

Wulfrun College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**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 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100
Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

© FEFC 1999 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	6

Curriculum areas

Mathematics and science	9
Engineering	15
Business and management	21
Health and childcare	28
Languages and communications	33
Basic education	38

Cross-college provision

Support for students	43
General resources	49
Quality assurance	55
Governance	64
Management	72
Conclusions	82

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 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Wulfrun College

West Midlands Region

Inspected May 1999

Wulfrun College is a medium-sized general further education college in Wolverhampton. One-third of its students are recruited from disadvantaged areas. It offers courses from pre-foundation to degree level. The self-assessment report provided for the inspection was the third that the college had produced. It was reasonably comprehensive but did not include consideration of all the relevant quality statements. The production of the report involved governors as well as staff at all levels in the college. Two external observers, from another further education college and from Wolverhampton University, helped the college to moderate its self-assessment grades. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses recorded in the report. Since the report was produced, the college has successfully addressed some of the weaknesses it identified.

The college offers courses in all of the FEFC's programme areas. Most teaching is satisfactory and some is outstanding. Students' achievements are improving but retention and achievement rates remain low on some courses. Effective leadership has enabled the college to make significant improvements since its last inspection in January 1997. The college's much improved strategic planning is supported by

detailed monitoring of the progress made in meeting its objectives. Communication within the college is good. There are many productive links with local organisations. Governors are actively involved in strategic planning and monitoring the college's financial and non-financial targets. Quality assurance has substantially improved since the last inspection. Well-defined service standards have been set for all support areas. Staff development is well organised and carefully reviewed. There have been improvements to accommodation and resources, including the well-resourced student services area at the college's main site and the high number of modern computers available for students and staff. The strengths of the college's support for students identified in the last inspection have been maintained and there have been a number of improvements, including better co-ordination of tutorial provision. The college's commitment to widening participation is clearly demonstrated by its careful attention to equal opportunities. The college should improve: the quality of teaching in some areas; student retention and achievement rates on some courses; the rigour of course reviews; the data provided for course teams, including records of students' attendance; inadequate library resources and some poor accommodation; and the quality and monitoring of students' action plans.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and science	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	3
Business and management	3	Quality assurance	3
Health and childcare	2	Governance	2
Languages and communications	2	Management	2
Basic education	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Wulfrun College is a general further education college serving a population of around 300,000 in Wolverhampton and south Staffordshire. The student population is drawn primarily from Wolverhampton and its borders, although some specialist provision attracts students and companies from across the West Midlands region. The local economy combines a growing service sector with a significant general manufacturing sector, largely supplying the automotive industry. Small and medium-sized enterprises predominate. Four hundred local companies make use of Wulfrun College's education and training services.

2 The college's main campus is in a parkland setting to the west of the centre of Wolverhampton and its other major site, an inner-city community learning centre, is one mile away. It also operates a motor vehicle bodyshop, a town centre basic skills centre, in conjunction with a neighbouring college, and a horticulture centre. Courses are provided in 40 community centres in and around Wolverhampton and at 50 company premises locally and regionally. Courses are offered in all of the FEFC programme areas and include a growing amount of higher education work. There are strong links with the University of Wolverhampton and Staffordshire University. The college offers a broad curriculum for students aged 16 to 18, including 20 subjects at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), 30 at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) together with general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) and national diplomas. There is a developing programme at entry and foundation levels. The college works with local and regional partners to support New Deal and has over 80 New Deal clients following the full-time education and training option. Programmes of access to higher education are well established and a community programme has been developing since 1995.

3 Wolverhampton is ranked as the 27th most deprived local authority in England. The educational achievements of Wolverhampton's school-leavers are improving. However, the percentage of year 11 students gaining five or more GCSE A to C grades in 1998 was 35% compared with the national average of 46%. Of the 21 secondary schools in Wolverhampton, 20 have sixth forms. In the past, the college has competed for students with nine further education colleges within the Black Country. While competition remains, the college contributes to a range of collaborative work with further education and higher education partners. Some well-established and developing partnerships are in place with local schools. The college is a member of the sponsoring group for the emerging Wolverhampton Regeneration Strategy.

4 In 1997-98, the college enrolled 9,600 students, of whom 1,500 were on full-time programmes. Of the students at Wulfrun College, 40% are from minority ethnic groups and 85% are aged 19 or over, with 50% over the age of 25. Of the college's students, 33% live in wards designated by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) as deprived. The college employs 278 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 14% are from minority ethnic groups.

5 The college's mission is to provide excellent lifelong learning opportunities for local people, businesses and communities. There is a strong commitment to working in partnership with the local authority and Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise (TEC) to develop the skills of the local population and to regenerate the local economy. The college's work in community and company settings has significantly expanded over the last two years in furtherance of its strategic aim of widening participation. The college's recently-revised strategic priorities are:

- to continuously raise levels of student achievement and satisfaction
- to ensure that the college continues to develop, diversify and extend participation

Context

- to invest in the skills and professional development of all staff
- to promote inclusive learning, access and equality of opportunity
- to be a key partner in the continuing development and regeneration of Wolverhampton
- to promote excellence and innovation in teaching, learning and curriculum development
- to provide accessible and comprehensive guidance and support for students
- to achieve best value in the development of the learning environment and in the deployment of resources.

also consulted the TEC about its relationships with the college.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 77 lessons inspected, 61% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% were less than satisfactory. This compares with averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 17 May 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. This included data on students' achievements for 1996 and 1997 that derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college had experienced problems with its previous computerised student records system and acknowledged that the data for 1996 and 1997 were not fully reliable. The college supplied retention and achievement data for 1998. Inspectors checked these against class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected about two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 48 days. Inspectors observed 77 lessons, including some tutorials, and examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. Inspectors observed a meeting of the governing council and held meetings with governors, representatives of external partner institutions, college managers, staff and students. Inspectors

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	3	5	0	0	10
GCSE	0	3	2	0	0	5
GNVQ	2	3	3	1	0	9
NVQ	2	2	3	0	0	7
Access	1	3	0	0	0	4
Basic education	0	4	4	2	0	10
Other vocational	6	10	8	1	0	25
Other	4	2	1	0	0	7
Total (No.)	17	30	26	4	0	77
Total (%)	22	39	34	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Wulfrun College	8.6	81
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Science

Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering GCE A level and GCSE in science and mathematics, GNVQ advanced science, City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numeracy and mathematics in the access to higher education programme. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but considered that the college had placed insufficient emphasis on students' achievements.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- the substantial additional support provided for individual students outside lessons
- good range of mathematics and science provision
- well-attended workshop and learning centres
- stimulating programme of events for science week

Weaknesses

- low student retention and achievement rates on most courses
- lack of appropriate variety in the teaching of mathematics
- poor management of health and safety in some lessons
- insufficient regular homework and tests for some classes
- little use of information technology (IT), particularly in mathematics teaching

10 The division of mathematics and science offers a wide range of courses, from entry to degree level, both full time and part time, including Saturday morning courses. As the self-assessment report stated, there are good progression routes in mathematics. However,

there is no special mathematics provision arranged for those students studying science without mathematics. The division has been involved in a number of events to raise the profile of science and technology, including a successful science week in March 1998 attended by 1,200 pupils from 32 local primary schools.

11 Most teaching of science and mathematics is satisfactory or good. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that lessons are well planned. In the best examples, teachers made their lesson objectives clear to students. The lessons were conducted at a lively pace. Teachers made skilled use of visual aids and frequently aimed questions at individual students to check their understanding. There was an appropriate mix of practical and theory work. In a chemistry revision lesson, students were divided into teams and given the names of compounds printed on separate sheets. The teams were challenged to use all the compounds to solve problems of chemical synthesis. Students worked well together and rapidly arrived at the correct chemical equations. However, in some lessons there were no clear learning objectives, students spent long periods of time working through exercises and only the most able answered the teacher's questions. Inspectors could not agree with the self-assessment report that there is a variety of effective teaching methods. While some interesting group and practical work was observed in science, there was little variation in the teaching methods used for mathematics and this was reflected in the schemes of work for this subject. Inspectors observed some unsatisfactory practice in practical lessons.

12 Some teachers do not give homework and tests frequently enough to encourage students to learn and practise on their own. Some students' assessed work showed good knowledge of the subject but spelling mistakes remained uncorrected and students had not been encouraged to discuss uncertainties in the results of practical work. A group of students on the access to higher education course had

Curriculum Areas

made considerable progress during the year in their understanding of mathematical concepts. In contrast, some GCSE students did not understand the stages of a solution.

13 Examination pass rates have been at or below the national averages for general further education colleges in the last three years. The significance of this weakness was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report, nor did the action plan accompanying the report fully address it. Notable exceptions include the pass rates in GCSE chemistry and GCE A level mathematics in 1998 and in GCE A level physics in 1996 and 1997. Retention rates in most subjects were low in 1998.

14 Teachers are well qualified but few have recent industrial experience. Four technicians provide effective technical support. The

laboratories, although old, are serviceable but many have uncomfortable seating arrangements. There is enough material and equipment for students to carry out experiments and the stock of textbooks is adequate. There is no students' work on display. Provision for the use of IT has been increased but IT is not yet fully integrated with the curriculum in all subjects. The mathematics workshop, science open learning workshop and physics resource centre are well equipped and valued by students. All full-time students identified at induction as needing help with numeracy are referred to the mathematics workshop for additional support. Over 70% attend and a high proportion obtain credits in Open College Network mathematics, as noted in the self-assessment report.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE chemistry	2	Expected completions	*	*	28
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	64
GCSE mathematics	2	Expected completions	*	*	295
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	*	*	30
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	69
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	*	*	33
		Retention (%)	*	*	69
		Achievement (%)	*	*	64
GCE A level mathematics	3	Expected completions	*	*	46
		Retention (%)	*	*	70
		Achievement (%)	*	*	75
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	38
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

15 Inspectors observed 12 lessons including provision on a local company's premises. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report but found a number of other strengths and weaknesses not identified in the report.

Key strengths

- good, vocationally-relevant teaching
- high standards of practical work
- high retention rates
- good achievement rates for courses at levels 1 and 2
- a wide range of courses
- productive links with industry

Weaknesses

- inadequate action-planning for individual students
- low achievement rates on level 3 courses

16 The college's engineering provision successfully meets the needs of local students and industry. As recognised in the self-assessment report, there is a wide range of courses in motor vehicle, manufacturing and electronic engineering from level 1 to 4, with good opportunities for specialisation. The college has productive links with industry and has significantly expanded its work with employers. Teaching takes place at the premises of local companies; last year over 500 employees gained work-based national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Short courses are tailored to meet the needs of local industry. The college has recently been awarded a substantial three-year contract to develop the manufacturing skills of a local company's workforce. The expansion of this work has been greater than expected and has increased the

already heavy reliance on part-time teachers noted in the self-assessment report.

17 A strength of the teaching is its high vocational relevance and, as the self-assessment identified, the clear links between theory and practice. In most lessons, there is a variety of appropriate activities that often include realistic exercises which effectively improve students' understanding. Teachers clearly explain new concepts and illustrate their application by reference to well-chosen examples of industrial practice. As recognised in the self-assessment report, teachers have a good understanding of current industrial practice and this was evident in the lessons observed. Students' interest is maintained by teachers' skilful use of questions. In a few of the lessons, teachers' questioning was not effective and involved only a minority of students. Most students show a good grasp of technical aspects but some have underdeveloped mathematical skills. In a few lessons, students were not able to pay full attention because they were too busy copying notes and diagrams.

18 Practical lessons are well planned and prepared. Students' skills and understanding are developed through clearly specified exercises. Teachers make frequent checks on the progress of individual students; they are clear about the standard of work required and show students how to improve their performance. In a motor vehicle lesson, students worked enthusiastically on a range of realistic maintenance tasks clearly specified on a worksheet. The teacher carefully monitored their work, by discussing the outcome with each student and effectively covering the related theory. There is a good range of equipment and tools for practical work. The self-assessment report underestimated the strength of the specialist resources, which have been further improved by the provision of equipment by local companies.

19 In most areas there are effective arrangements for assessment. Students are well informed about assessments and value the

Curriculum Areas

prompt return of their work. Students' understanding of theory is effectively promoted by working on clearly specified, realistic assignments. Some exercises effectively combine application of theory with practice, for example, electronics exercises that require the students to design, build and test circuits. For most of their work students are provided with helpful written feedback. Teachers are responsive to requests for help. There are good opportunities for students to meet their tutors but there are weaknesses in the recording of their interviews with students. Many records do not include a comprehensive review of the student's progress, and targets for improvement are poorly specified and are not followed up in subsequent tutorials.

20 Student retention and achievement rates have improved over the last three years. In 1997-98, with few exceptions, retention rates were at least at the national average and in most cases higher. Achievement rates are more variable. They have been consistently good in level 1 and 2 manufacturing over the last few years and in 1997-98, more than 90% of the work-based students who completed their studies achieved the qualification. At level 3, achievement rates in manufacturing have declined and were low in 1997-98, with some pass rates at only 25%. Although motor vehicle students' achievements have improved at all levels, there are a number of low pass rates. In electronic engineering there has been a significant improvement and in 1997-98 pass rates at level 1 and 2 were good.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Manufacturing engineering	1 and 2	Expected completions	493	763	788
		Retention (%)	84	83	85
		Achievement (%)	49	59	86
Motor vehicle	1 and 2	Expected completions	221	162	190
		Retention (%)	65	82	80
		Achievement (%)	44	43	62
Electrical/electronic engineering	1 and 2	Expected completions	92	91	88
		Retention (%)	77	79	76
		Achievement (%)	52	58	85
Mechanical engineering	3	Expected completions	165	67	85
		Retention (%)	74	86	79
		Achievement (%)	36	62	51
Motor vehicle	3	Expected completions	46	77	40
		Retention (%)	89	81	88
		Achievement (%)	44	42	53
Electrical/electronic engineering	3	Expected completions	32	31	15
		Retention (%)	50	71	87
		Achievement (%)	38	33	62

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

Curriculum Areas

Business and Management

Grade 3

21 Inspectors observed 15 lessons covering administration, GNVQs in business, GCSEs, GCE A levels and professional courses in management and accountancy. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses. They considered that the college had understated some weaknesses, particularly those relating to students' retention and achievements.

Key strengths

- good links with employers
- broad range of courses
- use of a range of appropriate learning methods
- good specialist resources
- the high standard of students' work

Weaknesses

- some poor retention and pass rates
- failure to share learning objectives with students and to achieve them in some lessons
- insufficient emphasis on consolidating students' learning
- limited strategies for dealing with groups with widely varying ability
- inadequate staff liaison in the management of some courses

22 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that a broad range of courses in administration, business and management is offered. In addition to provision at the main site, courses are run in community venues. Students can enter part-time administration programmes at various times throughout the year or can choose a distance learning option. There are well-established links with employers

and substantial provision of NVQ assessment in the workplace. Provision is well planned and monitored and responsibilities for managing courses are generally clear. However, there is insufficient liaison between the staff responsible for GCSE and GCE A level courses for full-time students. The college has addressed several of the weaknesses it identified in its self-assessment report. For example, a first level course devised for students whose needs were not adequately served is now running.

23 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is some good teaching. In the best lessons, teachers plan well and use an appropriate variety of learning activities to sustain students' interest and increase their understanding. They ensure that students understand new concepts. In a revision session on marketing, small groups of GCSE students considered the key issues involved in setting up a new retail outlet. Their contributions, supported by input from the teacher, resulted in a comprehensive set of notes. In administration lessons, students work at the level which best suits them and teachers check their progress carefully and provide additional help when needed.

24 Although all courses have schemes of work, several of these are simply lists of topics. Teachers do not share planned learning objectives with students and, in some lessons, the objectives are not achieved. Some lessons have unrealistic time allocations. Teachers place insufficient emphasis on consolidating students' learning. In many lessons, they do not check whether students have understood the work or have a reasonable written record of their learning. Apart from lessons where students have an individualised learning programme, there is little attempt to encourage students to work at a pace appropriate to them. As a result, some lessons move at the pace of the slowest student. Some handouts and overhead projector transparencies are poorly presented and difficult to follow. The college's

Curriculum Areas

self-assessment report did not note these weaknesses.

25 The quality of most assessed assignments is good. Teachers mark work promptly and provide appropriate comments to help students to improve their work. On administration courses, employed students contribute substantial evidence of achievement from their workplace.

26 The college's self-assessment report acknowledged some poor retention and achievement rates but omitted significant weaknesses. Pass rates on NVQ accounting courses have been significantly above the national average in two of the last three years and those for wordprocessing courses have matched or exceeded the national average over the last three years. The GNVQ intermediate business pass rate has improved, from 11% in 1996 to 67% in 1998. Pass rates are low in GNVQ advanced business, GCE A level and GCSE business studies and GCSE accounting and have fallen on the GCE A level one-year business studies course to only 25% in 1997-98. Retention rates fluctuate, with no clear trend. Many students who complete their courses progress to higher education, to higher level courses at the college or to employment.

27 Most teachers are well qualified and have appropriate commercial experience. Some have recently undertaken work placements in business. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there are good specialist resources. Classrooms are furnished and equipped to a good standard with modern business and IT facilities. Well-resourced base rooms support teaching in the major areas of work. There is a good range of up-to-date library books and periodicals. Students have good access to 'drop-in' computing facilities.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Wordprocessing	1 to 3	Expected completions	211	181	182
		Retention (%)	84	83	87
		Achievement (%)	63	90	69
GCSE business	2	Expected completions	24	35	30
		Retention (%)	79	71	67
		Achievement (%)	21	35	20
NVQ administration	2 and 3	Expected completions	80	71	35
		Retention (%)	61	65	83
		Achievement (%)	57	75	90
NVQ accounting	2 to 4	Expected completions	39	38	37
		Retention (%)	59	84	92
		Achievement (%)	70	55	26
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	92	33	34
		Retention (%)	70	73	76
		Achievement (%)	36	48	50
Higher national certificate business	4	Expected completions	26	43	32
		Retention (%)	96	63	69
		Achievement (%)	84	91	95

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Childcare

Grade 2

28 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in health and social care, vocational skills, childhood studies, holistic therapies and first aid. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but they considered that it contained too few relevant judgements about the quality of provision in health, care and childcare.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- good integration of work-based and classroom learning
- the good support provided for students on level 1 courses
- written schemes of work and lesson plans of good quality
- good pass rates in childhood studies

Weaknesses

- the narrow range of provision for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 2 and 3
- low retention and achievement rates on some courses
- the adverse effect on students of a high turnover of NVQ assessors

29 All courses in the division lead to nationally-recognised qualifications. Full-time courses in vocational skills at level 1 and part-time level 2 qualifications in crèche management and playwork and for classroom assistants meet an identified need in the community. The range of provision is broadly appropriate, but at levels 2 and 3 it is too narrow for students aged 16 to 18, a weakness that was not identified in the self-assessment report. GNVQ programmes have been withdrawn as a result of poor retention and achievement rates and competition for students

from schools. NVQs in childcare and education and care are available at levels 2 and 3. At level 4, higher national certificates are offered in social care and childhood studies. There is a good range of first-aid courses at levels 1 and 2. Introductory courses in aromatherapy and reflexology are provided in community centres. Where appropriate, these courses are taught in Punjabi and the students are encouraged to use college facilities and consider progression to other courses.

30 Most schemes of work are well written and accompanied by comprehensive lesson plans. All of the lessons observed were satisfactory or good. Lessons in courses at levels 1 and 4 provided good opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and understanding. Teachers successfully integrate students' work-based learning with classroom learning. They show appropriate regard when students express personal views and opinions and students show their respect for the professional expertise of teachers. In one successful lesson, the teacher skilfully used students' work experience to identify how to deal with some of the complex issues associated with providing support to those in care with learning difficulties. In lessons for students on level 1 courses in vocational skills, teachers provided good support for individual students and encouraged all students to play an active part. All lessons included an appropriate mix of lecture, small group discussion and practical work and teachers provided good opportunities for students to contribute. Some teachers successfully summarised what had been covered and what students were expected to do before the next lesson.

31 The monitoring of students' retention and achievements is not rigorous enough. While the self-assessment report identified the need to improve retention and achievement rates, the action plan accompanying it did not state clearly how improvements will be sustained. Much of the written work produced by students is good.

Curriculum Areas

In childhood studies, students produce consistently good-quality assignment work that is relevant to their professional practice and understanding and pass rates are good. Pass rates in social care courses are low. However, there is evidence of good work by students and those who achieve the full award are appropriately prepared for professional training or higher education. Retention and achievement rates on courses in holistic therapies are good. On NVQ programmes, students' portfolios are satisfactory but the high turnover of workplace assessors has adversely affected student retention and achievement rates and few students have achieved the qualification. Pass rates for the high number of students on first-aid courses are good.

32 Teachers are appropriately qualified. The division has many visiting teachers who provide a broad range of professional expertise. However, not enough support is given to those who lack teaching experience. Classrooms are appropriately furnished. Displays of students' work in rooms and in corridors reflect the high standards set for work in nurseries, schools and care settings. There are sufficient practical resources, including a small nursery and a holistic therapy treatment room. Although it is appropriate for much of the time for students to work in non-specialist rooms for creative skills and science, there are no opportunities for them to use specialist art and science facilities during their courses.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
First aid	1 and 2	Expected completions	244	238	157
		Retention (%)	93	97	100
		Achievement (%)	96	88	92
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Expected completions	17	42	23
		Retention (%)	65	52	65
		Achievement (%)	0	100	80
First certificate in caring	2	Expected completions	13	14	7
		Retention (%)	85	79	86
		Achievement (%)	91	82	100
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Expected completions	*	14	17
		Retention (%)	*	86	35
		Achievement (%)	*	100	75
National diploma and certificate in childhood studies	3	Expected completions	111	93	62
		Retention (%)	64	86	79
		Achievement (%)	93	92	93
National certificate in social care	3	Expected completions	53	29	21
		Retention (%)	66	72	67
		Achievement (%)	92	59	55
Diplomas in aromatherapy and reflexology	3	Expected completions	*	31	41
		Retention (%)	*	71	92
		Achievement (%)	*	82	92

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

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Languages and Communications

Grade 2

33 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering modern foreign languages, English as a foreign language (EFL), British Sign Language, and communications for students on GNVQ and access to higher education courses. The self-assessment report covered a wider range of provision than that inspected. Although there was little in the report specific to the subjects inspected, inspectors were able to agree with some key strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- consistently well-planned, lively and effective teaching
- good use of the language being taught by skilled linguists
- students' well-developed oral skills
- good retention and achievement rates on most courses
- a wide range of courses and clear progression routes for students
- effective use of foreign language assistants

Weaknesses

- some underdeveloped schemes of work
- low pass rates on GCE A level modern language courses
- the restricted opening hours for the communications workshop

34 The college's self-assessment report judged that teaching and learning had many strengths. Inspectors agreed that most teaching is of a high standard and that some is outstanding. The lively and effective teaching is reflected in students' evident enjoyment and commitment to

their work. Excellent relationships between teachers and students encourage learning. Lessons are well planned and the language being taught is used as the principal means of communication. There are schemes of work for all courses but a few are merely lists of topics to be covered over a given period. In the lessons observed, students used the language they were learning freely and fluently, and modern language students rarely lapsed into English. In communications lessons, teachers were expert at helping students to identify key features of good communication and providing activities to help them develop their communication skills. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is poor attendance on some courses. The average attendance for the classes inspected was 72%. Attendance rates were particularly low in two evening classes observed, in modern languages and in EFL.

35 Students' written work is of an appropriate standard. Teachers mark and correct it clearly and provide positive and encouraging written comments. While most retention rates are good, the self-assessment report recognised that retention is below target on a few courses. In 1997, for instance, the overall retention rate on GCE A level modern language courses was above the national benchmark, at 78%, but fell to only 63% in 1998. Examination pass rates are generally good. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that performance in examinations in EFL was excellent in 1998. The self-assessment report also noted that Open College Network units have recently been developed for some modern language students. A large number of students entered for this award in 1998 and college data show that results were good. In order to maintain provision of some modern foreign languages, the college has combined students taking different language qualifications in one class. This may partly account for some poor GCE A level results.

Curriculum Areas

36 The college has developed a framework of EFL, modern foreign language and British Sign Language courses across all levels. These offer good progression routes to a wide range of students. As noted in the self-assessment report, part-time staffing levels are high in communications and modern languages. Regular scheduled meetings take place and teachers also work together informally. This is also true in British Sign Language, where part-time staff levels are high. This provision is now co-ordinated, as indicated in the self-assessment report, by a full-time tutor of deaf studies. The college has strengthened its external links for modern languages by obtaining funding to undertake a feasibility study of collaboration post-16 in modern foreign languages across Wolverhampton; a report has now been published giving plans for further collaborative action.

37 Teachers are well qualified and take full advantage of opportunities to undertake staff development. The two foreign language assistants are effectively used. A particular strength of the resources in this area is the language laboratory with its attractive wall displays. However, some classrooms lack displays and do not provide a stimulating learning environment. The college has a communications workshop where students can receive additional support but its opening hours are inadequate. Weekly modern language workshops help students with specific weaknesses as well as those who can benefit from additional work to extend their skills. The library has a good range of books, magazines, audio and videotapes for this area but there is little IT provision.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People stage 1 (basic) certificate in British Sign Language	1	Expected completions	114	106	138
		Retention (%)	72	81	78
		Achievement (%)	52	79	74
Cambridge first certificate in English	1	Expected completions	41	25	32
		Retention (%)	93	88	72
		Achievement (%)	42	54	88
Cambridge certificate in advanced English	2	Expected completions	23	32	25
		Retention (%)	100	75	84
		Achievement (%)	39	65	93
GCSE French, German, Italian, Punjabi and Spanish	2	Expected completions	58	64	41
		Retention (%)	67	61	71
		Achievement (%)	73	82	68
Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People stage 2 (intermediate) certificate in British Sign Language	3	Expected completions	54	59	61
		Retention (%)	70	90	84
		Achievement (%)	43	70	41
Cambridge certificate of proficiency in English	3	Expected completions	29	27	*
		Retention (%)	97	85	*
		Achievement (%)	61	89	*
GCE A level French, German, Italian and Spanish	3	Expected completions	41	65	68
		Retention (%)	81	78	63
		Achievement (%)	25	84	38

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

*not recorded in the centrally-held college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 3

38 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in literacy, numeracy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and access to further education. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment but found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- teaching carefully designed to meet the needs of individual students
- well-managed and effective access to further education courses
- students' increased confidence
- the development of students' basic skills and study skills

Weaknesses

- teachers' over-reliance on worksheets
- inadequate ESOL provision
- lack of progress by students studying on courses at lower levels
- shortcomings in the recording and monitoring of students' achievements

39 The college's basic education provision includes some support for basic skills and ESOL for students enrolled on other courses. Inspectors agreed that the curriculum offered, including the opportunity for students to study in open learning centres at times convenient to them, contributes to the college's strategic aim of widening participation. Courses are available at different levels to assist progression. For example, the recently-introduced 'return to learn' course provides a valuable bridge between basic skills provision and courses at level 3. Courses in access to further education are well managed and reflect the college's commitment to equal opportunities. Inspectors

found greater weaknesses in ESOL provision than were identified in the self-assessment report. The college recognises that courses in ESOL are not managed effectively to cater for the diversity of students' abilities and skills in English. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the use of accreditation designed for EFL is not suitable for some students. The need to redesign the ESOL curriculum and teaching methods is noted in the college's widening participation plan for 1999-2000. Course teams meet regularly and, in most cases, their discussions and reviews of provision lead to improvements in quality. Systems for accurately recording and monitoring students' achievements and using achievement data effectively to set targets are underdeveloped. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

40 Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers' supportive relations with students encourage students to learn and increase in confidence. Inspectors found some weaknesses in teaching that were not included in the self-assessment. For example, many teachers rely too much on the use of worksheets and some teaching of ESOL, and of basic skills in open learning centres, is not effective. In these centres, the good system for planning and recording students' learning and progress is sometimes not well implemented. Where teaching was of good quality, students' individual learning programmes were based on thorough initial assessments. Teachers use varied methods and authentic teaching materials, for example, newspapers and job advertisements, to make learning relevant and interesting. They give students valuable individual support and encouragement, regularly checking their understanding and reviewing their progress with them. Tutorials in access to further education provision work well and motivate students to progress to more advanced study. Arrangements for initial assessment in ESOL are underdeveloped and teachers fail to

Curriculum Areas

take sufficient account of students' reasons for studying English and their different abilities.

41 Most students make steady progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and study skills. A growing number of students have registered for accreditation, for example, Open College Network credits, and have progressed from literacy and numeracy courses to other further education courses. In access to further education courses, students achieve good results and are well prepared to progress to other further education courses. Over the last three years, retention rates on the 'preparation for access' course have ranged between 75% and 80% and figures provided by the college indicate some good achievement rates. Almost all these students progress to the access to higher education course or to other provision at level 3. A few students, particularly those studying at lower levels in literacy and ESOL, make insufficient progress. The self-assessment report identified that retention rates are low in the courses in ESOL for beginners. In the open learning centres, students' folders are rarely well organised. It was not possible to produce a table of students' retention and achievements because college data do not clearly define achievement in this programme area.

42 Most teachers have suitable teaching qualifications. Up-to-date computers in the open learning centres are used for teaching basic skills. Courses in ESOL do not involve the use of IT. The development of IT skills is an integral part of the access to further education courses. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the two open learning centres provide friendly and purposeful learning environments and that there is a good range of materials and resources at the Newhampton centre.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- well-planned enrolment and induction
- impartial pre-course advice and guidance
- good tutorial provision
- good careers facilities
- helpful range of services provided by the student services area

Weaknesses

- no assessment of the additional learning support requirements of most part-time students
- the poor quality of many students' action plans

44 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that potential students receive impartial advice and guidance before enrolment. Where appropriate, provision offered by other colleges and training providers is considered. Well-designed prospectuses and supporting documentation provide useful information on the college's courses. Some course leaflets are provided in Punjabi and Urdu. The college employs a variety of recruitment methods, including visits to local schools, open and 'taster' days, a website and advertisements in the local press and the cinema. However, there has been a decline in the number of full-time students recruited over the past three years. There are clear procedures for admissions. All prospective full-time students receive an interview before enrolment and those who are unsure about the programme they wish to study have a separate guidance interview. Arrangements for enrolment and induction are

carefully planned. Most students find the college's procedures for admission, enrolment and induction informative and efficient.

45 Tutorial support is good. Students find tutors helpful and supportive. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the organisation of tutorial support is clear. This has addressed a weakness identified in the previous inspection. A tutoring support group co-ordinates the tutorial provision. The group meets regularly and is chaired by the student services manager. It has reviewed the college's tutorial policy, introduced a tutorial entitlement for students and a monitoring system to ensure that key tutorial activities take place. All students have an assigned tutor. The college has an established system for tutors to help students assess their progress and plan to improve their performance. However, many of these action plans are too vague to be effective.

46 The range of facilities and materials available for additional learning support is mostly good. Students receive help with communications, numeracy, IT and study skills. The college provides a range of adapted materials and services to meet students' individual learning requirements. Students can obtain support through timetabled group sessions, as part of their main courses, through individual appointments or by calling at the study centres. There are regular reviews of students' progress by additional learning support tutors. The use of individual learning plans is often not developed. Full-time students receive a diagnostic assessment to assess their levels of literacy and numeracy at the start of their courses; many on substantial part-time programmes do not. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is no formal system to inform course tutors about students' progress in numeracy and communications. Responsibility for providing additional learning support is located in a number of college areas. These arrangements do not encourage the sharing of good practice.

Cross-college Provision

47 The college provides good support for students applying for higher education or employment, a strength not recorded in the self-assessment report. The well-resourced area for careers at the main site is organised effectively with up-to-date information that includes software packages, books and university prospectuses. There is a helpful guide to internet sites providing information on job vacancies and careers. Further facilities for careers are available at other college sites. Full-time students regularly receive careers education as part of their tutorial programme. The college has a contract with the local careers service whose advisers give individual guidance interviews and career talks. The college, in partnership with the local careers service, offers guidance and help on courses and career options to students, their parents and the local community after the publication of examination results. Many students from the college gain entry to higher education.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college that the new student services area offers a wide range of helpful services for students, including guidance and assistance on welfare rights, accommodation and student travel. Staff in the area are welcoming and helpful. A personal counselling service is staffed by qualified counsellors. Where appropriate, the service refers students to other agencies. The college provides a range of childcare. These include facilities at the main site for children aged between six weeks and five years, a playgroup at the Newhampton centre and crèches at community education centres. The college also uses its access fund to support childminding arrangements for adult students. Students who had used these services felt that their requirements had been well met. Arrangements for the administration and allocation of access and hardship funds are clear. The college's disability statement is laid out clearly and available in Punjabi, Urdu, Braille and on audiotape. The college has a named person to give reader support to help with understanding the disability statement.

General Resources

Grade 3

49 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of its general resources, although in some aspects the report did not match the inspection framework. They agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses but found some further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective refurbishment of general accommodation
- well-resourced IT provision
- welcoming entrance foyers and reception areas

Weaknesses

- low utilisation of classrooms and other learning areas
- some poor temporary buildings used for teaching
- inadequate provision of library facilities

50 Most of the college's sites and community centres are within a six-mile radius of the main site at Paget Road. Much of the accommodation is of a satisfactory standard. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the student services area at Paget Road has been refurbished to a high standard. Other accommodation of good quality includes the learning areas at the Newhampton centre and the main halls. The entrance foyers and reception areas are welcoming and well furnished. Refectories at Paget Road and the Newhampton centre have been refurbished to a high standard, addressing a weakness found in the last inspection. They are of adequate size and layout, although the Paget Road refectory is often overcrowded at lunchtime. Some staff rooms are of good quality and adequate size but others are small and shabby. The college's self-assessment report recognised that the amount of

Cross-college Provision

classroom and other learning space is substantially more than the college currently requires. The college has removed a number of poor temporary buildings since the last inspection but the three that remain in use for teaching are in a poor state of repair. Most toilets and male changing rooms are poor. The Valley Park centre and several corridor areas and stairways at the main site need renovation. There are eye-catching displays throughout the college of students' work and, especially in the media area, of students' photographic work.

51 The college is well maintained. All areas are cleaned to a high standard and landscaped areas are well tended. Sports facilities, some of which are shared with the local authority, are adequate. Car parking is sufficient at most sites. Internal and external signs are clear and informative. Most areas of the college are accessible to people with restricted mobility. However, as the college self-assessment acknowledged, parts of one block at the main site are inaccessible to wheelchair users. Some external ramps are too steep.

52 The college's learning centre at the main site has been well refurbished but it is small for the size of the college. The total number of study spaces is adequate but there are not enough spaces for quiet study. The centre has an appropriate number of well-qualified staff. The learning resources budget is adequate but there are not enough books for the number of students in the college. Most books are of good quality but some are out of date. There is a good selection of periodicals and journals for most programme areas. Opening times are appropriate. The self-assessment report for learning resources recognised that library membership and book issues have fallen in recent years. Liaison between teachers and library staff is insufficient. These weaknesses and others in learning resources were not identified in the college's self-assessment report. There is a comprehensive range of well-presented library guides and assignment materials. The library management information

system is inadequate, as it has only cataloguing facilities and the issuing of books has to be manually recorded, a weaknesses now being addressed by the college. The college has a number of other well-used learning centres. They are located in good accommodation and some, for example, the mathematics workshop, have excellent resources.

53 The college has invested significantly in IT equipment in the last three years. The number of modern computers is high. There is a wide range of software applications that effectively meet staff and students' needs. The quality and quantity of printers is good. The previous inspection report identified a weakness in access to the internet by staff and students. This has now been remedied. Many students make effective use of the internet for their research and assignment work. The college's intranet is being developed and contains some useful information on courses, educational references and a small range of learning materials. Electronic mail is well used by those staff who have good access to computers in their staff rooms. Many staff have recently received IT training.

54 The college has a clear budget and bidding system for capital equipment that is carefully linked to strategic objectives. There is careful recording and auditing of equipment assets.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

55 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered that some strengths cited in the report were not significant. They found a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- an informative, widely-available quality assurance and improvement handbook

Cross-college Provision

- good use of service standards in all cross-college areas
- well-focused and thoroughly-reviewed staff development programme

Weaknesses

- insufficient improvement in students' achievements on some courses
- uneven quality of course reviews
- insufficiently clear improvement plans

56 The college has improved its quality assurance arrangements since the last inspection. Some improvements were completed after the self-assessment report was produced. Staff understanding of the need for quality assurance has increased. A quality assurance committee oversees the quality system. A recently-improved and expanded quality assurance handbook provides a clear and helpful guide to the policies, procedures and forms to be used in relation to quality assurance. Electronic versions of sections of the handbook can be sent to staff by electronic mail.

57 Quality assurance arrangements cover all areas of the college. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the well-drafted and thoroughly-revised service standards are a particularly well-developed aspect of the college's quality assurance. The extent to which standards are achieved is carefully measured. Levels of performance on many service standards are reported annually to the quality assurance committee of the academic board. This committee also receives reports on the college's performance in meeting its charter commitments and dealing with complaints.

58 The quality of course reviews is uneven, as the self-assessment report noted. Inspectors considered that the final course reviews for 1998 had several weaknesses. Some course review documents were incomplete or lacked rigour. The action plans and self-assessment reports for a number of courses with low

student achievement rates did not clearly indicate the action to be taken to address the weakness. The records to show that action plans had been checked and agreed by managers were inadequate. The college has recognised some of these weaknesses and has carefully redesigned its course review documentation. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the revised system.

59 Performance indicators for student retention and achievement rates are used to demonstrate the success of individual courses. Students' satisfaction and the grades awarded in lesson observations are also used. However, there is little use of data on students' attendance and destinations and little reference to the quality of support for students and resources. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the analysis of the value added to students' achievements at the start of their courses is underdeveloped. Curriculum teams have begun to set targets on retention and achievement but some targets are not appropriate as they have been set at levels lower than those currently achieved. A large number of lesson observations have been completed. They have led to some detailed reports on the quality of teaching in each division but do not clearly identify strengths and weaknesses in individual subject areas.

60 There have been significant improvements since the last inspection in arrangements for reporting on students' perceptions of their courses. Surveys are carried out when students enter the college, midway through and at the end of their courses. Each curriculum area receives a report summarising the findings from the surveys and identifying areas for action.

61 The responsibility for monitoring the quality of the college's small amount of collaborative provision is shared between a central unit and curriculum areas. There are regular visits to collaborative partners. A variety of checks are made, including feedback from students. Lesson observations have not

Cross-college Provision

been undertaken to assess the quality of teaching and learning in this provision.

62 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that staff development is a strength. Staff development is closely linked to college priorities. All applications for staff development must be linked to one of the college's strategic priorities to receive approval. Staff reported high levels of satisfaction with their training and development opportunities. The college gained recognition as an Investor in People in March 1998. Extensive reviews of training are reported to the senior management group. These reviews include careful analysis of the costs and benefits derived from staff development. All staff receive an annual appraisal. The outcomes of appraisal are used to inform staff development plans but appraisals do not include lesson observation and only managers have a review of agreed personal objectives.

63 The self-assessment report was well written and contained useful sections on the action taken in relation to the findings of the last inspection. It did not cover the quality criteria in Council Circular 97/22, *Joint Working: Audit and inspection*. There was thorough discussion and moderation of the grades awarded. The evidence quoted in the report did not always show clear reasons for a judgement. Some curriculum area self-assessments contained few judgements on the quality of teaching and learning.

Governance

Grade 2

64 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report did not address all the relevant quality statements in Council Circular 97/22.

Key strengths

- wide range of governors' skills and experience
- effective involvement of governors in strategic planning and monitoring
- governors' monitoring of financial and non-financial information
- thorough scrutiny of students' retention and achievements
- good procedures for accountability and openness
- well-developed evaluation of the governing council's performance

Weaknesses

- weaknesses in procedures for appointment and reappointment of governors
- lack of a formal governor training programme
- failure to approve properly the college's three-year financial forecast for 1998 to 2001

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

66 The governing council consists of 15 governors. Governors bring a wide range of relevant local knowledge, expertise and experience to the college with the exception of professional estates expertise. Governors' experience of industry and education has been particularly valuable to the college. Several skills audits of governors have been carried out. Governors make annual declarations of their eligibility to serve but inspectors noted that one governor's appointment was inconsistent with the eligibility criteria. Another governor

Cross-college Provision

appointment had not been correctly approved. The governing council has not given sufficient consideration to the question of the reappointment of long-serving governors. The college has established a nominations subcommittee to identify potential candidates for governors. Invitations to enquire about becoming a governor are included in college documents but the college has not established a written procedure for the appointment and reappointment of governors. The self-assessment report did not clearly identify these weaknesses. New governors receive induction. There have been a number of briefing and strategic planning meetings for governors. However, as the college's self-assessment report acknowledged, there is no formal development and training programme for governors.

67 Governors play an active part in strategic planning and receive termly reports on progress against operating statement targets. The operating statement includes clearly measurable targets. All governors receive monthly information on the college's financial and non-financial performance. Governors have been well briefed on national and local developments in further education. They have informal and formal links with some college areas and receive regular briefings from college staff on various aspects of college activity. They attend college social events and award ceremonies. Governors have also recognised the need to improve the co-ordination of their links with the college. They have a strong commitment to partnership with other organisations.

68 Governors have addressed the need, identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, to improve further their reporting and analysis of the college's performance. They pay close attention to students' performance, in particular retention and achievements. They have received detailed information on students' retention and achievements for the last three years. This has enabled them to review progress over time and against national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC. The

data are accompanied by a helpful commentary that identifies areas of strength and weakness and, in some cases, comments on the actions taken to address weaknesses, for example, the need to reconsider the college's foundation level programme. The governing council pays close attention to curriculum matters and the executive subcommittee discusses some of these in greater depth.

69 Meetings of the governing council are held frequently, and governor attendance is sufficient to ensure that governing council meetings are quorate. There are four main subcommittees; audit, executive, finance, and remuneration. As indicated in the college's self-assessment, the conduct of the business of most governing council and subcommittee meetings is effective. All governing council and subcommittee papers explicitly identify the financial and equal opportunities implications of proposed actions. All governors receive the agendas and papers for subcommittees. The chair of each subcommittee presents the relevant subcommittee minutes to the subsequent meeting of the governing council. A schedule of routine items for decision and monitoring has been established. The college's three-year financial forecast for 1998 to 2001 was not submitted in full for approval by the governing council before its submission to the FEFC. The approval of the budget for 1998-99 was not formally recorded. The audit subcommittee has an established procedure for reviewing progress on internal audit recommendations. The clerk to the governing council services all subcommittees.

70 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the governing council has established good procedures for accountability and openness. They include the adoption of standing orders, a code of conduct and 'whistleblowing' procedures. Very few items of governing council business have been confidential and members of the public can attend meetings for non-confidential items. A publicly available register of interests is updated

Cross-college Provision

annually. However, it does not cover the interests of spouses and partners. Governors have a good working relationship with the college's senior managers and clearly understand the distinction between governance and management. The governing council's code of conduct documents this relationship but it does not include the seven principles of public life identified by the Nolan committee.

71 As indicated in the college's self-assessment report, the governing council reviews its performance annually. This has addressed a weakness identified in the previous inspection and has led to improvements. Governors were involved in the self-assessment process and formally approved the self-assessment report before its submission to the FEFC.

Management

Grade 2

72 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. However, inspectors found some further strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the effective leadership
- the well-devised strategic plan and planning process
- thorough promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
- strong links with external partners

Weaknesses

- lack of clear and measurable targets in some operating statements
- inadequate registration and monitoring of students' attendance

73 The college's management has set clear goals for the college that include raising students' achievements, widening participation

and strengthening partnerships with other local organisations. The college has made significant progress since the last inspection. Targets have been set for students' retention and achievements. Close attention to raising students' retention and achievements has led to significant improvements. One member of staff works with divisions to increase their understanding and use of performance indicators. However, as the college recognises, it needs to improve further its students' performance.

74 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that strategic planning is a strength. The strategic plan has clear goals and the accompanying operating statement has appropriate performance indicators. Strategic planning is widely shared across the college. Management development days, including many at divisional level, have focused on strategic planning. Divisional plans are carefully cross-referenced to the strategic plan. However, as noted in the self-assessment report, some of the objectives in divisional plans do not have clear, measurable targets. Progress in meeting objectives is regularly monitored but the extent to which this analysis is followed by specific action aimed at improvement is not always well documented.

75 The college's management structure has been substantially revised, partly in response to criticisms made in the previous inspection report. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles. Curriculum management is generally good. The appointment of programme leaders to assist the heads of curriculum divisions has been effective. It has significantly strengthened links between curriculum areas and courses in centres away from the main sites. Movement of the management of community education to the main site has strengthened links with cross-college areas. Some recent appointments, for example, a post with responsibility for widening participation, have been made to support the college's strategic priorities. The college's

Cross-college Provision

curriculum committee is a valuable forum for examining a wide range of curriculum issues. The co-ordination of cross-college aspects of the curriculum is improving. The college has established a formal course approval process. The health and safety committee regularly monitors the college's health and safety policy. However, inspectors found some weaknesses in the application of the policy in one programme area.

76 Communications are good, as noted in the self-assessment report. The college's newsletter and the principal's letters to staff contain much useful information. The college's intranet and electronic mail systems are widely used, although they extend to only one centre beyond the main site. Regular meetings of management groups and divisional teams help the flow of information throughout the college.

77 Resources are carefully deployed, although staffing costs are relatively high. Each division forecasts its budget needs. Resources are moved between divisions where target units have been under or over-achieved. Careful attention is paid to ensuring efficient class sizes. Teachers receive retraining to enable them to move from declining to growing areas. Budget systems are well understood.

78 The college's management information system has improved since the last inspection. Staff have more confidence in the information supplied by the management information section, which has responsibility for both information and examinations. They find its monthly monitoring reports helpful. Some weaknesses remain. It is not possible to obtain regular, up-to-date information on students' attendance. The college is addressing weaknesses in the completion of its attendance registers.

79 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has adequate levels of solvency. However, it has a large accumulated deficit, forecast to be

cleared by 2000-01. The college's assistant principal (finance and information services) is a qualified accountant. He is a member of the college's senior management team and attends both finance committee and governing council meetings. The finance team is adequately resourced. Detailed monthly management accounts include progress against financial performance indicators, unit achievement, and staffing and student information. However, they do not include a balance sheet to date and some information in the income and expenditure statement is unclear. Budget holders receive informative monthly reports on expenditure. The college has taken action to address audit concerns raised in previous years about the reliability of the college's student record system. A recent internal audit report has raised some concerns about the system.

80 The college has close links with many external organisations. These links include a productive relationship with Wolverhampton Local Education Authority (LEA) to examine the development of the 14 to 19 curriculum. A useful example of this collaboration has been a joint survey into the provision of modern foreign languages. There is close co-operation on initiatives to widen participation. Representatives of the TEC and the university stressed the strong sense of trust established between the college and the local community and gave many examples of productive collaboration.

81 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that equality of opportunity is effectively promoted and monitored. The college's equal opportunities policy is clear and widely circulated. The equal opportunities committee monitors carefully the implementation of the policy. A governor member of the committee reports to the college's governing council. The action plan for equal opportunities is revised annually. The college has a widening participation action plan to increase enrolments from under-represented groups.

Cross-college Provision

Conclusions

82 The college's self-assessment report and the accompanying updates provided a useful starting point for the inspection. Inspectors agreed with a number of the findings but found that some weaknesses were more significant than shown in the report. A number of weaknesses identified by the college had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with four of the six curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected and with all the grades for cross-college provision.

83 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 (May 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	3
16-18 years	20
19-24 years	17
25+ years	59
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (May 1999)

Level of study	%
Foundation	43
Intermediate	21
Advanced	25
Higher education	5
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	6
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	287	1,251	18
Agriculture	1	45	1
Construction	49	249	3
Engineering	153	1,049	14
Business	180	1,035	14
Hotel and catering	71	187	3
Health and community care	212	1,574	20
Art and design	172	230	5
Humanities	312	1,370	19
Basic education	45	247	3
Total	1,482	7,237	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1994-95 ISR data, the college recruited 33% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (May 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	132	28	0	160
Supporting direct learning contact	30	0	0	30
Other support	79	0	9	88
Total	241	28	9	278

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£8,575,000	£8,697,000	£8,951,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£19.45	£18.72	£17.76*
Payroll as a proportion of income	93%	78%	74%
Achievement of funding target	90%	100%	102%
Diversity of income	22%	22%	22%
Operating surplus	-£1,501,000	-£316,000	-£384,000

Sources: Income – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996), Performance Indicators 1996-97; April 1999 Supplement (1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996), Performance Indicators 1996-97; April 1999 Supplement (1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	347	346	559	1,608	1,296	2,035
	Retention (%)	75	75	84	80	81	81
	Achievement (%)	33	68	74	30	75	72
2	Expected completions	987	1,238	1,269	1,053	1,071	1,468
	Retention (%)	63	71	76	75	77	79
	Achievement (%)	29	44	71	46	69	70
3	Expected completions	1,207	1,113	1,175	1,100	1,110	1,360
	Retention (%)	70	75	83	66	79	84
	Achievement (%)	61	68	69	55	70	73
4 or 5	Expected completions	n/a	3	3	12	17	40
	Retention (%)	n/a	67	67	67	65	75
	Achievement (%)	n/a	50	100	38	56	26
Short courses	Expected completions	259	459	560	3,364	3,724	2,976
	Retention (%)	85	90	90	84	86	89
	Achievement (%)	38	84	84	59	88	87
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	431	233	455	1,083	1,144	801
	Retention (%)	86	94	93	76	84	86
	Achievement (%)	26	93	84	40	83	81

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

FEFC Inspection Report 104/99

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council**

Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>

© FEFC June 1999