

West Nottinghamshire College

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*

© 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	5

Curriculum areas

Engineering	9
Administration, secretarial and business information technology	14
Leisure and tourism	20
Childcare	27
Art and design	33
English and modern foreign languages	40
Basic skills	46

Cross-college provision

Support for students	53
General resources	62
Quality assurance	71
Governance	78
Management	87
Conclusions	95

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

West Nottinghamshire College

East Midlands Region

Inspected October 2000

West Nottinghamshire College is a large general further education college based in Mansfield. It has a well-established and rigorous self-assessment process that is effectively linked to strategic planning. The self-assessment report was based on information from review and evaluation procedures involving staff at all levels. A validation process involved the directorate and middle managers. The document was well structured and thorough, and judgements were supported by evidence. By the time of the inspection, the college had taken action to address a number of weaknesses identified. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They agreed with all the curriculum grades awarded by the college. In one cross-college area they found that the college had overestimated the grade. They considered it had underestimated the grade in two other areas.

The college provides a broad range of courses in all 10 of the FEFC programme areas. Provision in seven of these was inspected. The college benefits from effective, purposeful and open management. Arrangements for strategic planning and self-assessment are

comprehensive. Beneficial collaborative partnerships and external links support the implementation of flexible strategies for meeting the learning needs of the community. Governors demonstrate effective oversight of strategic planning. They undertake close financial monitoring and close monitoring of students' achievements. College self-assessment procedures are rigorous and lead to improvement. Since 1997, there has been a general improvement in students' achievements at all levels of qualification, and most are now above national benchmarks. Courses are well managed; the majority of teaching is good and all is at least satisfactory. In the area of administration, secretarial and business information technology, the quality of teaching is good or outstanding. Students benefit from comprehensive and responsive welfare support and there is strong and effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The accommodation and general resources are of high quality. The college should address: unsatisfactory retention rates on some courses; inconsistencies in tutorial practice; low take-up of additional support for literacy and numeracy; insufficient attention paid to some aspects of the audit committee operation; and the underuse of space on some sites.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	2	Support for students	2
Administration, secretarial and business information technology	1	General resources	1
Leisure and tourism	2	Quality assurance	2
Childcare	2	Governance	2
Art and design	2	Management	1
English and modern foreign languages	2		
Basic skills	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 The mission of West Nottinghamshire College is 'to provide education and training of high quality for individuals, employers and the community'. This is supported by a values statement, which recognises the benefits to the local community of lifelong learning and equality of opportunity to learn and achieve. The college has six sets of priority objectives. These focus on business excellence, participation and progression, inclusive learning programmes and services, support for learners, good employment practice and creating the right environment for the college to thrive.

2 The college was formed in the 1970s from the merger of a college of art and a technical college. It has three main centres in Mansfield and another in Sutton-in-Ashfield. Its catchment area also serves the 'M1 corridor' linking Nottinghamshire with Derbyshire. The total population in this area is about 300,000. The local community has been affected by changes in its main industries; there have been major reductions in coal mining and structural change to the other major industry, textiles. The locality has been identified as one that has significant levels of need. Activity to support regeneration of the local economy is well under way. Manufacturing remains important, accounting for around 30% of employment.

3 A broad range of courses is provided in all 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. These are available from entry level to level 3; many curriculum areas also offer higher education level provision. Achievement levels for school-leavers aged 16 to 18 are generally lower than the national and regional averages. Effective collaboration with schools enables provision to be delivered in partnership with them. About 200 year 12 students from schools attend the college through a consortium arrangement. The college is a member of the North Nottinghamshire Learning Partnership, which is chaired by the local

education authority (LEA). In association with North Nottinghamshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the college provides work-based learning, offering foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships. Off-site learning is provided through workplace learning centres. Partnerships have enabled industry standard facilities to be created, for example, to support engineering and textile training. There is substantial provision in community venues, schools and voluntary sector establishments. The college has made substantial investments in information and communications technology facilities for learners. It has supported the East Midlands Development Agency in its work, also contributing to the Coalfield Alliance, a subregional strategy for the former coalfields. The agency's first objective is to encourage the use of information and communications technology, and the college has incorporated this into its strategic plan for 2000 to 2003.

4 Student numbers grew in 1999-2000 to 2,834 full-time students, of whom 2,200 were FEFC funded, and 12,040 part-time students (again, largely FEFC funded). Areas of growth have included full-time provision for 16 to 18 year old students, part-time provision for adults, work-based learning and University for Industry (Ufi)/learndirect. The college manages the local learndirect hub. In July 2000, the college employed 790 staff, of whom 333 were full time. Teaching and learning is managed through six curriculum areas, co-ordinated by programme managers and programme tutors. Business support staff contribute both to curriculum areas and central services.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 9 October 2000. In planning and carrying out the inspection, the team used the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. In preparing for inspection the

Context

college acknowledged that data on students' achievements for 1997 to 1999 derived from the individualised student record (ISR) contained inaccuracies. As a consequence the report contains tables of students' achievements that are incomplete. However, due to the robust way in which the college had tackled the problem of inaccurate student data during 1999-2000, the college was able to provide revised data on retention and achievement for 1997 to 1999, as well as some data for 1999-2000. These were checked against primary sources such as registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies and found to be largely accurate. Inspectors were therefore able to use these data in making their judgements. The inspection took place early in the college year, and the college was unable to enter all its data in time for the inspection. It was also waiting for some data from awarding bodies.

6 The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The FEFC

inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 56 days. They observed 82 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students. Nine inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college inspection. The joint areas inspected were engineering, business, and childcare. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 82 lessons inspected, 72% were judged to be good or outstanding and none were judged less than satisfactory. This compares favourably with the national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	1	7	2	0	0	10
GNVQ	1	6	3	0	0	10
NVQ	5	5	5	0	0	15
Other vocational	8	19	9	0	0	36
Other	1	6	4	0	0	11
Total (No.)	16	43	23	0	0	82
Total (%)	20	52	28	0	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

Context

8 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 (%)
West Nottinghamshire College	11.9	84
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

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- broad range of engineering courses
- modern and well-equipped manufacturing centre
- generally high levels of achievement
- effective employer links
- strong course management
- much good teaching

Weaknesses

- poor retention on some courses
- excessive note-taking in some theory lessons
- lack of opportunities for work experience for full-time students

10 The college offers an extensive range of engineering courses, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. Provision covers craft, technician and higher technician courses in mechanical and production, electrical and electronic, welding and fabrication, electrical installation, motor vehicle engineering and textile manufacture. The range of courses provides progression opportunities for students, and day-release and block-release courses offer good support for local companies. Inspectors agreed that employer links are well established. The engineering advisory committee meets termly. The Engineering Forum, an organisation representing local small and medium-sized companies, is based in the college. It recently appointed a consultant who

visits companies to determine their training needs. Pupils from local schools attend a workshop course on motor vehicle or mechanical engineering one day a week. Course management is good, as recognised in the self-assessment report. For example, course team meetings are held regularly and documented, and course files are comprehensive. Teachers have appropriate qualifications for the courses they teach.

11 Teaching is generally effective, a strength that was understated in the self-assessment report. Most lesson plans are detailed. In contrast, some schemes of work are merely a list of topics. Learning materials and handouts in electronics are particularly well structured. Teachers make effective use of question-and-answer sessions to involve students in discussions and to check their understanding. They take care to explain theoretical concepts and then relate them to a practical application. In a science lesson, a teacher used equations to calculate the volume of a cylinder and then determine its mass, given its density. The students then weighed several objects, found their volume by measurement, and went on to calculate their density and specify the material from which they were made. This contrasted with some theory lessons in which there was excessive note-taking, a weakness not identified by the college's self-assessment. In the better practical lessons, students undertake relevant work in a systematic way. In one motor vehicle lesson, students were told that a car had a problem with its brakes. The teacher discussed the symptoms with the students and agreed the course of action with them. Students correctly diagnosed the reasons for the fault then successfully carried out the repair, completing a job card explaining the process. Key skills have been effectively implemented on all full-time and some part-time courses. Written feedback on students' assignments is sparse and insufficiently detailed to help students improve

Curriculum Areas

their performance. The lack of opportunities for full-time students to undertake work experience was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college that the recently developed manufacturing centre called 'The Engine' is a modern, well-equipped facility. Its spacious foyer leads to a well-designed workshop containing several computer numerically controlled machine tools, a robot and a co-ordinate measuring machine, all linked to computers in adjacent rooms. The motor vehicle workshop is bright, well organised and contains sufficient tools and equipment. The mechanical workshop is spacious, but the machine tools are dated. Although the range of electronic test equipment is good, the electronic workshop is cluttered. The materials testing

laboratory is cramped. Both the electrical installation workshop and the welding and fabrication workshop are well equipped and provide suitable working environments.

13 Students are generally hardworking. Their portfolios are well presented, although few assignments are wordprocessed. Achievement is generally good. From 1997 to 1999, pass rates for the majority of courses exceeded national benchmarks. For example, the pass rate for advanced technician courses in 1999 was 97%, compared with the national average of 75%. Despite a general improvement from 1997 to 1999, the college recognises that there was poor retention on some courses. For example, retention on City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) level 3 craft courses was 67% in comparison to the national average of 85%.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ	1	Number of starters	*	*	47
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	33
Intermediate technician	2	Number of starters	30	*	24
		Retention (%)	57	*	79
		Achievement (%)	94	*	72

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Administration, Secretarial and Business Information Technology

Grade 1

14 Inspectors observed 15 lessons. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- teaching that was always good or outstanding
- well-managed provision
- workshops catering effectively for students of different abilities
- effective teamwork
- high and improving rates of retention and achievement
- good quality of equipment and materials in business technology
- increased participation through well-resourced community provision

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

15 The college offers a wide range of business administration, specialist secretarial and information technology (IT) courses from entry level to level 3. Students on programmes leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in administration and specialist legal and medical courses are able to combine their studies with text processing, wordprocessing and IT. Provision is available in a large number of community venues. Inspectors agreed with the college that widening participation is a strong feature of these programmes. The needs of students and the community are voiced and supported through local partnerships. Many

students who return to learning gain the confidence to progress to higher level programmes.

16 Provision is well managed and carefully planned, as recognised by the college. There is effective teamwork. Staff plan and monitor programmes at regular meetings which are well documented, with agendas and minutes. All programmes have detailed schemes of work using a common format. The work of programme managers is supported effectively by a range of management information reports for them to use in planning and reviews. Course teams address retention and achievement by setting targets against college and national benchmarks. The outcomes of reviews inform action plans, quality enhancement reports and programme revalidation.

17 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is much good teaching and it is often outstanding. In most lessons, students sustain a high level of motivation, interest and productivity. Model lesson plans are prepared and staff use them to ensure consistency and support schemes of work. Workshop sessions are effective, meeting the needs of students of differing abilities working towards different levels of qualification. Individual targets are set and met by students who are given effective support from good-quality learning materials and tutor input. Frequent assessment and monitoring of progress during lessons helps each student to achieve. The large majority of students work with confidence. In a legal secretaries course, an assignment required them to use technical language and to format conveyancing and will documents which on completion were sealed with wax. Students speak very highly of the tutor support and the attention they receive as individuals. Many students indicate that it is because of this support that they stay on at college and make progress. Full-time students take part in work experience, which provides effective reinforcement for their programmes. The

Curriculum Areas

self-assessment process identified that no key skills were provided for 16 to 19 students, and this weakness has now been addressed successfully.

18 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. The large number of part-time staff work well in teams with full-time staff, bringing up-to-date experience of business administration and technology practice. Inspectors agreed with the college that a strength of the area is that many staff participate in the varied staff development opportunities provided. Training and development events often result from needs identified by team reviews. Staff share resources and learn from each other. Students benefit from good-quality, up-to-date business technology equipment and software that meet high industrial standards. Computer projectors linked to workshop terminals provide excellent teaching opportunities that are valued by students. Community centres are well resourced, including a business technology academy, in the town centre that is well equipped and well used by the community.

19 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that rates of retention and achievement across most programmes are high and improving. In many programmes these rates are well above the national averages. Pass rates are particularly high at all levels of text processing and wordprocessing, computer literacy and information technology, and integrated business technology. These courses involve over 2000 students in a wide range of community settings. Of the 90 students on the NVQ level 2 administration course, 97% obtained the qualification, an outstanding result. Only in NVQ level 3 administration have results been below national averages. To address this weakness, the location and teaching approaches have been changed, resulting in significant improvements although pass rates still remain below the national average. Students' coursework and portfolios are generally of an appropriate or high standard. The students' files demonstrate the steady acquisition of business technology skills, as does their work in the workshops. Many students successfully achieve a range of qualifications. On many programmes students display self-confidence and aspire to higher achievements and employment opportunities.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in administration, secretarial and business information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	234	170	112
		Retention (%)	72	67	80
		Achievement (%)	60	95	97
Specialist secretarial programmes (legal/medical)	2	Number of starters	123	100	72
		Retention (%)	76	80	81
		Achievement (%)	84	81	83

Source: ISR

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 2

20 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good-quality teaching in most lessons
- wide range of additional qualifications
- effective industry links
- well-planned and relevant visits and residential programmes
- good achievement on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced programme

Weaknesses

- adverse impact of small groups on teaching strategies
- insufficient differentiation of learning activities to meet the individual needs of some students
- achievements on some courses below the national average

21 The college offers GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) in travel and tourism, and NVQ courses in travel services, sport and recreation at levels 2 and 3. Other programmes include a first diploma and a national diploma in science (sports studies). Pupils from local schools attend college to complete units for the GNVQ foundation or intermediate level programme. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that full-time students have the opportunity to study for a wide range of additional qualifications that enhance their employment opportunities.

22 The quality of teaching in most lessons is good, as the college identified. Lesson plans and schemes of work are carefully planned and shared with students. The wide range of activities undertaken is supported by good-quality learning materials. Students work productively in most lessons and their interest is maintained. In a minority of lessons, the small group size inhibits the use of a full range of teaching strategies and the development of effective group working. In some larger classes, there is insufficient differentiation of learning tasks to reflect the varying abilities of the students. This weakness was not identified by self-assessment. Assignment briefs are varied and interesting. One assignment on planning an event encouraged students to raise money for charity by holding a 'holiday event' during a college open day. The colourful presentations of attractive resorts, games and other activities attracted 300 visitors. Visits and residential programmes are well organised and linked to specific assessments. Teachers review portfolios and written work regularly. Most provide detailed and helpful feedback on students' work.

23 Inspectors agreed that courses are managed effectively. Course documentation is clear and concise. Teams meet frequently. The team ethos is strong and there is effective sharing of good practice. Teams set clear targets for student retention and achievement. There are rigorous procedures to monitor each student's attendance and progress. Programme managers make effective use of college management information and course review procedures. The internal verification system is robust.

24 Achievements on the GNVQ advanced programme are outstanding. The pass rate in 2000 was 100%. On the intermediate programme, pass rates were above the national average in 1997 and 1998. However, in 1999, they declined to 53%, significantly below the average. Pass rates on NVQ levels 1 and 2 sport and recreation programmes declined over the

Curriculum Areas

three-year period to 1999, when achievement was 13 points below the national average. On the community sports leaders award, pass rates have been generally above the national average. Achievements on all other additional qualifications were 97% in 2000. Poor retention on NVQ programmes was identified in the self-assessment as a weakness, but weaknesses in achievement were generally understated. The written work of the majority of students shows a thorough understanding of the subject and reaches a good standard. Students pay considerable attention to the organisation and presentation of their work. NVQ portfolios contain a good sample of evidence to support assessment.

25 Inspectors agreed that the effective links with local industry are a strength. In addition, the sports and recreation team has strong links with regional and international athletics. It liaises effectively with several district councils over the provision of coaching awards and the

organisation of events. Students help with sports lessons at local school in order to achieve the community sports leaders award.

26 Inspectors agreed with the college that there are good resources to support most aspects of the provision. Students use the sports facilities of local leisure centres and schools. College accommodation includes a well-equipped gym and fitness centre, a sports hall and sports field. Specialist equipment is available in the sports science laboratory. Some of these spaces are inadequate for large groups of students. The fitness centre and the travel shop provide realistic work environments for NVQ students and a learning resource for other students. The stock of books and other learning resources in the library are good. Resource files for student projects are updated regularly. Teachers have relevant vocational qualifications and experience and most have assessor and teaching qualifications.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in leisure and tourism, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ sport and recreation	1	Number of starters	14	6	*
		Retention (%)	71	83	*
		Achievement (%)	70	60	*
NVQ sport and recreation/travel service	2	Number of starters	†	17	*
		Retention (%)	†	53	*
		Achievement (%)	†	67	*
Community sports leaders award	2	Number of starters	29	16	38
		Retention (%)	97	94	100
		Achievement (%)	82	93	68
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	79	32	22
		Retention (%)	67	88	82
		Achievement (%)	74	89	53

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

† course not running

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 2

27 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but found an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- effective student support in college and on work placement
- above average achievements on the majority of courses
- wide range of effective links with childcare providers and local community groups
- good specialist resources

Weaknesses

- below average retention on most courses
- underdeveloped use of information learning technologies

28 Childcare courses are offered at the main college site and at eight community-based centres, including one franchise partner. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that effective links are maintained with external organisations providing childcare and education and local community groups. These links help shape the curriculum. Students can progress from entry level to higher education, employment or professional training. Course teams meet regularly to review courses and monitor students' progress. Staff based in the community receive an informative handbook and regular copies of the college newsletter. Teams monitor targets for enrolment, retention and pass rates during the review process. The

results of student focus groups inform course review and evaluation processes. Work experience is an integral part of courses. Students undertake a weekly work placement, allowing them to develop skills in a range of different institutions. Students' learning in the workplace is supported by effective liaison between college staff and workplace supervisors.

29 Lessons are well planned and provide effective learning experiences. In the best lessons, good use is made of the students' experience to promote the application of knowledge and understanding. In full-time classes, there is regular cross-referencing to the development of key skills in communication. However, the use of information and learning technologies is underdeveloped, and students have insufficient opportunities to develop their skills in IT. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment. Assignment briefs are clear and assessment criteria are shared with students. Marked work is graded fairly. However, in giving feedback, some teachers do not explain how work might be improved, and spelling is not routinely corrected.

30 Student support is an integral part of both college and work placement learning. Students speak very highly of the support given to them by tutors. There are effective meetings between the college and work-based supervisors and assessors. Teachers visit work placements regularly to monitor students' progress. All students receive regular tutorial support dealing with professional and pastoral issues. Group tutorials provide an opportunity for students to develop resources they can use in their work placement. Tutors carefully record and track individual students' progress, career goals and personal concerns. Their records help determine action plans and learning targets. The use of additional learning support has increased over the last two years.

31 Most students demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. In the

Curriculum Areas

workplace, students effectively apply theory to practice. Inspectors agreed that the majority of achievement is above national benchmarks. Students undertaking the advanced diploma in childcare and education in 1999 achieved a 100% pass rate. Results in the diploma in nursery nursing were above national benchmarks for three consecutive years from 1997. Achievement has improved consistently in the certificate in childcare and education. However, inspectors agreed that retention on the majority of courses is below national benchmarks. Strategies to address this issue include increased tutorial support, swifter follow-up for absent students, revised entry requirements and the provision of entry level programmes. Inspectors agreed that retention had improved on the majority of courses in 1999-2000, but it is too early to confirm that the downward trend in retention has halted.

32 Inspectors agreed with the college that staff are well qualified and demonstrate recent and relevant experience. Three teachers have undertaken placements in schools. There is, however, a need for teachers to acquire IT skills and knowledge. Additional peripatetic assessors and an internal verifier have been appointed to speed up the process of assessment, internal verification and achievement on NVQ childcare programmes. Classrooms are well equipped and all have access to computers, television and videos. The childcare library and learning centre at the Ashfield site provides an effective resource for part-time students. There is a significant amount of specialist resources available to support students in developing creative and practical skills. In one lesson, students carried out practical work using baby dolls representing different weights, gender and ethnic origin. There are imaginative, well-presented displays of students' work on all sites.

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

33 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective curriculum management
- high achievements on courses at level 3
- thorough planning and preparation for lessons
- good monitoring and support for individual students

Weaknesses

- some poor retention rates
- insufficient challenge in some lessons

34 The college offers courses in fine art, graphic design, fashion and textiles, three-dimensional design, crafts, computer graphics, interior design, and floral arts. Qualifications are available from entry level to level 3 by full-time or part-time study.

35 Management of the curriculum area is effective as identified in the self-assessment report. The curriculum has been enhanced to offer a range of experiences for students, including residential trips, work placements, professional client-led project briefs and external projects. One group of students produced designs for a stained glass window for a local church; another produced ideas on a corporate identity for a charity. Well-planned European projects have enabled staff and students to explore cultural and artistic ideas. Students have undertaken exchange visits to Italy. Staff from five European Union countries developed joint design and drama projects, using Commedia Del Arte and recording the

outcomes on video. The breadth of qualifications has been extended with the development of a vocational entry level. This provides opportunities for students to develop skills in performance and media as well as art and design. Effective pre-course 'taster' sessions, interviews and summer projects prepare students well for their studies. Students from the national diploma course on three-dimensional design created full-size seventeenth-century costumes in paper and this work was used imaginatively on 'taster' days to teach prospective students. An innovative induction project for foundation diploma students required them to draw insects and make large-scale models. They then worked in pairs to develop these into sculptural body adornments. Generally key skills have been integrated well with other parts of the course, but some teachers do not use the resources produced to make sure the content is relevant.

36 Detailed schemes of work support effective planning. They set out aims, objectives and staff and student activity. The best examples use simple language to convey complex design concepts. Lesson plans show careful tracking against specifications and thoughtful assignments written around common themes. In one lesson students were designing a mausoleum to celebrate the life of a famous twentieth-century artist. The teacher had carefully included application of number and historical and contextual studies in the assignment. The presentation of briefs for the national diploma in three-dimensional design is good. Detailed and clear tasks, useful information and the inclusion of photographs for reference, enable the design principles to be amplified.

37 Inspectors agreed with the college that teaching is generally effective. However, in some lessons students were insufficiently challenged. Teachers sometimes failed to check students' understanding of complex concepts and language, or their understanding of what

Curriculum Areas

was required of them. Students were sometimes distracted or having difficulties and teachers failed to notice. Individual support for students is otherwise good. Teachers conscientiously monitor students' progress. In one lesson, a teacher used appropriate questioning to challenge a student's perception of his progress. Some written feedback is insufficient and does not explain how students might improve.

38 Teachers are well qualified and experienced in a range of specialist subject areas. Students and staff are supported effectively by a team of five specialist technicians. Additional support is co-ordinated with enthusiasm by a member of the team. Support workers offer specialist help, for example, by signing or note-taking, or working with dyslexic students. Accommodation is bright, clean and attractive. Studios and workshops have good light levels, are fit for the purpose and contain appropriate equipment and resources. The design studio has high-quality drawing boards and storage for students' work.

Students benefit from a multimedia room which has excellent specialist IT resources and industry standard software. The library and open learning centre support students effectively with a good supply of research materials, books and magazines.

39 Students' achievements on level 3 courses are high. The diploma in foundation studies has 100% achievement over three years and GNVQ advanced students have achieved significantly above national averages for three years. This strength was understated in the self-assessment report. On a significant number of courses, retention rates have been poor. Retention on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) has been below national averages for the last three years. The college has recognised this weakness. Overall, attendance is good. Work displayed in studios and corridors is stimulating and shows exploration of varied media. Students' portfolio work shows the benefit of thorough research and extensive design development.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	20	21	29
		Retention (%)	80	71	69
		Achievement (%)	75	86	80
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	94
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
Diploma in foundation studies art and design	3	Number of starters	21	31	22
		Retention (%)	90	81	86
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
National diploma three-dimensional design	3	Number of starters	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

40 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment but identified others.

Key strengths

- good standard of teaching
- high-quality oral and written feedback on written work
- achievements that are well above national benchmarks
- good availability and use of teaching resources
- effective student support, both formal and informal

Weaknesses

- poor retention in GCE A level English
- slow pace of some lessons

41 The curriculum area of English and modern foreign languages offers a variety of full-time and part-time courses from beginners' courses through to GCE A levels. The curriculum offer has been revised in response to demand. For example, where numbers declined on traditional language courses, alternative courses were introduced. A planned programme of staff development activities has prepared teachers for the introduction of curriculum 2000. The college established links and some shared provision with partner schools to enhance the choice and viability of GCE A level courses. Teaching teams are well managed and there is co-operation amongst programme leaders. Course teams analyse examination results, student surveys and other relevant

information in reviews to identify areas for improvement. An increasingly refined value-added system is helping to set realistic targets and to measure achievement. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection.

42 Teaching is good, as stated in the self-assessment report. In English, teachers lay stress on independent, paired and group work, followed by feedback on outcomes to the teacher and the whole class. In the best lessons this produces animated discussion and a thorough analysis of what is being studied. In a GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) English class, students showed considerable insight and feeling for the complex dilemmas being faced in a short story by Kate Chopin. Teachers and students make good use of the Internet-linked computers in classrooms and in the open learning centre. The use of appropriate video recordings adds a welcome dimension to learning and features prominently in schemes of work. In a GCSE English class, the screening of a programme discussing the merits of docu-soaps helped students gain a deeper insight into this particular genre. Students followed this up by visiting relevant websites for further research on the same topic. In a minority of lessons the time allowed for students to undertake specific tasks is too generous. This slows the pace of activity and prevents students from being sufficiently challenged. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. In the best foreign language lessons, teachers make extensive use of the language to conduct the lesson. They move actively around the classroom, monitoring individual and group progress carefully. They introduce vocabulary items and phrases in context and within known sentence patterns to help their students retain the knowledge. In a Spanish class, a video showing native Spanish speakers was used to good effect to illustrate meaning and build oral confidence. Most students concentrate well and stay focused during the lengthy lessons. This is

Curriculum Areas

especially true when teachers invite their active participation and use a good variety of methods and activities to keep their interest alive.

43 Teachers take every opportunity before, during and after lessons to give students structured and detailed oral feedback on written work. This is in addition to the comprehensive written comments and marks on assessment sheets. The conscientious marking of the content of essays on literature helps students to deepen their understanding. The close attention paid to correct spelling, punctuation and grammar makes a significant contribution to improving standards of literacy. Students hold their teachers in high regard. They enjoy being treated like adults but still value the ready availability of good pastoral and academic support. The self-assessment report identifies the high levels of student satisfaction.

44 Students' achievements at higher grades in GCSE English language, English literature and combined languages are well above national benchmarks. In 1999, GCE A level English language pass rates and the percentage achieving higher grades improved substantially to well above the national averages. However, retention remained below national benchmarks. This weakness was not identified by the college. These results also indicate considerable added value, given the previous attainment profile of many students. These strengths were not fully recognised by the self-assessment report.

45 Staff have suitable qualifications and experience. Programme managers provide effective support to part-time staff. Classroom accommodation is good. The curriculum area is well resourced both in textbooks and in technical equipment. The library provides adequate additional resources.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and modern foreign languages, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	202	*	126
		Retention (%)	70	*	74
		Achievement (%)	64	*	73
GCSE English literature	2	Number of starters	13	16	20
		Retention (%)	77	69	70
		Achievement (%)	50	90	79
GCSE French/Spanish/German	2	Number of starters	59	57	36
		Retention (%)	58	77	78
		Achievement (%)	74	82	63

Source: ISR

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

46 Inspectors observed nine lessons. They agreed with most of the college's judgements but found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- beneficial collaborative arrangements in a wide range of community venues
- accurate and detailed individual learning plans
- effective support for students' personal achievements
- comprehensive strategy to promote basic skills across the college

Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching methods in some classes
- some students insufficiently challenged

47 The college has developed a comprehensive basic skills policy and implementation strategy. These imaginatively promote basic skills as a key priority. The college has set challenging targets to increase and enhance provision. A basic skills steering group has oversight of provision and the development of a strategic approach. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the promotion of basic skills is a significant strength.

48 Basic skills are offered in a variety of ways. Discrete provision is offered through adult basic education programmes, which include pre-GCSE English and mathematics. Additional learning support is offered within vocational areas. Effective arrangements are in place with vocational departments, allowing them to provide on-course group or individual support for basic skills. Discrete provision is also offered

to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agreed that the programme is wide-ranging and responsive. The considerable community provision helps to widen participation. Collaborative arrangements with a wide range of agencies deliver a comprehensive, flexible service. This provides an important access point into education for students who traditionally have been resistant to learning. Development of family literacy and numeracy programmes and participation in a national on-line training pilot to support volunteers are examples of effective work to widen participation and support basic skills. Opportunities for progression are available on all main sites.

49 A major strength of the provision is the emphasis on accurate and detailed individual learning plans. This strength was not recognised by self-assessment. Action plans are used effectively by students to manage their own learning. They set themselves clear short-term and long-term targets, and inspectors were impressed to observe students using reviews from the previous year to help plan their priorities. Monitoring and review of progress is regular. However, in some classes, lesson planning is neglected as a result of over-reliance on students' action plans. This weakness was not included in the self-assessment report.

50 Groups are managed skilfully. However, inspectors found a narrow range of teaching methods used in some lessons. An over-reliance on worksheets means that little sustained teaching takes place and students are insufficiently challenged. The marking of students' work acknowledges their hard work but misses opportunities to stimulate further learning. Groups are well staffed by teams of tutors and volunteers. In some lessons, volunteers were not used to best effect. They were offering personal support rather than promoting learning opportunities. There is a wide range of needs in groups. Many include students with significant learning difficulties.

Curriculum Areas

The support they receive is good, reflecting the colleges strong inclusive framework.

51 Increasing numbers of students achieve their learning goals. A good range of basic skills awards is being developed. Students understand the assessment criteria and express a strong commitment to achievement. They demonstrate many types of achievement and are particularly proud of their creative writing. They talk of how classes have helped to foster self-esteem and confidence. Students are enthusiastic about their own success. One student reported how developing her basic skills helped her to participate in community action; another reported 'I am learning to read and write. I always thought I was stupid before.' There are good displays of students' work which have a considerable impact on students' sense of success. A photographic display of an outing to York, which included students from community sites, was mounted in both college and community venues. In 1999-2000, average

retention across groups working towards National Open College Network (NOCN) awards was 93%, well above national benchmarks. Attendance is well above the average for the sector.

52 Resources are generally good. Accommodation in community venues is adequate, including base rooms for basic skills work on two sites. A good range of materials is being developed to support vocational areas, but some updating of paper-based materials is required. Access to IT is good. Staff are increasingly using IT to enhance learning. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is active staff development for staff teaching basic skills. All staff undertakes the C&G initial certificate in teaching basic skills as a minimum qualification. A comprehensive range of training is available to support staff across the college to ensure coherent approaches to basic skills development.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

53 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and found that many weaknesses were being addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- comprehensive and effective pre-entry advice and guidance
- beneficial admissions and induction procedures
- strong and effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- comprehensive and responsive welfare and personal support
- positive support arrangements for community provision

Weaknesses

- inconsistencies in group tutorials
- low take-up of additional learning support

54 There are thorough and effective arrangements for pre-entry advice and guidance. An extensive range of high-quality literature provides clear and appropriate information. Good use is made of local media in promoting college activities. Links with local schools are well established. Open evenings provide useful information and advice. A promotional video offers a lively overview of the college from a student's perspective. Student services have a central location on two of the college's main sites, and guidance information is available on other sites. Students speak highly of the quality of guidance and support services.

55 Inspectors agreed that admissions procedures and induction are effective.

Admissions procedures are clear and well documented, and supported by a detailed staff guidance booklet. Full-time applications are dealt with efficiently. Applicants for full-time programmes receive a useful information pack, which includes a booklet on preparing for the entry interview. Close attention is paid to identifying specific learning and welfare needs of individual students. Student services provide a well-structured induction, supplemented by appropriate induction activity within curriculum areas. There are informative and useful student handbooks.

56 Students appreciate the high level of personal support they receive from teachers and tutors. Recording and tracking of students' progress is generally effective. However, inspectors agreed with the college that other aspects of tutorial provision are inconsistent. There is inconsistency in the planning, delivery and attendance at group tutorials. A new tutoring policy and framework was introduced in September 1999 to address this weakness. New posts of programme tutors have been introduced to work with personal tutors in each curriculum area. Evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of tutorial provision has yet to be established.

57 Comprehensive and effective help is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agreed with the college that this is a significant strength and reflects the college's commitment to inclusive learning. Increasing numbers of students with hearing impairment, visual impairment, dyslexia, and mental health problems are following mainstream programmes with appropriate support. There are well-established and effective links with external agencies and with local special schools. Thorough diagnosis of the additional needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities takes place before entry. Appropriate staff development and support materials are provided for subject and vocational teachers. Students have access to a

Cross-college Provision

wide range of specialist support workers and appropriately adapted equipment. Students' progress is monitored and reviewed systematically.

58 The self-assessment report acknowledged the need for a more coherent strategy for delivering additional learning support for literacy and numeracy throughout the college. Steps have been taken to address this weakness including changes to the management and delivery of additional learning support. An initial diagnostic screening test designed by the college has been introduced to identify students needing this support. All full-time and some part-time students undertake the test. The fact that the test is computerised has significantly improved the time taken to process the results and identify individual students' support needs. Inspectors confirmed the college's view that the take-up of additional learning support has been low. The college is addressing this issue by organising additional learning support for literacy and numeracy within curriculum areas and through closer integration with the delivery of key skills. There is some early evidence of higher rates of participation.

59 Students have access to comprehensive and responsive welfare and personal support. A 'well-being support team', which comprises qualified mental health workers, counsellors and a college nurse, offers high levels of personal support for students. An effective and confidential self-referral system operates through the provision of 'letterboxes' at all centres. There is a strong commitment to encouraging good health. This includes an annual 'well-being' week, a 'support for mental health' week and the availability of health screening services. Effective partnerships with external agencies help to maximise funds available for student financial support. Subsidised transport is available for full-time students aged 16 to 19. There are good support arrangements for the wide and expanding range of community provision, including the

appointment of an adult guidance worker and the provision of crèche facilities at 21 community centres.

60 A team of professionally qualified careers advisers provides students with opportunities for careers guidance interviews. They also offer a series of careers education sessions including support for higher education applications and job searches. A 'Connexions' personal adviser from the Guideline Careers Service attends three days a week. Resources for the support of careers education and guidance are good. However, the location of the careers library in the diner at one of the main sites is unsuitable.

61 A qualified youth worker works with the students' union and promotes the college's enrichment programme. A broad range of sporting, leisure and recreational activities is provided as part of curriculum 2000. The programme includes an increasing number of students taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Not all students can take part in sports fixtures on Wednesday afternoons because of timetable clashes.

Cross-college Provision

General Resources

Grade 1

62 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. Many weaknesses had been addressed by the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- well-furnished and welcoming accommodation
- wide range of accessible, well-equipped learning centres and open learning centres
- high-quality extensive IT resources
- easy access for students with restricted mobility
- effective use of partnership funding

Weaknesses

- underuse of space on some sites

63 The college has three main sites. The largest is a greenfield site in Derby Road, 2 miles from Mansfield town centre. The other two main sites are situated in Chesterfield Road in the town centre and at Sutton-in-Ashfield. The college has a further 10 buildings including the 'cyber centre' in Kirkby in Ashfield, and a base for beauty, hairdressing and IT in the shopping centre in Mansfield. A partnership arrangement has enabled a modern 'drop-in' learning centre to be opened within the central library in Mansfield. Other college premises are small units offering specialised provision. The college also makes use of over 20 community venues.

64 Inspectors agreed that the standard of accommodation is high. There is a welcoming reception area at each centre. All the buildings provide a good learning environment that is clean and attractive. Classrooms are well decorated, comfortably furnished and fitted with

window blinds. They are well equipped with modern teaching aids. Attractive examples of students' work are displayed in classrooms and corridors and in many communal areas. Internal signposting is clear, but there are no road signs to help find the college sites. Parking is adequate at Derby Road and Ashfield, but there is no general student parking at town centre locations.

65 Imaginative use of buildings and a major refurbishment programme have improved the learning environment substantially, as recognised by the college. There is a planned annual maintenance programme. Income has been secured from a wide range of partners and organisations and used to fund the 'Engine' manufacturing centre, the university centre of Mansfield, the 'cyber centre', and the Mansfield library IT centre. New, pleasant cafeteria facilities have been provided at Chesterfield Road. The new diner at Derby Road is much appreciated by students.

66 There are attractively furnished and well-resourced learning centres containing appropriate library resources on the main sites in Mansfield. Resources in Ashfield are also good, having been upgraded recently. The learning centre provision is effectively managed across all sites and is appropriately staffed. All centres are easily accessible, and they are open throughout the week and on Saturday mornings. The resources include 27,000 volumes, 170 journals, and a wide range of multimedia materials. A variety of CD-ROM resources are available, many of them networked. In addition, each site has open learning centres, which offer 'drop-in' facilities and provide access to the Internet. Specialist computers are available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is an extensive range of visual aids available to enhance teaching and learning including data projectors, digital cameras and electronic whiteboards. Staff workrooms are of a good standard, are comfortably furnished and have networked

Cross-college Provision

computers. Much internal communication is by electronic mail and staff are making increasing use of the Internet.

67 Inspectors agreed with the college that it provides high-quality and accessible IT resources. The information and learning technology committee has wide representation from within the college. It has effectively formulated a robust strategy for information and communications technology and had oversight of the development of the network. The college has invested heavily in new technology. There are over 1,100 high-specification computers available for student and staff use. The college is close to achieving a ratio of computers to students of one machine to every five students. Laptop computers are provided for use in community venues. Most of the college premises are linked by modern network facilities. The IT centre in Mansfield library has been connected to the college by an innovative radio frequency link. It has up-to-date software and easy access to the Internet. Technician support for IT is good and there are ample opportunities for all staff to train in the new technologies.

68 As the self-assessment states, access to college buildings for students with restricted mobility is very good. Automatic doors, new lifts and many ramps have been provided. Only a few rooms at Chesterfield Road are not now accessible. A new lift is due to be installed shortly, and then only two rooms will be inaccessible. Special arrangements for car parking and rooming are made for students with restricted mobility.

69 The college monitors the use of its accommodation regularly. Steps have been taken to reduce the mismatch between the size of many rooms and the needs of classes but space utilisation remains low on some sites. This weakness has been recognised and the college is currently reviewing its accommodation strategy.

70 Recreational and sports facilities on site are limited, a weakness not identified by the college. At Derby Road, there is a small sports hall, a fitness centre and a playing field, used for a significant amount of time by students on sports and leisure courses. There are no recreational facilities at the other sites. However, the college's enrichment programme offers opportunities for a range of sports and recreational activities in commercial venues.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

71 Inspectors agreed with the key strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- effective quality review processes
- rigorous self-assessment leading to improvement
- extensive systems for gathering and responding to students' opinions
- wide range of data to support self-assessment and target-setting
- effective staff development linked to operational planning and appraisal

Weaknesses

- slow progress in reaching some national retention benchmarks
- some service standards insufficiently quantitative
- not all staff appraised annually in some teams

72 The college demonstrates a strong commitment to quality, which has led to effective quality review processes as noted in the self-assessment report. Procedures and

Cross-college Provision

responsibilities for quality review are clear. The quality framework has continued to evolve and revisions are implemented successfully. The framework is described in a helpful manual, which provides guidance in implementing the system. Staff are supportive of the quality processes. There are effective links between quality procedures and strategic planning. The academic board receives reports on quality, including all curriculum, cross-college and business support self-assessment reports and student questionnaires. Courses identified as performing poorly or having low recruitment, including franchised courses, are reviewed and discontinued if appropriate. A corporation member has responsibility for the regular detailed review of quality matters and for reporting them to the board.

73 Classroom observation is carried out annually, and graded and moderated to ensure consistency. Results provide evidence on the quality of teaching and learning. Feedback is given to those observed, and good teaching is highlighted to share good practice. Poor performance is dealt with through staff development. In the areas inspected, there was a strong correlation between the college's classroom observation grade profile and that awarded by inspectors.

74 Processes for self-assessment and review are implemented rigorously, as recognised by the college. All curriculum, cross-college and business support teams complete annual reviews, and most are completed conscientiously. Judgements are evaluative although there is room for further development in some teams. The reviews involve all team members, including part-time staff. Action plans are clearly linked to issues identified, and progress on actions is monitored through quality agenda items in team meetings. Some action points are designed to spread the good practice identified. Each action point is linked to college operational objectives and contributes to their fulfilment. A comprehensive validation process

is used in the production of the college's self-assessment report. There has been a general improvement in students' achievements at all qualification levels between 1997 and 1999 with most above sector benchmarks in 1999. Retention has also shown improvement, but there remain some major courses where progress to improve retention to national benchmarks has been slow.

75 Inspectors agreed that good use is made of benchmarks and a range of accessible data for reviewing performance and setting targets. For example, course teams are provided with three-year trends on student questionnaire responses, retention and achievement benchmarks for the sector, and the latest course targets for retention and achievement. New retention and achievement targets are set annually. The classroom observation grade profile is compared with overall national findings but not national programme area profiles. A revised framework introduced in business support areas uses service standards for reviews. This addresses a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. The development of standards has involved the teams concerned and it has been effective in a number of teams. However, as identified by self-assessment, some key curriculum support teams do not make best use of data to set sufficiently quantitative standards against which to measure their performance.

76 Student surveys are used effectively, as stated in the self-assessment report. Three surveys are conducted annually and quickly analysed. Information is aggregated to appropriate levels and distributed to course teams and managers. Prompt feedback is given to students through notices posted around the college. Student course representatives are elected annually, attend course team meetings and make a valuable contribution to improvements by raising issues which are dealt with promptly. Student focus groups provide a further opportunity for students to raise

Cross-college Provision

concerns. They are a relatively new development but already students are extremely positive about them. There is timely feedback on issues raised, and the information from focus groups has resulted in a number of improvements.

77 Staff development is planned effectively and linked to operational priorities. A staff development committee draws members from all areas of the college. The committee produces a staff development plan using the college's strategic plan priorities as well as national priorities and initiatives. Staff development needs are also identified by individual teams to meet operational requirements and through the appraisal system. Not all staff have been appraised annually and action has been taken to address this weakness. Part-time staff are encouraged to take up staff development opportunities where there is a clear link to operational priorities. The college achieved the re-accreditation of the Investor in People award in June 1999.

Governance

Grade 2

78 Inspectors agreed with many strengths identified by self-assessment. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective oversight of strategic planning
- close monitoring of students' achievements and their views
- good use of governors' skills and experience
- capable management of board business
- strong commitment to openness
- close financial monitoring

Weaknesses

- little use of performance indicators to measure the board's effectiveness
- insufficient attention to some aspects of the audit committee operations

79 The board consists of 15 members. Currently there is one vacancy for a community member. The corporation makes effective use of the appropriate range of skills and expertise of its members. Inspectors agreed with the college that management of board business is effective. The board meets monthly. This helps ensure that information is retained easily from one meeting to the next and allows action to be taken quickly. Papers identify key issues and the type of response required by the board. Meetings are short, normally lasting 60 to 90 minutes, and attendance is satisfactory. At the beginning of the academic year a schedule of board meetings is produced which identifies when key aspects of the annual governance cycle will be addressed. There are standing orders to aid the business of the board.

Cross-college Provision

80 The board has an appropriate range of committees. Committees operate within their terms of reference, but some of these require updating. Inspectors agreed that monitoring of college finances is a strength. The finance committee has a co-opted member with specialist skills. It closely monitors the college's financial position by its consideration of the college's management accounts at every meeting. The full board formally considers finances every two months. The audit committee has not given sufficient attention to some of its responsibilities, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. In 1998-99, the audit committee did not deliver an opinion on the operation of the college's internal control system. The audit committee does not consider internal audit assignment reports promptly. It has not developed an effective mechanism for monitoring the implementation of all audit recommendations.

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

82 Inspectors agreed that the board effectively oversees strategic planning. It determines the educational character of the college. The strategic planning meeting is an annual two-day residential event, also attended by college senior managers. Its main purpose is to review and update the plan and mission statement and to develop the associated annual action plan. The college consulted a wide range of community bodies on the suitability of the current strategic plan and responded to a number of issues raised. The board regularly reviews progress against the strategic action plan. In March, a paper is presented as a formal, annual review stating whether each objective has been met, but there is little use of measurable targets.

Board minutes do not fully summarise the ensuing discussions or record the outcomes of the review. Self-assessment did not identify these shortcomings.

83 Inspectors agreed that close monitoring of students' achievements is a strength. The board agreed not to establish a standards committee but to monitor academic achievements at full board meetings. Governors undertake a comprehensive analysis of students' achievements, and the results of students' surveys are reported. A member of the corporation meets formally with senior managers to further review other quality-related aspects of the college's operation. Information on the quality of franchised provision is not presented to the board.

84 Inspectors agreed that the board has demonstrated a strong commitment to openness and accountability. The annual public meeting is well attended. An informative annual report is published. The board has a code of conduct and a register of interests covering the governors and the clerk. Staff have access to board papers by electronic mail. A monthly 'board bulletin' summarises the outcomes of board and committee meetings before the circulation of approved minutes. Committee membership and governor profiles are available by electronic mail. Minutes of board and committee meetings are available in the college library.

85 Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment report that communications with some college departments are underdeveloped. A number of governors have had frequent contacts with departments but visits have not always been recorded formally. Governors have an office at the college, and the chair is accessible by electronic mail. College managers have attended meetings to give short presentations on their area of work, and staff are invited to attend board meetings as observers. There is governor representation on the college health and safety committee.

Cross-college Provision

86 The annual performance of the board is assessed through individual governor meetings with the chair and a governance self-assessment working party. A governor self-assessment questionnaire has yet to be completed. The self-assessment report recognised that there was little use of performance indicators and targets to improve the quality of governance. Each governor has completed a résumé of their experience and skills, but the systematic identification of governor skills against an intended profile has not been undertaken. The induction of two new governors was managed effectively, and both were allocated a mentor. The board recognises the need to create a more systematic induction programme for new governors.

Management

Grade 1

87 Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the self-assessment report. Considerable progress had been made in addressing weaknesses by the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- effective, purposeful and open management
- good internal communications
- beneficial collaborative partnerships and external links
- comprehensive arrangements for strategic planning and self-assessment
- flexible strategies for meeting the learning needs of the community
- clear financial monitoring and reporting

Weaknesses

- some student data unreliable in previous years

88 The college has a clear vision of its role in the community, expressed through its six sets of priorities and well understood and supported by staff. Managers encourage a culture of target-setting and regular review to underpin the drive for improvement and development. A well-developed set of arrangements supports strategic and operational planning, which is fully integrated with self-assessment. Inspectors agreed that the purposeful leadership given by senior managers is a strength.

89 As stated in the self-assessment report, internal communication is good. Managers put considerable emphasis on frequent and varied forms of communication, particularly as the college operates across many locations. Decisions of the senior staff planning group are included in the weekly 'executive briefings'. Internal electronic mail is used extensively, and information is regularly circulated with payslips. There is an extensive programme of meetings, which are well organised. Agendas and minutes are sent to a range of managers and staff. The good practice in communication is a significant factor in contributing to the positive and supportive attitude of staff.

90 Staff understand the management structure and their role within it. The structure places a significant emphasis on development. The staffing structure is reviewed regularly. The college recognised difficulties arising from the workload on curriculum and programme managers and, following consultation, a significant restructuring of curriculum management was introduced from September 2000. At the time of inspection, it was too early to assess the impact of the change. However, the introduction of programme tutors, whose role is to focus on the quality of teaching and learning, has been welcomed by staff.

91 Substantial benefits accrue from an extensive range of collaborative arrangements and external links, a strength identified by self-assessment. The college is well respected

Cross-college Provision

by many partners for the energy it gives to collaborative arrangements. North Nottinghamshire TEC considers the college to be particularly responsive to learner needs. The college's central role in the Coalfield Alliance has assisted its success in bids to the Single Regeneration Budget, leading to significant growth in the use of community venues. The college has led local developments of the Ufi initiative and there are indications that this has been successful in developing community-based provision. Approximately 1,000 employees in a major local company have enrolled. Other collaborative arrangements include a GNVQ consortium operating between the college and 14 secondary schools.

92 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has taken positive action to address weaknesses in financial management and to improve the college's financial position. A qualified accountant was recruited as director of finance and member of the senior management team. Financial management has been further strengthened by the appointment of two qualified accountants. The content of monthly management accounts has been revised to report detailed and comprehensive historical and forecast information. A range of financial performance indicators is being developed further. The senior management team formally considers the monthly management accounts. The annual budgeting process is documented and course-costing information is available. The college is forecasting surpluses for the next three years. There have been long delays in the finalisation of annual audited accounts. Recently updated financial regulations contain some omissions but are supported by detailed financial procedures.

93 The college's self-assessment recognises that the provision of accurate and timely management information has been problematic. The management information system used

before August 1999 proved insufficiently robust. This created substantial work validating data. The college addressed the problem vigorously, investing in a new software package for finance and student data. A wide range of subsidiary systems such as those for admissions, library and marketing now link directly to the central core data. These systems operated throughout 1999-2000, supported by a significant staff development programme. Additional posts were created to provide an enhanced management information support service. The college also purchased kitemarked software to enable managers to analyse student retention and achievement data. The result of these investments is a significantly improved service to managers, who are increasingly confident in its use. However, not all managers are yet able to take full advantage of the systems. This is being addressed through training. Significant improvements have been made to address the weaknesses in management information. However, some historical student data remains unreliable.

94 The equal opportunities policy is expressed through codes of practice and monitoring systems covering areas such as marketing and publicity, complaints, race and gender. Inclusive learning is a key aspect of improving equality of opportunity. Flexible modes of attendance and delivery are increasing. Partnership projects with local schools aim to break down gender stereotyping in engineering and construction.

Cross-college Provision

Conclusions

95 The college produced its fourth self-assessment report in preparation for inspection. The report was compiled using the framework specified in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* and the guidance in Council Circular 97/13, *Self-assessment and Inspection*. The report was completed during January 1999. It covered the period 1998-99. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and clearly laid out. The document was thorough and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with all the grades awarded by the college for curriculum areas and with two of the cross-college grades. In one cross-college area they found that the college had overestimated the grade. In two others, inspectors found that considerable progress had been made in addressing the weaknesses since the self-assessment report and gave higher grades than awarded by the college.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	15
25+ years	66
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	28
Level 2 (intermediate)	36
Level 3 (advanced)	18
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Level not specified	13
Non-schedule 2	3
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	467	2,948	23
Agriculture	46	112	1
Construction	290	448	5
Engineering	280	1,412	11
Business	365	1,636	13
Hotel and catering	162	745	6
Health and community care	614	2,198	19
Art and design	243	279	4
Humanities	240	1,708	13
Basic education	127	554	5
Total	2,834	12,040	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 22% 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 (August 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	151	62	0	213
Supporting direct learning contact	119	5	0	124
Other support	126	13	0	139
Total	396	80	0	476

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£12,978,000	£14,026,000	£16,911,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.06*	£16.20*	£16.64
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	61%	59%
Achievement of funding target	98%	101%	100%
Diversity of income	33%	31%	38%
Operating surplus	-£532,000	-£213,000	£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*

FEFC Inspection Report 10/01

**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).

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

The print run for this document was 1,400 copies

Please quote the reference number below when ordering.
Reference INSREP/1153/01