laboratory. A well-equipped laboratory contains a range of numerically controlled equipment and associated computers. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that all staff are technically qualified. The majority of them have obtained appropriate verifier and assessor awards.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G (greater than 24 weeks)	1	Number of starters	43	118	92
		Retention (%)	86	75	66
		Achievement (%)	29	64	61
C&G (greater than 24 weeks)	2	Number of starters	92	166	213
		Retention (%)	99	86	83
		Achievement (%)	20	51	52
C&G (greater than 24 weeks)	3	Number of starters	45	60	54
		Retention (%)	98	92	87
		Achievement (%)	52	72	53
National certificates	3	Number of starters	75	71	95
		Retention (%)	83	80	68
		Achievement (%)	58	88	98

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Studies and Management

### Grade 3

**15 Inspectors observed 12 lessons on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ), advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE), GCE AS, and management and professional courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment reports. Some strengths were no more than normal practice and there were a number of weaknesses which the college had not identified.**

#### Key strengths

- a broad range of provision with good opportunities for progression
- good teaching on management courses
- good levels of achievement on the GNVQ intermediate course and some professional courses
- good accommodation

#### Weaknesses

- poor levels of attendance and punctuality
- underdeveloped arrangements for work experience
- inadequate provision for key skills on the AVCE course
- poor or declining retention rates on some programmes

16 The college offers a broad range of courses in business, professional and management studies. There are good opportunities for students to progress from one level of qualification to another and to choose from different patterns of attendance. Some courses are designed to attract students from under-represented groups. Collaboration with

external partners, for example, has led to a short introductory course in supervisory management, which has enabled a significant number of students from minority ethnic groups to gain an initial qualification. The college's self-assessment report failed to identify inadequacies in the provision of key skills for students on the AVCE course. The students are unclear about the means by which they will gain their key skills and there are no arrangements for developing them. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that arrangements for full-time students on vocational courses to gain relevant work experience are underdeveloped. Some students are involved in successful activities on the Young Enterprise scheme.

17 The number of lessons graded good or outstanding was well below the average for the sector. On the management programmes the teaching is good. Teachers encourage students to draw upon their own experience at work in order to help them understand management theory, and this is often associated with well-managed group work. Teaching on other courses is generally satisfactory, but less effective. The college's self-assessment report failed to identify a number of weaknesses. Many lessons are uninspiring. Teachers talk for long periods and there is no opportunity for students to discuss issues or to test their own ideas. In some lessons, teachers and students rarely ask questions of each other and there is little effort on the part of the teacher to find out what students have learned. Most teachers have a lesson plan but few of them start by explaining to the students the objectives and structure of the lesson. Schemes of work for some courses are out of date. Attendance at the lessons observed was poor, at 64%. Some students arrived late for most of the lessons observed, even for lessons starting in the middle of the day.

# Curriculum Areas

18 There has been effective action to address poor achievement on national vocational qualification (NVQ) accounting courses, including the introduction of alternative qualifications that suit some students better. Achievement rates at level 2 and level 3 are now above the national average. All students who completed the certificate in personnel practice course in 2000 were successful. Improvements in retention and achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate course in the three years to 2000 mean that the college's performance is now well above the national average. Of those students who started the national certificate course in 1998, however, only 28% remained for the two years. Other courses with poor or declining

retention rates include the NVQ accounting courses at levels 2 and 3 and the introductory award in supervisory management short course.

19 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the accommodation for management programmes is of a high standard. A former leather factory near to the main site has been imaginatively redeveloped as a museum and training centre. Most of the other teaching rooms for business studies are well decorated and well furnished. The library contains a good range of periodicals and many up-to-date textbooks. A significant number of books, however, do not reflect modern business technology and practice.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate business (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	35	48	34
		Retention (%)	74	83	85
		Achievement (%)	81	70	86
Introductory award in supervision (short course)	2	Number of starters	*	59	138
		Retention (%)	*	95	78
		Achievement (%)	*	85	97
NVQ accounting (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	54	66	25
		Retention (%)	78	86	56
		Achievement (%)	49	47	79
Certificate in personnel practice (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	21	36	29
		Retention (%)	76	75	86
		Achievement (%)	94	93	100
Certificate in supervisory management (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	38	37	34
		Retention (%)	79	78	85
		Achievement (%)	90	92	86
GNVQ advanced business (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	71	69	74
		Retention (%)	79	71	78
		Achievement (%)	65	77	78
National certificate in business and finance	3	Number of starters	10	25	36
		Retention (%)	100	68	28
		Achievement (%)	100	50	44
NVQ accounting (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	40	44	36
		Retention (%)	90	84	61
		Achievement (%)	6	17	65

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

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Hairdressing

### *Grade 1*

**20 Inspectors observed 15 lessons, covering NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors from the TSC observed five training sessions in hairdressing for work-based trainees.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good teaching in most lessons
- high retention and achievement rates on most courses
- an excellent commercial salon
- a broad and flexible curriculum
- productive collaboration with industry
- the high standard of students' work

#### **Weaknesses**

- inadequacies in the assessment of key skills

21 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the curriculum is well matched to the needs of students and employers. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time hairdressing courses at NVQ levels 1 to 4. The level 4 course started this year. Many students progress to higher level courses at the college. There are flexible patterns of attendance and provision is open to students from Monday through to Saturday. The college also offers a good range of short and full-cost courses to meet individuals' needs as well as the needs of industry. African-Caribbean and men's hairdressing are offered as an additional qualification to full-time students. Teachers monitor students' performance closely, through monthly reviews. Assessment and internal verification are well organised, and good records are kept. Key skills work is in the early

stages of development and students, as yet, do not know how they are to be assessed in key skills. There are good opportunities for full-time students to gain experience of work in the college. This is made more realistic for NVQ level 3 students by setting income targets for the main salon.

22 Most of the teaching is good or outstanding. There are detailed schemes of work and lesson plans that take account of the differing needs of students. Lessons are well organised. Students experience a good range of methods of working and are provided with good learning resources. In one lesson, the teacher started by explaining the objectives of the lesson, then the students divided into small groups to design questionnaires for use with their clients. At the end of the lesson each group presented their questionnaire to other members of the class and a decision was made on which to use with the clients. Teachers also provide good individual instruction in practical skills and in the supporting theory. Students' practical hairdressing skills are of a high standard and they work safely and hygienically. The number of clients is sufficient to cover the range of assessments required for each student. In a few lessons, the pace of the work is too slow.

23 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that levels of achievement are good on most courses. Last year, the one-year programmes for NVQ levels 1 and 2 and the one-year and two-year NVQ level 3 programmes had achievement rates above the national average. Achievement rates on the one-year NVQ level 1 programme have been significantly above the national average over the last two years. Last year, there were also high retention rates on all these programmes. Retention and achievement rates on the three-year NVQ level 2 programme, however, have been low. The college's assessment accurately identified this weakness and the college no longer offers this programme. Students develop both their

# Curriculum Areas

hairdressing skills and their social skills by participating in external and internal events. Three students recently took first, second and third place in a local hairdressing competition. The college holds annual hairdressing competitions for students at all levels.

24 There are three hairdressing salons, which have been recently refurbished to a high standard. The main salons are in a prominent position at the front of the college. FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the main salon is furnished to the highest of industry standards. The college has a productive relationship with a local hairdressing group and a major international

manufacturer, who have supported the development of facilities. There is a reception and a dispensary. Students undertake training in both areas; training which includes the effective use of computers. Students use a computer to monitor clients' visits and individual levels of retailing in the main salon. There is wheelchair access to the main salon from the reception area and wheelchairs can move around the salon. Staff are well qualified. They update their industrial skills in conjunction with the local salon group and manufacturer. Students value teachers' awareness of industrial standards.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ	1	Number of starters	33	55	74
		Retention (%)	88	73	85
		Achievement (%)	79	95	90
NVQ (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	45	48	36
		Retention (%)	91	83	83
		Achievement (%)	63	71	83
NVQ (two-year course)	2	Number of starters	15	9	31
		Retention (%)	67	78	64
		Achievement (%)	44	67	75
NVQ (three-year course)	2	Number of starters	22	17	19
		Retention (%)	59	53	58
		Achievement (%)	73	0	36
NVQ (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	91

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

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Care

### *Grade 2*

**25 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering the main programmes in health and care. Inspectors confirmed most judgements in the self-assessment report, although some strengths were overstated.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good teaching
- the high levels of support for students
- high pass rates
- well-organised work experience
- good links with employers and voluntary agencies
- thorough assessment and verification

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor retention on some courses
- inadequate development of key skills
- inadequate attention to individual learning needs in some lessons

26 The college has developed a broad range of health and social care courses. These include the GNVQ foundation and the AVCE in health and social care. Following a review of provision, the GNVQ intermediate has been replaced by the Edexcel first award in caring. The Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) courses are offered at foundation, certificate, diploma and advanced level. The Edexcel national diploma in early years is also offered. The college has developed mutually beneficial links with employers and voluntary agencies. These links are used for staff development, to widen participation and to update the skills of staff through work shadowing. Teachers make good use of students' work experience in theory lessons, but they are less effective in developing key skills.

The college induction programme incorporates a diagnostic assessment of students' key skills but there has been a delay in reporting these assessments to vocational teachers. Assessment and verification are outstanding. Students' work is thoroughly marked and there are comprehensive written comments from teachers to show students how they might improve their work. Spelling and grammar are carefully corrected.

27 Most teaching is good. Some of it is outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that lessons have clear vocational aims and objectives, and that schemes of work are detailed and informative. Teachers are knowledgeable in their subject and work imaginatively to motivate students. During a lesson on childhood illness the teacher linked the topic of meningitis to seasonal variations and explained the association between the forthcoming winter and an expected increase in the incidence of the disease. The topic was expanded by encouraging students to consider their own health needs and to attend the vaccination sessions to be held at the college. In some lessons, teachers do not take enough account of individual learning needs. Students always work as a class or in small groups and individuals' separate or additional needs are sometimes neglected. This weakness was identified in the college's self-assessment report.

28 Most pass rates are significantly above the national average for the sector. Retention rates are declining on the CACHE programmes and on the GNVQ foundation programme. This has been recognised by the college and steps have been taken to remedy factors judged to be contributing to students withdrawing from their courses. Attendance on most courses is good. Students' assignments are well organised and some are very good. Some portfolios and assignments make good use of IT, photographs and artefacts. Many of the students progress to other courses within the department or move into employment or higher education.

# Curriculum Areas

29 Most teaching rooms are in one locality. They are spacious and well furnished and can be used for a range of lesson activities. Some rooms are divided by wooden shutters which do not always work effectively, so that noise from

adjacent classes intrudes. This was recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Staff have appropriate qualifications and experience of work in the fields in which they teach.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation	1	Number of starters	21	25	15
		Retention (%)	71	64	47
		Achievement (%)	69	67	71
CACHE certificate	2	Number of starters	21	54	37
		Retention (%)	81	65	56
		Achievement (%)	88	97	100
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	29	33	23
		Retention (%)	69	52	74
		Achievement (%)	61	71	77
CACHE diploma	3	Number of starters	81	93	64
		Retention (%)	74	71	53
		Achievement (%)	64	88	100
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	17	25	36
		Retention (%)	82	79	72
		Achievement (%)	77	58	91
BTEC national diploma (early years)	3	Number of starters	28	16	15
		Retention (%)	79	88	80
		Achievement (%)	94	100	100

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



# Curriculum Areas

## Art and Design

### *Grade 2*

**30 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering the main programmes in art and design. Inspectors largely agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Some of the strengths, however, were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified an additional weakness in students' achievements.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a broad curriculum with extensive community provision
- consistently good teaching
- the high standard of students' practical work
- good specialist equipment and accommodation
- good specialist IT facilities

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor attendance and punctuality for some lessons
- poor retention rates on a few courses
- consistently low achievement on the GNVQ in advanced art and design

31 The range of full-time courses in art and design allows students to progress from foundation level to higher education. Full-time and part-time students have a wide choice of courses, which include photography, fashion printmaking, ceramics, computers in design, graphics and life drawing. An established 'creative independence' course attracts a large number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Part-time courses are delivered in community venues and this widens participation by attracting new types of learner. There are effective community links, including

links with schools, as the self-assessment report indicates. Students receive appropriate academic support from their teachers. Most courses are well planned. There are some comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans, although learning objectives are not always sufficiently precise and course reviews are not always sufficiently evaluative. The analysis of data on students' retention and achievements is not rigorous enough to provide a basis for effective action. Visits to galleries and trips are used to deepen students' knowledge and interest in their specialism. The college's fashion show, held in the new art gallery, includes children from schools and local community organisations. Opportunities for work placement, however, are underdeveloped. Equal opportunity initiatives are a strong feature of the courses.

32 Teaching is good. Practical lessons include a suitable range of learning activities. Tasks often enable students to develop their own ideas and techniques. Practical skills are well developed. Teachers provide effective guidance through discussions with individual students as they go about their practical work. The teaching of practical skills is thorough and closely related to theoretical study. The most effective teaching enables students to develop their knowledge and understanding while engaged in practical activities. For example, students were producing their own Rangoli textile designs for a mural to celebrate the Diwali festival of light. They explored ideas of symmetry and the meaning of Indian symbols as part of their visual language development. A high priority is given to the development of design skills, exploratory drawing and sketchbook work. Most projects are well designed and enable students to work on a variety of creative activities. In a printmaking lesson, for example, students produced a concertina book of images demonstrating the use of several printmaking techniques.

# Curriculum Areas

33 Achievement rates are above the national average on the majority of full-time courses. This has been a consistent pattern on the BTEC national diploma course in graphics and fashion and the GNVQ intermediate in art and design over the last three years. Achievement rates on the GNVQ advanced in art and design and the access certificate in art and design during the same period have been poor. This weakness was not identified by the college. There are good pass rates for full-time students taking additional qualifications. The creative independence course has had consistently high pass and retention rates. Retention rates are poor on a few courses, though for most they are at, or around, the national average. Students' practical work in portfolios is of a high standard. There are many examples of stimulating, creative work in graphics, textiles and the use of computer-generated design. Written work is of variable quality. Some students have a long way to go to reach the required standards. Punctuality was poor and attendance at several lessons was low. Not all students are sufficiently committed to their studies. Some arrive unprepared for lessons and without essential materials such as sketchbooks.

34 The college provides specialist teaching rooms, workshops and studios for graphics, fashion, printmaking, textiles, art, design and photography. The studios are suitably equipped. The workshop for sculpture, however, is too cramped to support the production of large-scale projects. There is a shortage of storage space in a few areas. Two newly equipped computer suites give students access to IT software of industry standards. The European Design Centre provides effective access to the Internet and students make good use of the facility for their research. There is an adequate stock of books in most but not all specialisms, and a good collection of art slides, CD-ROMs and other learning resources. Technicians provide effective support to teachers and students.

# Curriculum Areas

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in art and design, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NOCN creative independence	Entry and level 1	Number of starters	28	33	27
		Retention (%)	96	97	100
		Achievement (%)	85	88	100
GNVQ foundation art and design	2	Number of starters	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	58
		Achievement (%)	*	*	78
GNVQ intermediate art and design	3	Number of starters	13	10	14
		Retention (%)	77	100	86
		Achievement (%)	100	100	83
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	34	39	47
		Retention (%)	73	64	72
		Achievement (%)	75	75	71
National diploma in design (fashion/textiles)	3	Number of starters	12	26	14
		Retention (%)	92	65	71
		Achievement (%)	91	81	100
National diploma in design (graphic design)	3	Number of starters	19	38	29
		Retention (%)	89	82	76
		Achievement (%)	94	93	91
Access certificate in art and design	3	Number of starters	16	9	10
		Retention (%)	75	66	80
		Achievement (%)	50	16	57
National diploma in foundation studies	3	Number of starters	54	48	43
		Retention (%)	78	98	86
		Achievement (%)	100	85	97

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

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## English, History, Psychology and Sociology

### Grade 4

**35 Inspectors observed 16 lessons on GCE A level, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and access programmes. They agreed with some of the findings in the self-assessment reports but considered there was insufficient emphasis on weaknesses relating to teaching and learning, achievement and retention.**

#### Key strengths

- good provision, responsive to local needs
- effective subject management in English and psychology

#### Weaknesses

- the failure to meet individuals' learning needs in many lessons
- insufficiently demanding teaching in many areas of work
- low retention and achievement rates on many courses
- poor attendance
- the lack of targets for students to work towards

36 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that it is responsive to local needs in the courses it provides. There are GCE A/AS level and access to higher education courses in psychology, sociology, history and English which are offered in the day and evening. Students can study English from foundation to advanced level, and progression from the certificate of achievement in English is clearly defined. The college is successful in attracting to its humanities courses a high proportion of young people and adults who do not traditionally participate in further education. One class of

GCE A level sociology students consists of girls from a local Muslim school.

37 The subject areas of English and psychology are well managed. There are regular and useful meetings of subject teachers in these areas, and rigorous monitoring of students' achievements. There is little sharing of good practice, however, between teachers of different humanities subjects. Little use is made of value-added measurements to monitor students' progress and performance, and key skills are not yet being developed effectively in GCE A level subjects. Schemes of work in most GCE A level subjects fail to address subject-specific skills and study skills.

38 The college's assessment of the quality of its teaching and learning was overgenerous. In many lessons, teachers were failing to meet the needs of individual students and had insufficient information to help them identify those needs. In some of the poor lessons, the pace of the work was too slow and activities were inappropriate. Questions designed to check learning were often poorly framed and students received insufficient encouragement to develop their oral skills. The use of audiovisual aids is underdeveloped. English literature teaching is good. Access to higher education students receive well-structured guidance on developing study skills and personal skills relevant to their course. In some areas of humanities, the criteria for assessment are not sufficiently explicit. Teachers generally provide prompt and constructive guidance on students' written work. In some subjects, however, errors of spelling and grammar are not corrected.

39 Examination results on many courses are poor. For the past three years, pass rates for students on GCE A level courses in history and sociology have remained low. In GCE A level psychology, the achievements of students on one-year and two-year courses are erratic; sometimes pass rates are above the national average, sometimes below. In GCE A level

# Curriculum Areas

English language and literature there has been a clear improvement in overall pass rates and in the proportion of students gaining high grades. Pass rates in GCSE English language are below average. Retention rates on all two-year GCE A level courses have remained consistently low, declining still further in three out of four

subjects in 2000. For most one-year courses, retention rates are generally in line with national averages. The college's self-assessment report fails to convey a comprehensive picture of the weaknesses in achievement and retention rates. It does, however, draw attention to the low levels of attendance and poor punctuality.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, history, psychology and sociology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Certificate of achievement in English	1 and 2	Number of starters	10	59	48
		Retention (%)	100	80	85
		Achievement (%)	90	59	87
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	112	97	60
		Retention (%)	82	87	85
		Achievement (%)	27	43	35
GCSE psychology and sociology	2	Number of starters	42	27	19
		Retention (%)	67	56	74
		Achievement (%)	58	40	58
GCE A level English language (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	50	56	38
		Retention (%)	56	50	47
		Achievement (%)	71	82	100
GCE A level history (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	18	24	21
		Retention (%)	56	46	57
		Achievement (%)	20	40	36
GCE A level psychology (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	65	43	75
		Retention (%)	54	63	35
		Achievement (%)	54	59	58
GCE A level sociology (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	34	34	35
		Retention (%)	47	59	46
		Achievement (%)	44	35	62

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Basic Skills

### *Grade 2*

**40 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in basic English and numeracy at level 1 and below. Inspectors agreed with most of the statements in the self-assessment report. Some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching methods
- a wide and broadening curriculum
- some good achievement rates
- good resources

#### Weaknesses

- inappropriate use of basic skills centre accommodation
- poor levels of attendance and punctuality
- delays in processing initial assessment results and providing additional support

41 There is a well-defined management structure for basic skills, which ensures that provision is cohesive. Staff teach across the range of programmes and have a good overview of the provision. Team leaders take responsibility for designated areas of the curriculum and for accreditation. All areas of the provision are expanding and helping to develop an inclusive curriculum. There is, for example, a substantial basic skills input to the entry level 'achieving together' programme for full-time students, many of whom are disaffected. The college has an ongoing project with the Walsall Lifelong Learning Partnership, developing work with voluntary organisations to increase the capacity for basic skills provision in the community. Short community-based courses in citizenship are part of the project. Other community-based courses are developing,

including the 'Back-a-Yard' reading project with Afro-Caribbean students, and IT for parents and toddlers. As identified in the self-assessment report, the basic skills summer and Easter school programmes have run successfully. The number of additional support workshops has also increased for 2000-01.

42 Most lessons are good or outstanding. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide and appropriate range of teaching methods. Teachers make good use of students' experiences and interests and practical learning activities help to reinforce theory. In one numeracy session on metric measurement, mature students were involved in estimating and then measuring accurately the size of furniture in the teaching room. The students responded enthusiastically to the task, and worked well collaboratively. Tutors effectively encourage group discussions and the development of oral skills. In some of the weaker classes discussion was unfocused and poorly directed.

43 The initial assessment used across the college to identify additional support needs in literacy and numeracy has been redesigned and was used for the first time in September 2000. Responsibility for marking the assessment and referring students for appropriate support is shared between the faculties and the basic skills staff. Unsatisfactory delays in the process this year have led to the late take-up of additional support by students. Some students had to wait until the October half term.

44 Achievement rates are increasing. On some courses, for example the C&G numeracy course, they are above the national average. Most short course awards are accredited by the college. The achievement table is based on externally accredited courses. In all areas of provision, the attendance at some sessions is low. Punctuality is also a problem. A significant number of students, particularly full-time students, arrive late for lessons and disrupt learning. Students place a high value on their

# Curriculum Areas

learning, are positive about their progress and speak of the helpfulness of staff. Many are clear about intended learning outcomes and about their long-term aims. This is especially true of mature students on 'return-to-learn' courses and young people on 'achieving together' courses.

45 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the key and basic skills centre has good provision for IT, including a range of basic skills software. As the designated resource area, the centre is also well equipped with paper-based worksheets, many of which

relate to vocational areas. There are close links with the European Design Centre which houses reading matter specifically for basic skills students. Whilst it is well equipped and provides a light and airy space, furnished to a good standard, the basic skills centre is not appropriate for teaching several groups at the same time. Noise levels are sometimes so high they interfere with learning. Students themselves say they have difficulty maintaining concentration when there are groups in adjoining areas.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G 3793 Wordpower	Entry	Number of starters	*	30	14
		Retention (%)	*	90	58
		Achievement (%)	*	23	50
NOCN foundation accreditation in mathematics and English (short courses)	Entry and level 1	Number of starters	76	49	123
		Retention (%)	85	96	79
		Achievement (%)	47	28	98
NOCN foundation accreditation providing progression to further qualifications (short courses)	Entry and level 1	Number of starters	11	97	50
		Retention (%)	100	96	89
		Achievement (%)	64	17	92
C&G 3750 numeracy stage 1	1	Number of starters	13	94	25
		Retention (%)	31	61	91
		Achievement (%)	100	41	81
C&G 3793 Wordpower stage 1	1	Number of starters	*	13	22
		Retention (%)	*	85	69
		Achievement (%)	*	†	92
C&G 3794 Numberpower stage 1	1	Number of starters	*	15	23
		Retention (%)	*	100	44
		Achievement (%)	*	55	100
C&G 3750 numeracy stage 2	2	Number of starters	*	8	19
		Retention (%)	*	100	94
		Achievement (%)	*	100	89
C&G 3750 numeracy stage 4	2	Number of starters	25	28	67
		Retention (%)	100	100	65
		Achievement (%)	60	63	76

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

\*course not running

†data unavailable

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

**46 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors identified significant weaknesses that had not been recognised.**

#### Key strengths

- effective liaison with schools and parents
- impartial pre-course advice and guidance
- excellent learning support in lessons
- the good range of welfare, counselling and childcare services

#### Weaknesses

- weaknesses in tutorial practice
- insufficient evaluation of the impact of learning support
- delays in implementing literacy and numeracy support for students
- inadequate development of key skills in some areas of work

47 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that prospective students receive impartial and relevant information and guidance from the student services centre. Long opening hours ensure access to guidance services at times that meet students' and clients' needs. Publicity material, including information on courses, is comprehensive and informative but it is not available in Braille or on audio tape. The college has established productive links with a number of pre-16 and post-16 schools locally and in neighbouring boroughs. The college provides support and progression opportunities for pre-16 year olds who have been excluded, or who are on the verge of exclusion from school. Parents receive a copy of the college charter which includes information on parents' rights. They are also encouraged to attend the initial

interview of the prospective student and parents evenings. Parents are informed immediately of any absences from lessons. Students feel well informed about the courses they are joining as a result of open evenings and 'taster' days. A multi-lingual guidance worker has been appointed to provide advice to members of minority ethnic groups. Admission procedures are effective. The college checks initial enquiries against final enrolments to test the effectiveness of the service.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students receive a comprehensive induction to the college and to its central support services. There are also effective procedures to provide induction for students who enrol late. All students receive a diary which incorporates the charter and useful information about college services. Course teams have guidelines for conducting induction activities.

49 The college, in its self-assessment report, failed to identify the weakness in some aspects of learning support. All full-time and substantive part-time students complete a diagnostic assessment in literacy and numeracy as part of their induction. This year, there have been excessive delays in informing students of the results of these assessments, and this has adversely affected the development of individual learning plans. There has been inadequate consideration at curriculum level, and the college level, of the additional learning support which students need. Attendance at learning support lessons and the impact of the support on improving students' achievements have not been effectively analysed. In many curriculum areas there are weaknesses in the development of key skills. Students are not sufficiently aware of how key skills are to be assessed. Students have access to a range of enrichment activities. Some of these activities lead to accredited awards; some are recreational. There has been a poor take-up of enrichment activities related to curriculum 2000. Students' achievements are



# Cross-college Provision

celebrated in publicity materials, on college noticeboards and at awards ceremonies.

50 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled on appropriate courses and provided with the support necessary to achieve their primary learning goal. Students with sensory impairment and other disabilities receive excellent support in lessons. Learning support assistants work effectively with course tutors and individual students. Specialist equipment such as enlarged computer screens and a machine for translating text into Braille are available to help students with their work. The college has been particularly successful in working with students who have a hearing impairment. There is specialist support for dyslexic students.

51 The personal support services for students are effective and comprehensive. They include counselling, health advice, advice on benefits, accommodation, transport and childcare. There is also effective careers guidance. The services are well promoted in the college and there are productive links with local agencies. Good records are kept and these provide a basis for evaluating the services. The college plans to rectify deficiencies in accommodation which hinder the continued development of these services. Shortcomings include the lack of rooms in which to hold confidential meetings, the smallness of the area dedicated to careers, and the physical appearance of the student services centre.

52 The college's assessment understates the weaknesses in tutorial practice. All full-time and most part-time students have a personal tutor. All full-time students are entitled to a weekly group tutorial and an individual review of their work each term. However, not all students are seen individually on a regular basis. Full reports on students' progress are not always available. Many individual action plans are weak; they are too vague and do not include measurable targets for students. Some records did not include action plans.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**53 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses presented in the self-assessment report. They considered that some of the strengths claimed were no more than normal practice.**

#### **Key strengths**

- secure, well-furnished accommodation on all but one site
- well-managed site maintenance
- good learning resources centre
- good IT provision for staff and students
- effective use of community centres

#### **Weaknesses**

- lack of sports facilities and recreational areas for students
- poor accommodation on the Bradford Place site

54 St Paul's campus in the town centre is the main site. The other sites are: the Shelley campus, 2 miles away; Bradford Place, which is part of the conservation area in the town centre; the Wisemore complex, a Victorian factory building now refurbished to a high standard as a management training centre; and the Extra-Wise centre. There are outreach premises at Beechdale and a women's centre in Caldmore. There are also 24 community centres, the location of which have been carefully chosen to provide ready access to study for the many different communities in the locality. The accommodation strategy reflects the strategic aim of widening participation.

55 Since the last inspection, there has been effective rationalisation of the college's buildings. Those in poor condition that are no longer required have been sold. Major refurbishment

# Cross-college Provision

of some of the accommodation has been carried out. Internally, the college environment is good. Rooms are well furnished, clean and tidy, and good security measures are in place. In several areas of the college, the walls are bare and there is little display of students' work. The main entrance offers few comforts and communicates little of the character of the college. Signposting to direct people around the main building has been improved and is now effective in most buildings. The building on the Bradford Place site has several shortcomings. Although the college has been able to offset some of these, many of the teaching rooms are of poor quality and there are limits in the activities which can take place. Since the last inspection, managers have introduced a central system of timetabling. Maintenance is carefully managed and the maintenance programme is reviewed annually. College surveys show that much of the accommodation is well used.

56 The college has a well-conceived information and learning technology strategy, developed in consultation with staff, which is based on a three-year purchasing plan. There has been significant investment in information and computer technology and the provision is good. Good networked IT equipment with up-to-date software is available throughout the main campus and there is a good IT centre housing a large number of computers. Computers are readily available for students to use on their own. Those centres at a distance from the main site have been connected to the site through high-quality computer links. Many of the computers provide students and staff with a link to the Internet. Most staff have electronic mail accounts and good access to personal computers. A useful intranet is developing for staff and students.

57 Learning resources are brought together effectively in the well-planned European Design Centre. The centre was opened in 1997, following an investment of £2.2 million, partly provided by the European Regional

Development Fund. There is a college library, a 'drop-in' area with 98 computers, an IT services helpdesk, computing classrooms with 54 computers, a television studio and the 'weekend college'. Librarians organise a variety of lively events for students and the local community which are designed to raise awareness of recreational literature and poetry, and raise funds for charities. The annual budget for learning resources has increased significantly in each of the last three years. Opening hours are good. Curriculum teams liaise regularly with library staff. A helpdesk provides a service for students using the centre and for staff who need support with IT equipment. Art and design students benefit from the close proximity of an art gallery.

58 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that sports facilities are inadequate. There are not enough social and recreational areas for students. The college has several catering outlets for students on the St Paul's campus. There is a coffee shop, a meals service, a sandwich and snack service, and the restaurant. There is little provision for refreshments on the other sites. Some staff workrooms are cluttered and lack storage space, an issue which the college is currently tackling.

59 The college's strong commitment to provide for students with disabilities has been backed up by continuous efforts to make all areas of the college accessible. Access for students with restricted mobility using the main site is good. Improvements include the provision of ramps and lifts. There is limited access to the upper floors of the Bradford Place site, however.

# Cross-college Provision

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

**60 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, they found that some of the strengths identified were no more than normal practice and that some weaknesses were understated.**

#### Key strengths

- a comprehensive framework for self-assessment and quality assurance
- a thorough staff appraisal system
- effective staff development, linked to strategic objectives

#### Weaknesses

- quality assurance procedures' lack of impact on teaching and learning
- weak course reviews
- inadequate monitoring of some aspects of quality assurance

61 The college mission statement includes a commitment to continuous quality improvement. There is a comprehensive framework for quality assurance, covering all aspects of the college's activities. Since the last inspection, the college has refined and developed its procedures. It now has comprehensive self-assessment, a lesson observation scheme, service standards for cross-college areas, and effective procedures for staff appraisal and staff development. The college has established methods of monitoring and reviewing policies and procedures. However, the monitoring of some aspects of quality assurance are inadequate, a weakness which is underestimated in the self-assessment report. Quality audits, for example, fail to challenge unsupported statements in minutes of course team meetings, course management files and reviews. The college has integrated quality

assurance with planning and there is a calendar of activities which ensures that all staff are aware of their commitments. Quality assurance arrangements have led to some improvements, but some of the issues raised in the last inspection have not been addressed. Action plans are still insufficiently detailed and some course data are inadequate.

62 Self-assessment is well established and the current self-assessment report was the fifth annual report produced by the college. The process involves all staff and questionnaires enable the views of students to be taken into account. The report is approved by members of the corporation. A self-assessment subcommittee of the academic board oversees the preparation of reports and is responsible for verifying the judgements made. The quality of self-assessment across the college varies. Some curriculum areas are overgenerous in judgements made about teaching and learning and students' achievements. Weaknesses in some cross-college areas are understated.

63 As part of an annual monitoring calendar, course teams carry out termly reviews. They are required to set targets for student retention and achievement and to measure performance against national benchmarks. Quality assurance activities, including course reviews, are recorded in a well-designed and comprehensive course management file. However, the use of targets and benchmarking data is underdeveloped in many areas and reviews are not sufficiently rigorous. Reviews often lack evaluative judgements and some action plans have no information on timescales for completion or the staff responsible for seeing that the actions are implemented and monitored.

64 The college has completed its second year of lesson observations. The scheme has benefited from a variety of projects including joint work with another college on the development of standards for teaching and supporting learning. Lesson observation has given teachers the opportunity to debate

# Cross-college Provision

teaching and learning issues and to identify staff development needs. Information on the quality of teaching and learning and an analysis of outcomes and the grades awarded to the lessons observed, are reported in summary programme area reports. The lesson grades awarded by the college are monitored against the profile of grades in the chief inspector's report, published annually by the FEFC. In many curriculum areas, lesson grades overstated the strength of teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that service standards for cross-college aspects are generally well defined and the college has been awarded the Charter Mark for its standards of customer care. Monitoring of service standards, however, is irregular. Year-on-year comparisons are not always undertaken.

65 Surveys of students' perceptions are carried out twice a year. An initial survey focuses on entry and induction, a second on students' levels of satisfaction with their courses, including their views on teaching and learning. There is an end-of-year survey of employers' views. The responses to the surveys are analysed by the quality assurance unit and contribute usefully to course reviews. Students are issued with the college's charter, which explains their responsibilities and entitlements and includes a complaints procedure. Complaints brought to the attention of staff, managers and the principal are dealt with effectively.

66 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that appraisal and staff development are a strength. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1997. The staff development programme is based on needs identified at appraisal and linked to the college's strategic objectives. The college has also introduced a staff mentoring scheme that is used effectively as part of the induction of new staff. Staff speak highly of the supportive nature of appraisal and of the range of professional development opportunities.

## Governance

### *Grade 2*

**67 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses, though they considered some to be overstated.**

#### Key strengths

- effective conduct and operation of corporation and committee business
- effective monitoring of the college's financial performance
- highly effective clerking

#### Weaknesses

- lack of clarity about the action required from college managers to improve students' performance

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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.

69 The corporation has agreed a determined membership of 18 in line with the statutory modifications to the instrument of government. Governors have a wide range of skills and expertise in areas which include business, higher education, training, design and marketing, finance, and accountancy. The corporation has a clear strategy and accompanying procedures for the recruitment of new governors. The search committee operates effectively in seeking candidates and advising the corporation on the appointment of governors. The range of governors' skills identified in the recent skills audit is considered when making new appointments. Levels of attendance at corporation and committee

# Cross-college Provision

meetings are good. The search and standards committee reviews attendance at all committees annually. Each committee also examines its own attendance as part of the self-assessment process. Appropriate action is taken where poor levels of attendance are identified.

70 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that governors are involved closely in developing and monitoring the strategic plan. They have reviewed the college mission and are aware of many of the strategic issues facing post-16 education. Strategic matters are considered at an annual two-day residential meeting. A programme for monitoring and reviewing the strategic plan is in place. Governors approve targets for 18 corporate performance indicators.

71 The governors have established a quality performance committee. They receive regular reports on the college's performance but are aware they need to monitor some aspects more closely. They have introduced a regular programme of reviewing different curriculum areas. They are aware of the critical importance of improving students' achievements and raising levels of retention, but minutes of meetings do not always specify sufficiently what further action is required from college managers. The strength of governors' links with the college's curriculum areas varies. Faculty advisory boards have benefited from the involvement of governor representatives. There is a policy designed to improve governor links with students and staff.

72 Arrangements for governor training are developing. There has been an impressive range of national speakers at training events. There are good arrangements for the induction of governors and a mentoring scheme has been introduced for new governors. During the last year, governors have identified their own training needs and a training plan has been developed. They recognised, however, that more needs to be done to identify needs and provide the appropriate training.

73 Governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. All governors and senior managers annually update the register of interests. The corporation has revised its code of conduct to include the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. Agendas, papers and minutes are available for public inspection. Confidential items are reviewed after two years. The latest corporation minutes are also available on the college intranet.

74 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the clerk to the corporation provides a high standard of support to the corporation and individual governors. The agendas and supporting papers for corporation and committee meetings provide a good basis for decision-making. Corporation agendas feature a summary report, produced by the clerk, on the work of each committee since the last corporation meeting. The chair of each committee also gives an oral report. Important issues are covered in detail, and where appropriate the full paper is included in the supporting documentation.

75 There is an annual calendar of corporation and committee meetings, and a schedule of standard agenda items. The corporation has committees for finance, quality performance, resources, audit, remuneration, search and standards, community liaison, and student affairs. All committees have terms of reference that clearly identify their responsibilities and relationship to the corporation.

76 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that governors monitor the college's financial performance effectively. The finance committee considers the monthly management accounts at each of their monthly meetings. The accounts include detailed financial performance indicators and benchmarking information, student enrolment data, staff costs, and graphical representations of key financial trends. The corporation receives relevant

# Cross-college Provision

extracts from the full management accounts at each of its meetings, along with written and oral reports from the chair of the finance committee.

77 The audit committee effectively monitors the plans and reports of the internal and external auditors. It produces an annual report to the corporation on the whole system of internal control within the college. Once a year, the committee appraises its own performance and assesses the work of the internal and external auditors against established performance indicators. At every meeting it reviews a rolling schedule of internal and external audit recommendations, in order to monitor the implementation of agreed recommendations.

## Management

### *Grade 2*

**78 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They also found a significant additional weakness.**

#### Key strengths

- sound strategic planning
- productive collaboration with external bodies
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity through community activity
- good financial management
- effective internal communications

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient scrutiny of some cross-college areas
- inadequacies in monitoring and reporting student attendance

79 The college's mission is publicised across the local community. Staff understand the

mission and are committed to implement it and to strengthen the college's place in the community. Senior management provides strong strategic leadership. The strategic plan and operating statement are reviewed and progress against targets is recorded. Some programme areas have operating statements which reflect the strategic plan objectives. Other areas use action plans arising from their self-assessment reports.

80 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that it has extensive collaborative partnerships with external providers and the local community. There are strong links with local minority ethnic groups and there is a good understanding of, and response to, their needs. Links with the community have enabled the college to promote lifelong learning, widen participation and develop provision to meet the needs of a diverse range of students. Senior managers represent the college on numerous committees and steering groups. The college has a close working relationship with a neighbouring university. It also has good links with the local authority and local faith organisations. The principal is a member of the Black Country Principals' Group and a national panel for sustainable development education. There are excellent links with the local health authority, which has provided funding for college staff to develop a 'healthy college' initiative. The college has a large number of projects supported by European funding. Links with industry have resulted in contracts for training and improved facilities for students.

81 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the management structure needs to be reviewed to ensure that it reflects changes in priorities. However, the self-assessment report failed to recognise that in some cross-college areas, monitoring and control of provision is not effective. Examples include tutorials and the development of key skills. Other cross-college activities, such as the work with disaffected young people, are

# Cross-college Provision

managed effectively. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that senior managers have a clear sense of purpose.

82 Internal communication is effective. There are wide-ranging methods of communication. These include a regular team briefing from the principal, information from which is passed on to faculty and team meetings, a monthly college newsletter and the principal's 'roadshows'. The college is also developing its use of electronic communication. Regular meetings of the senior management team, middle managers, faculty management teams and programme teams ensure that management decisions are communicated effectively. The middle managers' monthly meeting is the forum for dissemination and discussion of key curriculum initiatives. However, actions required and responsibilities for their implementation are not always recorded clearly. This makes it difficult to monitor what is happening and hinders the development of strategies for improvement. The failure of some programme teams to record action plans effectively makes it difficult for staff to improve the quality of their work.

83 Management information has improved since the last inspection. Useful information is available to support monitoring, review, decision-making and the setting of targets. The senior management team receives detailed weekly reports. All middle managers can monitor data on students electronically. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there are weaknesses in monitoring and reporting students' absences and in monitoring the use of accommodation. The college has recently installed a computerised system for recording attendance.

84 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The financial health of the college is improving. The director of finance, who is a qualified accountant, heads the finance function. Comprehensive and timely

management accounts are produced every month. They include an income and expenditure account with a commentary, a balance sheet, a rolling 12-month cashflow forecast, and a report against key financial ratios. The senior management team receives detailed financial reports every month. Budget holders are closely involved in setting their budgets and they receive monthly budgetary control reports. Financial regulations are up to date and comprehensive. Statistical and financial returns to the FEFC are timely.

85 The college has an appropriate range of policies and procedures including those for equal opportunities, and health and safety. The college effectively promotes equality of opportunity. It has planned and secured increased participation from members of minority ethnic communities. It also monitors disability, ethnicity and gender, although the information is not used systematically in all parts of the college. Equal opportunities matters are considered by the corporation's subcommittees, but the corporation does not receive an annual summative report. The health and safety policy is monitored effectively and it is a standing item on the agenda of all corporation committees.

# Cross-college Provision

## Conclusions

86 The college's self-assessment report provided a good basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, but found that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with just over half the curriculum area grades. They awarded lower grades to three of the areas. For most of the curriculum areas, insufficient weight is given to weaknesses in teaching, learning and achievement. Inspectors agreed with three of the cross-college grades, awarding lower grades for the other two. Some weaknesses for these aspects of provision are understated; others are not identified.

87 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.



# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (July 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	28
19-24 years	20
25+ years	52
Not known	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	21
Level 2 (intermediate)	32
Level 3 (advanced)	29
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Level not specified	13
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision (%)</i>
Science	319	1,474	18
Agriculture	17	11	0
Construction	306	654	9
Engineering	363	900	12
Business	241	933	11
Hotel and catering	181	207	4
Health and community care	545	896	14
Art and design	547	652	12
Humanities	332	1,052	14
Basic education	171	413	6
Total	3,022	7,192	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 48% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	226	3	109	338
Supporting direct learning contact	42	4	0	46
Other support	130	18	0	148
Total	398	25	109	532

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£14,560,000	£16,038,000	£17,883,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.62*	£16.48	£16.82
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	71%	71%
Achievement of funding target	100%	103%	98%
Diversity of income	19%	22%	27%
Operating surplus	-£321,000	-£484,000	-£290,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

\*provisional data

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	554	450	762	1,826	1,520	1,863
	Retention (%)	89	83	80	80	81	83
	Achievement (%)	34	54	64	56	76	63
2	Number of starters	1,263	1,179	1,482	1,653	1,389	1,980
	Retention (%)	84	79	85	83	85	82
	Achievement (%)	51	58	66	55	61	66
3	Number of starters	1,077	1,046	1,328	1,709	1,384	1,799
	Retention (%)	90	76	80	89	79	77
	Achievement (%)	57	65	73	47	64	68
4 or 5	Number of starters	24	64	25	480	476	356
	Retention (%)	83	77	88	89	86	88
	Achievement (%)	69	76	79	64	63	64
Short courses	Number of starters	922	781	562	2,908	3,362	2,129
	Retention (%)	92	92	93	92	95	95
	Achievement (%)	47	58	61	58	70	61
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	317	313	323	322	502	623
	Retention (%)	86	88	74	79	80	83
	Achievement (%)	56	56	70	47	68	60

Source: ISR

# **FEFC Inspection Report 22/01**

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

## **January 2001**

**Extracts from this publication may be reproduced for non-commercial educational or training purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged and the findings are not misrepresented.**

**This publication is available in an electronic form on the Council's website ([www.fefc.ac.uk](http://www.fefc.ac.uk)).**

Further copies can be obtained by contacting  
the communications team at:

The Further Education Funding Council  
Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone 024 7686 3265

Fax 024 7686 3025

E-mail [fehcpubs@fefc.ac.uk](mailto:fehcpubs@fefc.ac.uk)

The print run for this document was 1,400 copies

Please quote the reference number below when ordering.

Reference INSREP/1161/01