

Melton Mowbray College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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*

© FEFC 1999

You may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	4

Curriculum areas

Mathematics and information technology	6
Engineering	13
Business studies and office technology	21
English, communications and access to higher education	26

Cross-college provision

Support for students	31
General resources	39
Quality assurance	45
Governance	53
Management	60
Conclusions	67

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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Melton Mowbray College

East Midlands Region

Inspected March 1998

Melton Mowbray College is situated in the borough of Melton in Leicestershire. The college's first self-assessment report was prepared by the managers for cross-college and curriculum areas in preparation for the inspection. The report covers all the work of the college that is funded by the FEFC. Teaching staff were not fully involved in confirming the judgements in the self-assessment report. Judgements about most areas are brief and evidence supporting the self-assessment is not always clearly referenced. The corporation has been comprehensively and effectively evaluating its own performance and published its own assessment report for each of the last three years. Overall, inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. However, some of the weaknesses were understated or omitted.

For the size of the college, a relatively wide range of courses and progression routes are offered. Courses in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas are available. Many provide a variety of patterns for student attendance at levels up to higher education. There is a substantial programme of leisure and recreational courses. Provision in four of the programme areas was inspected. The inspection also covered aspects of cross-college provision. Teaching is well planned, the quality

of teaching is generally high and all full-time students have the opportunity of placements for work experience. The time allocated to tutorials is used productively. Students' work is regularly assessed and standards of work are good or satisfactory. Students' achievements in a range of office administration courses are consistently high; in other curriculum areas there is no discernable pattern. Curriculum resources are used efficiently. Students benefit from a well-organised and well-resourced learning centre and from some modern specialist resources. The college's accommodation includes both a leisure centre and a theatre that are operated through a wholly owned subsidiary. Governors are actively involved in strategic planning. Corporation business is carried out effectively although attendance at corporation meetings is sometimes iniquorate. Significant management responsibilities are effectively delegated to staff teams. The college information system provides timely financial information. Information for financial forecasts has been inconsistent. The college should: fully implement the new system for quality assurance; increase the consistency of course reviews; address the low rates for student retention and attendance; develop further operational planning; improve target-setting and development action-planning, improve financial forecasts and strategies; and provide more detailed commentaries with financial plans.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Business studies and office technology	2	Quality assurance	3
English, communications and access to higher education	3	Governance	2
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Melton Mowbray College, based in the attractive market town of Melton Mowbray, was founded in 1929. A major building project in the early 1970s included purpose-built accommodation for practical training courses for all 14 to 16 year olds in the area and for use by the youth service and community. Facilities include a commercially operated leisure centre and a theatre that is open to the general public. The county library service leases part of the college premises for the main town branch library and the rural mobile library service. The college has historically served the needs of the local community through its general provision and is, in addition, a regional centre for the performing arts. The college is recognised as the provider of community education in the borough and receives funds from Leicestershire Local Education Authority (LEA). More recently, students have also been attracted to the college from Peterborough, Nottingham, Leicester, Grantham and Stamford. The catchment area is predominantly rural. The limitations of the public transport system are a potential barrier to recruitment. This constraint has been successfully overcome by the free transport policy adopted by the college. The local economy has grown from its agricultural base to include a wide range of businesses in manufacturing, production and the service sector. The recent closures of the Asfordby coal mine and of an army depot resulted in the loss of over 1,000 highly skilled jobs and made a significant impact on the local economy. The college is the second largest employer in the area. There are few large employers; most businesses have less than 25 employees. Unemployment rates in the East Midlands have fallen in 1997 to a level of 6.4% and in Melton to 2.5%.

2 The college operates in a competitive environment. Within the college's catchment area there are four other major providers of post-16 education, including two schools, an

agricultural college and a sixth form college. Within the Melton borough, the reorganisation of secondary education has resulted in a proposal for a large 11 to 18 school. About 75% of 16 year olds remain in full-time education in the area compared with the county average of 67%. A further 18% are in employment with training. In 1996, the college recruited 22% of 16 year olds living in the locality. As a part of its strategy to maximise opportunities for study and for access, where appropriate, to courses in higher education, the college has become an associate college of De Montfort University. Close links have been formed between the two institutions and include: a 'Progression through Partnership' scheme; higher education programmes in engineering; and a full three-year BA (Hons) degree in the performing arts that is managed and taught by college staff.

3 The curriculum is delivered through four sectors: technology and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; business management and service industries; visual and performing arts; and communications, science and general education. Courses and progression routes are offered in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college mission seeks to provide 'opportunity and achievement, supported by total quality, for all students and clients regardless of age, ethnic background, ability, gender, and previous educational or training experience'. The main corporate objective is to secure the survival of a locally managed and responsive further education establishment, leisure centre and theatre. The college priorities are to: continue to offer a full range of courses; maintain the size of the college; develop flexible approaches to teaching and learning so that opportunities for individuals are maximised; encourage greater participation from those who are not substantial users of college facilities; maintain effective control of finances and resources; and continue to seek collaboration opportunities with other education institutions.

Context

The Inspection

4 The college was inspected during March 1998. The self-assessment report and information provided by other divisions of the FEFC were evaluated before the week of the inspection. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1995 to 1997 which were checked against class registers and pass lists issued by examining and awarding bodies. The inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors working for 30 days and an auditor working for five days. Meetings were held with governors, managers and college staff and students. In the curriculum areas, the inspection included observation of lessons and tutorials, review of students' work and discussions with students and teachers.

5 Of the 47 lessons inspected, 68% were rated good or outstanding and 2% were less than satisfactory. This profile is better than the average for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*, where 61% of lessons were graded outstanding or good and 8% less than satisfactory. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected (72.5%) is below the average attendance for all colleges for 1996-97 (77%) according to the same report. The highest attendances were in engineering (77%) and business-related courses (74%). The lowest attendance was in humanities (69%). The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	5	3	1	0	12
GCSE	1	2	3	0	0	6
GNVQ	0	0	3	0	0	3
NVQ	0	6	1	0	0	7
Other vocational	5	10	4	0	0	19
Total	9	23	14	1	0	47

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Information Technology

Grade 3

6 The self-assessment report covered the whole of the sciences programme area and identified strengths and weaknesses in specific subjects; these included computing, information technology (IT) and mathematics which were the subjects inspected. There were no references in the report to the quality of teaching or learning. Inspectors identified areas of strength and weakness not included in the report.

Key strengths

- the range of qualifications available in mathematics
- effectively planned teaching
- feedback to students on assessed work
- a well-organised and well-resourced learning centre

Weaknesses

- the lack of a broad curriculum for full-time vocational computing courses
- the narrow range of learning activities for the development of some key skills
- insufficient attention to managing the progression of some students
- low achievement in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations and some computing courses
- lack of systematic procedures for review and evaluation

7 A well-organised mathematics workshop provides opportunities for students to study for a carefully chosen range of mathematics qualifications either full time or part time. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. A comprehensive range of printed notes

and worksheets of high quality provides clear explanations of mathematical concepts and effectively supports students' learning. Teaching staff provide energetic and productive support to individual students. IT is an integral part of mathematical programmes including those supporting vocational courses.

8 The full-time vocational courses in computing emphasise the development of practical skills. They do not on their own provide a suitable programme of study that fully equips 16 to 19 year old students for higher education or employment. This shortcoming was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment. The IT course 7261 of the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) is well organised and supported by a good range of learning materials. Opportunity to gain a theoretical understanding of computing is provided by the GCSE IT course which a few students take with the C&G modules. Well-planned teaching in computing for the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) encourages students to develop appropriately rigorous approaches to programming and systems design. The range of learning activities is narrow, particularly for those studying GCE A level mathematics where opportunities to integrate key skills were missed.

9 Students taking mathematics complete homework regularly which is appropriately marked and promptly returned. Students' attendance at the mathematics workshop is effectively monitored and their progress is recorded but this information is not used to identify students who may be beginning to experience difficulty. Students are given insufficient guidance on how to improve management of their learning programmes.

10 Work in IT lessons was of an appropriate standard for the level of the courses. In the IT programmes, students had appropriate levels of skill to benefit from the use of a range of applications packages. There is limited

Curriculum Areas

monitoring of students' progress on the C&G 7261 course. A significant number of students had made insufficient progress and had to extend the length of their course.

11 Inspectors confirmed the college's own self-assessment that IT facilities are effectively managed and resourced. There is a college-wide network of modern computers and software that provides suitable curriculum support and opportunities for students to use computers outside timetabled classes. The staffing levels for IT and the learning centre are appropriate for the number of students attending. Some aspects of record-keeping and monitoring of the activities in the workshop are not systematically reviewed. There has been no overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the mathematics and IT workshops through, for example, an analysis of students' progress and

achievements in relation to their entry qualifications.

12 Attendance observed during the inspection and records for students currently enrolled for the mathematics workshop indicate lower levels of retention than in previous years.

Examination results are uneven. Inspectors agreed with the college's own self-assessment that the level of success in examinations is close to the national average for the further education sector for some courses, for example GCE A level, but that the achievements in GCSE courses and some vocational qualifications in computing are weak. The pass rate for the C&G 7261 course has improved from 25% in 1996 to 75% in 1997 but the pass rate in some one-year courses in IT has declined. The college self-assessment did not place sufficient emphasis on the weaknesses in students' achievements.

Examples of students' achievements in mathematics and information technology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level mathematics	Retention (%)	83	78	81
	Pass rate (%)	100	73	70
GCSE IT/computing	Retention (%)	81	77	77
	Pass rate (%)	33	25	31
GCSE mathematics	Retention (%)	67	82	75
	Pass rate (%)	19	35	30
IT (one-year course)	Retention (%)	100	93	87
	Pass rate (%)	33	79	16
IT (two-year courses)	Retention (%)	86	50	100
	Pass rate (%)	5	25	75

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

13 The inspection covered aspects of motor vehicle, mechanical and electrical engineering. In general, inspectors confirmed the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. However, they found important weaknesses which had not been included.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- flexible delivery of provision for the national vocational qualification (NVQ)
- well-organised specialist accommodation
- provision which offers progression to students
- effective assessment procedure for NVQ programmes
- industrial partnerships

Weaknesses

- decreasing retention rates
- fluctuating pass rates

14 The engineering provision is well managed. Meetings are held regularly and course files are comprehensive. The curriculum provides opportunities to study a broad range of engineering programmes at both craft and technician level. There are courses in motor vehicle, mechanical, fabrication and welding, and electrical engineering. As class sizes are generally small, some part-time students share course modules with full-time groups. Full-time students may also work for additional qualifications, for example an NVQ accredited by the Engineering and Marine Training Authority in mechanical or electrical engineering. Significant numbers of students from local schools and from schools in Grantham attend the junior engineering technicians club. This

successful scheme enables students to gain experience in practical engineering. The inspection team agreed with the college's judgement that the higher national certificate in mechatronics, franchised from De Montfort University, provides an effective local route for progression into higher education.

15 Students are able to enrol on NVQ programmes at any time and study at their own pace. Inspectors confirmed the benefit for students who enrol on the 'flexi-study' programme and have the option to purchase a set number of hours of tuition in the programme of their choice.

16 The student placements for a qualification at NVQ level 3 within the modern apprenticeship framework, which are available throughout Leicestershire and neighbouring counties, have greatly widened the industrial partnerships between the college and employers.

17 The inspection team agreed with the college's assessment that staff had appropriate vocational expertise and experience of teaching. A number of workshop tutors with recent industrial experience have been appointed. Other full-time staff have substantial industrial experience, but few have been able to update their expertise. Full-time staff possess appropriate qualifications. The majority of staff have a training and development lead body assessor award; two are qualified to verify assessments.

18 The specialist accommodation for mechanical, welding and motor vehicle provision is well lit and well organised. Although some of the machine tools are dated, they are well maintained and fit for purpose. A number of the tools have been fitted with modern digital readouts. Two anti-static soldering stations have recently been purchased with help from the Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). A mechatronics laboratory, which is also used as a drawing office and has recently been refurbished, is a

Curriculum Areas

high-quality facility with modern furniture and decor. The college's learning centre, used by engineering students mainly for studying mathematics and IT, is of a similar standard. Inspectors agreed that the workshop and laboratory provision is of good quality and well maintained.

19 Teaching is generally sound and well planned. The effective teaching was noted in the self-assessment of the engineering provision. In practical lessons students were guided by well-prepared task sheets and helped by the teacher when they encountered a problem. Motor vehicle students all wore boots and overalls but some part-time students in the mechanical workshop did not. The college recognises the effectiveness of the assessment procedures for NVQ programmes. Evidence is quickly assessed and students can readily gain access to their portfolio in the central store. In theory lessons, teachers made good use of

question and answer sessions and related the topic to a practical situation. Some BTEC assignments and a few entries in NVQ portfolios were wordprocessed.

20 The achievement of students has fluctuated during the past three years. In 1995, BTEC national programme pass rates were 70% but fell to 56% in 1997. In NVQ and other craft courses pass rates rose to 73% in 1996 and then fell to 51% in 1997. Retention rates show a general decline although many students who leave the full-time courses either find employment or join a modern apprenticeship scheme and are able to continue their training at the college. In BTEC national programmes, retention fell from 71% in 1995 to 42% in 1997, whilst in NVQ and other programmes, retention fell from 55% to 51% during the same period. The self-assessment report did not comment on either the fluctuating pass rates or the declining retention rate.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
BTEC national programmes	Retention (%)	71	48	42
	Pass rate (%)	70	75	56
NVQ and other craft courses	Retention (%)	76	64	54
	Pass rate (%)	55	73	51

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies and Office Technology

Grade 2

21 The inspection covered courses in administration, office technology, and professional and general business. The self-assessment report assessed the main groups of courses separately, but lacked detailed evaluative comment. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, but considered that some strengths had been understated, and that some weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- effectively planned and managed courses
- thorough assessment procedures
- good teaching across the curriculum area
- good external examination results in a range of courses
- a generally high standard of students' written work
- the application and motivation of most students
- the broad range of provision to meet local needs
- a good range of specialist resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient integration of key skills with vocational programmes
- some poor retention rates
- inconsistent use of targets

22 The business programme offers a wide choice of courses from foundation to advanced level across a broad range of subjects that includes business studies, administration, office technology and some professional qualifications. Provision has been widened in response to

clients' needs. New qualifications include: the higher national certificate in business and personnel; and the certificate and diploma of the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) in administrative and secretarial procedures. Inspectors agreed that courses are effectively planned and managed, and documentation is thorough. The monitoring and recording of students' progress on courses in office technology is particularly effective. Assignments are clearly outlined and relevant to industry. Teachers provide detailed written comments to help students improve their performance. The college's self-assessment report recognises that key skills are insufficiently integrated with vocational assignments and projects. It also notes that some students on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced course in business require more guidance to enable them to complete their study programme successfully.

23 Some high standards of teaching were observed across the whole programme area. In the best lessons teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching and learning approaches, address individual students' learning needs, and promote effective and productive working relationships. The use of well-directed questions and the skilful handling of discussions give students an opportunity to express their views and raise questions. Teachers make effective use of learning resources to enable students to progress at an appropriate pace and level. A few lesson plans make little reference to aims and objectives, activities and learning outcomes. In a number of lessons teachers allowed some students to dominate proceedings to the detriment of other students.

24 Students have good access to appropriate IT resources, including a well-equipped workshop for office technology and an adjacent computer suite, each containing a network of industrial-standard computer equipment. A wide range of workbooks, handouts and other library materials provides appropriate support for the courses offered. Classrooms used in the

Curriculum Areas

programme area are adequately equipped and furnished. Teachers are well qualified and experienced, and they work effectively together across the programme area.

25 Inspectors confirmed that achievement rates on some courses are good. Particularly good results which are all above the national average for general further education colleges were obtained on RSA courses in office technology, GCSE accounting, and provision of the Association of Accounting Technicians. Results in law at GCE A level and GCSE are identified in the self-assessment report as improving but the report makes no reference to the overall downward trend in GCSE passes

between 1995 and 1997 across the business programme. The quality of students' written work is generally good, and students on courses in office technology demonstrate a high standard of computer literacy. Most students are well motivated, enjoy their work and show an ability to work and learn independently. Attendance rates are good on most programmes. The low level of retention on the GNVQ advanced course in business is recognised in the self-assessment report. The evaluation of achievements against targets for attendance, retention and progression lacks consistency.

Examples of students' achievements in business studies and office technology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level accounts and finance courses	Retention (%)	80	68	72
	Pass rate (%)	33	66	70
GCSE	Retention (%)	88	88	84
	Pass rate (%)	72	67	63
GNVQ	Retention (%)	92	100	50
	Pass rate (%)	56	100	25
Other vocational	Retention (%)	92	87	88
	Pass rate (%)	57	47	66

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English, Communications and Access to Higher Education

Grade 3

26 The college self-assessment report covered the whole humanities programme area. English, communications and access to higher education were inspected. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths although a few were considered to be overstated. Weaknesses related to teaching and learning were not identified.

Key strengths

- much well-planned teaching
- effective teaching methods
- encouragement for students to take personal responsibility for their work
- a good standard of achievement on access to higher education courses
- students' written work generally of an appropriate standard
- good achievement for students who complete GCSE English

Weaknesses

- fluctuating rates of attendance and retention
- insufficient checks on students' learning
- insufficient opportunities for students to generate their own ideas
- underdeveloped schemes of work
- variable achievements in GCE A level English and communication studies
- insufficiently rigorous evaluation of the teaching of individual subjects

27 Inspectors confirmed that many lessons were well planned with aims and objectives clearly understood by the students. In the better lessons, teachers confidently shared their knowledge with the students and created opportunities for them to develop and share

their own ideas. There were engaging and informative lessons in which teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching methods to stimulate and motivate. These included role-play, presentations, graphical illustrations of themes and concepts, and good interactive question and answer sessions. However, it was considered that the amount of effective teaching was overestimated in the self-assessment report. In the less effective lessons tutors failed to involve the students. In a few lessons insufficient attention was paid to checking and assessing students' learning and to aiding students to construct arguments and interpret information.

28 All students are able to take advantage of a study skills workshop which provides appropriate individual help when students require support. Students studying on English courses also benefit from an English workshop which offers effective and appropriate individual support from specialist staff. Inspectors agreed that the development of support for English and study skills is a strength in the college. The needs of adult students are also effectively addressed. Students are encouraged to be responsible for their own studies particularly on the access to higher education courses. A well-supported study skills programme helps them to develop the techniques necessary for undergraduate study. These students produce a good standard of work. Their studies provide an appropriately rigorous academic preparation for progression into higher education.

29 Administration is thorough. There is some review of the work and evidence of action taken to resolve problems. However, inspectors found that there is insufficient rigorous review and evaluation of the teaching of individual subjects. Area team meetings concentrate on administrative, operational and syllabus issues and there is little evidence of teamwork in the planning of teaching. Opportunities to build on the good practice which exists are not exploited. Schemes of work are underdeveloped; many

Curriculum Areas

schemes are no more than a list of topics or texts to be covered over a given period.

30 Students' written work is of an appropriate standard. It is assessed regularly. Teachers mark work carefully and accurately and provide students with useful and constructive feedback to help them to improve. Students who complete the GCSE English course achieve well. However, the college recognises that there is poor retention and erratic attendance in classes. The college is actively considering suitable alternative qualifications for some of the students who choose to study on GCSE courses and subsequently withdraw. Inspectors confirmed that students on the access to higher

education courses who complete their course and achieve a full certificate progress to a good range of courses in a wide variety of higher education institutions. Of the students who failed to achieve a full certificate in 1997, some 30% completed over half the modules and many of these were continuing their studies. Students' achievements at GCE A level English are consistently below the national average for sector colleges. Achievement in GCE A level communication studies has fluctuated. The college has identified the poor retention between the first and second years of the GCE A level courses in English and communication studies. A review to address this issue has started.

Examples of students' achievements in English, communication studies and access to higher education, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level communication studies	Retention (%)	72	67	76
	Pass rate (%)	72	52	75
GCE A level English	Retention (%)	81	71	77
	Pass rate (%)	70	70	71
GCSE English	Retention (%)	64	75	70
	Pass rate (%)	52	69	61
Access to higher education	Retention (%)	64	71	60
	Pass rate (%)	50	71	47

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

31 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified by the college in its self-assessment report. However, they identified weaknesses that differed from those in the college's report.

Key strengths

- the comprehensive pre-entry advice and guidance process
- the support for students from tutors
- the comprehensive induction programme
- the provision of advice on careers and higher education
- the opportunities for work experience for full-time students
- the good range of support services

Weaknesses

- inadequate system for reporting on students' progress in basic skills
- some poor levels of attendance

32 The college liaises closely with schools on opportunities in post-16 education. College staff attend schools careers and parents evenings and pupils and teachers from local schools visit the college. Advice centres are set up in nearby towns several times in the year. The admissions process is effective. Students are either interviewed immediately by an admissions tutor who is a subject specialist or, if less clear about their choice of study, they first receive a general guidance interview. A range of leaflets provides basic information on questions that are commonly asked. Inspection supported the college's judgement in the self-assessment report that there is a comprehensive service for pre-entry advice and guidance.

33 All full-time and a substantial number of part-time students are allocated to a tutor. Inspectors agreed with the college that tutors provide effective academic and pastoral support for students. Their responsibilities include: students' induction; the identification of any additional need for academic support; the production of students' plans of action; and personal support. A useful manual for tutors provides a framework for the tutors' duties. The weekly timetabled tutorials provide an appropriate mix of group work and meetings with individual students. In addition, a series of 'keynote' presentations covering matters of general and specific interest, including talks by careers staff, are offered throughout the year.

34 The inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there is a comprehensive induction programme for students when they join the college. Students are introduced to the college facilities including the student advice centre, the library and the careers service. A package of suitable introductory material has been developed for students who do not start at the beginning of the academic year. Part of the initial induction process includes an assessment of basic numeracy and literacy skills. Some students who do not start in the autumn term are not assessed. Students identified as requiring extra help are effectively supported by a specialist teacher. Students can also be referred for extra help by their tutors or by themselves at any time in the year. The system for informing tutors of students' progress in improving their basic skills is underdeveloped. Help can also be offered to develop study skills. More specialised help, such as that which may be required by hearing impaired students, is readily available.

35 Tutors monitor students' attendance. Many students' reports include references to their level of attendance. Subject teachers notify tutors of instances of poor attendance. Set procedures are used to warn students who are poor attenders. Despite most tutors and teachers

Cross-college Provision

carrying out these procedures, there are still some poor levels of attendance.

36 As recognised by the college in the self-assessment report, the provision of work experience is a strength. The majority of full-time students obtain work experience. A manager co-ordinates this activity and checks out work placements for their suitability. A college certificate is used to record the work experience. Students who are required to undertake work experience as part of their course are assessed on their performance during the work placement and a certificate at either level 2 or 3 from the Leicestershire Open College Network is awarded for successful completion.

37 The high-quality provision of careers and higher education advice is recognised by the college in its self-assessment. The local careers service is located on the college campus. An agreement between the college and the careers service seeks to ensure an appropriate level of service. The suite of rooms in the careers service is available to students and open throughout the year. Careers service staff take part in the student induction process. There was a high take-up on a pilot scheme that offered free psychometric testing and students, especially mature students, valued the advice obtained through the test and the subsequent guidance interview.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that there is a good range of support services. The students handbook gives a comprehensive overview of the services available. Appointments can be made with a professional counsellor; a private counselling room is available in the centre. The main refectory and a smaller snack bar provide an appropriate service to students. The leisure facilities run by the college leisure services may be used by students for a small fee. Students have access to a day nursery throughout the year, and also, during term time, to a separate creche and after-school club. A well-funded

welfare fund provides additional financial support for students aged 16 to 19.

General Resources

Grade 2

39 In the college's self-assessment all the judgements are supported by references to evidence. The inspection confirmed the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. The self-assessment report gives valid reasons in cases where no action is being taken on an issue.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and well-decorated college premises
- sufficient space to meet the needs identified in the college plan
- a well-organised and well-resourced learning centre
- good library facilities
- good recreational and sports facilities

Weaknesses

- some restrictions on access for students with restricted mobility
- low level of utilisation of classroom space
- constraints on the use of the site

40 The strategic plan for 1997-2000 contains clear aims to improve the quality of premises and equipment. The operational objectives set for 1997-98 align with these aims. There are performance indicators and costed proposals to achieve the objectives. The 'accommodation strategy 1997-2000' is predicated on a merger or close collaboration with another institution. The college identified the need for student residential accommodation and car parking space in its accommodation strategy for 1994-97, but has not been able to make

Cross-college Provision

progress on meeting these requirements. There is sufficient space to achieve the college plan despite restrictions on use arising from occupation by tenants. The allocation of accommodation to curriculum areas is appropriate. In the early 1970s new accommodation was built to cater for a number of LEA initiatives including the development of practical skills for all 14 to 16 year old school pupils in the area. The college recognises that present use is lower than the expected norms for the sector. The college has planned a 10-year maintenance programme. The general strengths and weaknesses of accommodation identified by the college in the self-assessment were confirmed by inspection.

41 The college premises are well decorated, clean and tidy. However, many walls are bare; there are few displays of students' work. A lack of resources has reduced the maintenance programme although at present there is no apparent evidence that the fabric of the college is being affected. There are adequate work areas for staff as identified in the self-assessment. Inspectors did not agree fully with the college claims in its prospectus and accommodation strategy that there is good access for students with restricted mobility; these students cannot gain access to the first floor of some buildings. However, individual students' needs are taken into account when timetabling classes. A review of access was carried out in October 1997 but no significant further action to improve access is to be taken as all specialist teaching areas are accessible to all students. The accommodation strategy acknowledges that external signs around the campus are poor although there are some planning restrictions on the placement of signs in some parts of the site. This shortcoming was not recorded in the self-assessment report. The high quality of recreational and sports facilities was confirmed by inspection. These facilities are available mainly through the leisure centre which adjoins the college and is run by Melton Leisure Services, a subsidiary company of the college.

42 The college library is part of the public library provided by Leicestershire County Council for the town of Melton Mowbray. Inspectors confirmed that the college benefits from this arrangement. The library is open 56.5 hours a week in term time including Saturdays. The number of professional library staff is double the number recommended by the Library Association. The County Library Service provides a discount on books purchased.

43 There are sufficient, dedicated study spaces and computer facilities. There are only a small number of books and other materials that directly support the curriculum. However, the additional stocks held in curriculum areas create an adequate level of resources. There is no central record of videos, compact disks and books that are purchased by curriculum sectors.

44 Inspectors agreed with the 'accommodation strategy 1997-2000' and the self-assessment report which records a marked improvement in learning facilities since the last inspection. The college, through a self-build project, established a well-organised and well-resourced learning centre which accommodates teaching for basic education and literacy and for mathematics up to GCE A level. In addition, 'drop-in' study skills workshops are held weekly on Wednesdays and Fridays, and English workshops are held on three mornings each week. The centre is well used by students from a range of backgrounds in the college. The centre is open from 08.30 hours to 17.30 hours and 19.00 hours to 21.00 hours from Monday to Thursday and 08.30 hours to 16.30 hours on Fridays. An adequate number of 100 networked workstations and a standard set of modern software are available to students. There is some special equipment for students with visual disabilities. However, computer provision in staff rooms and academic areas is inadequate. An IT development plan aims to achieve sufficient provision in these areas by 2001. There is an appropriate level of technician support.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

45 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the college had not identified all the strengths and weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, substantial changes to the college's approach to quality assurance were being implemented.

Key strengths

- a commitment to quality improvement
- the development of quality assurance procedures in business support areas
- a thorough charter and student handbook
- a comprehensive staff handbook
- effective staff development

Weaknesses

- the lack of full implementation of the new system for quality assurance
- an incomplete appraisal of teaching staff
- insufficient attention to target-setting
- insufficient development of action-planning
- inconsistency in the course review system

46 In 1996, a cross-college group carried out a thorough self-assessment which reviewed the college's approach to quality as part of the development of a culture of continuous improvement. The conclusions from the review recognised the need to improve consistency and identified eight quality standards and 118 assessment criteria. As the self-assessment report indicates, incremental changes have followed. These changes include improving the consistency of course reviews, the introduction of annual course reports and the channelling of information on quality obtained from course

reviews and students' questionnaires to four new quality improvement committees with responsibility for client services, administration and finance, leisure services and academic matters. The committees are reviewing quality of provision in their area of responsibility to improve the speed of responses to issues raised. Quality assurance has been extended to business support areas. Staff teams have created useful standards of service. Many are linked to quantitative performance indicators and are being monitored. Business support staff in these areas expressed strong commitment to a high quality of service for customers. The college acknowledges that many of these changes have only recently been implemented so that it is not possible fully to judge their effectiveness. The college also recognises that there is no overall focus group for issues affecting quality of provision throughout the institution.

47 Progress is monitored against key performance indicators in the strategic plan. Students' achievements and retention rates are reviewed by the academic board and the outcomes forwarded to corporation committees. Trends in achievements over the preceding five years are monitored and compared with national norms in the further education sector.

48 The college charter is thorough, has many customer standards and contains some specific quantitative targets. Inspection confirmed that the charter is an integral part of a handbook that is helpful to students and contains clear information on the complaints procedures. The charter contains relatively few references to employers. It is reviewed by staff each year but students are not involved. Surveys indicate that not all students are aware of the charter. The wide-ranging staff handbook has much helpful information and was revised in the light of staff comments. Formal induction for new full-time staff members has been introduced since the last inspection.

49 The college is an Investor in People and gives high priority to staff development which is

Cross-college Provision

linked to strategic priorities. Staff surveys indicate that staff development includes curriculum updating, acquiring internal verifier awards and teaching qualifications; it has effectively enhanced job skills. The strength of staff development was identified in the self-assessment report. A comprehensive appraisal system for support staff has helped staff to establish priorities in their work and identify their development needs. Teaching staff appraisal has been substantially revised since the last inspection but is less effective with only 61% appraised in the last cycle. Written feedback is not always provided and some staff had not found the process helpful.

50 The setting of targets and action-planning is not widespread. Recruitment and retention targets are set throughout the college but at course level there are no academic achievement targets. Numerical targets are rarely found in course or sector reviews. A more systematic college approach has recently been piloted in engineering courses. Action plans rarely assign specific responsibility or timescales. Recent changes in procedures for quality assurance show promise. The initial survey of students' responses to marketing and induction has been carefully analysed and led to the development of more thorough action points.

51 Course reviews and students' questionnaires are normally completed three times a year. The reviews usually include an analysis of students' responses. Each review has an appropriate focus, for example induction. Since the last inspection, the course review system has been extended to GCE, GCSE and part-time courses. Employers' perception questionnaires are not used. Reviews are not consistent although they frequently contain responses to external verifiers' reports. They contain little statistical information and analysis is not rigorous. Monitoring of the quality of reviews has been inadequate.

52 The self-assessment report was prepared specifically for the inspection. The report was produced by managers for cross-college and curriculum areas. Those for cross-college areas were reviewed by members of the team which had produced the pilot self-assessment report. Staff were not fully involved in the development of the self-assessment report and no external representatives were involved in the process. Judgements in most areas are brief and evidence supporting the self-assessment is not clearly referenced. There is insufficient action-planning. A few teaching observations were undertaken to support the report. Students' questionnaires contributed to judgements in both curriculum and cross-college areas. The corporation approved the final version of the self-assessment report.

Governance

Grade 2

53 The self-assessment report on governance follows the structure set out in the inspection framework. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements. These were underpinned by references to evidence. There is an action plan relating to two identified weaknesses but no allocated responsibility or date set for its completion.

Key strengths

- effective review of own performance by governors
- active involvement in the strategic planning process
- effective monitoring of performance indicators
- good clerking arrangements
- effective delegation of business to appropriate committees
- good decision-making procedures

Cross-college Provision

- annual review and adoption of key policies

Weaknesses

- further development in linking of governors with curriculum areas
- attendance at corporation meetings

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

55 The governors adopted three principles on 13 November 1995: accountability, probity and openness. Standing orders for the corporation and its committees are in place and updated periodically. The corporation effectively monitors its performance through an annual review; this strength was identified in the self-assessment report and confirmed by the inspectors. The review which has been published for the last three years is comprehensive and constitutes a valuable source of information for governors, managers and the public. It includes: standing orders for the corporation; terms of reference for committees; the code of conduct; a helpful summary of minutes and decisions taken during the year; and an audit separated into 13 categories of the skills possessed by governors. The latest edition of all college policies together with a date for their next review is contained in the governors' annual review. The register of interests is updated annually but does not cover all staff who hold significant financial responsibilities in the college.

56 Governors are involved in the process of quality assurance through their role on college and corporation committees including the quality improvement committees. Reports on

quality of provision are regularly prepared for governors' committees. An appropriate committee structure for the corporation consists of six committees which are supported by clear terms of reference. Meetings are well organised and agenda papers distributed in good time. Reports and papers of high quality are prepared and a clear record of decisions is made. Governors are effectively supported by the clerk who has a comprehensive job description. The financial responsibilities of the clerk are covered by a separate job description. These strengths were all identified by the college in its self-assessment and confirmed by inspectors.

57 Governors have an active involvement in the strategic planning process through a strategic planning working group. This group met on two occasions in February 1997 to establish the framework for objectives and the overriding direction for the strategic plan for 1997 to 2000. The plan established 12 key performance indicators which were approved by the corporation. These indicators are monitored through the three main committees of the board and subsequently by the corporation. The committees bring the senior managers and the governors together in a close working relationship whilst maintaining an appropriate separation of roles. They keep governors well informed on the main issues in the college, for example the curriculum and support for students.

58 Inspectors confirmed that, where the links between individual governors and specific curriculum areas had developed, these were effective. There is evidence of positive action arising from the involvement of governors. The college also recognises that the voluntary and informal nature of the arrangements means that in some areas of the curriculum the scheme is not working effectively. Inspectors supported the view of the corporation's curriculum and employment committee that, if full benefit were to be gained from the arrangements, staff with responsibility for curriculum areas should make

Cross-college Provision

more positive invitations to governors to join them. In addition, more formal monitoring of the arrangement should be devised.

59 Attendance at committee meetings is generally good but the attendance of business members at corporation meetings has been low. Decisions were taken at a meeting in May 1997 that was known to be inquorate. They had to be retrospectively ratified by those governors who were not present. Other corporation meetings in the last year were quorate but business members were in a minority. Governors who were present made a positive decision not to defer business to later meetings. While the procedural issues raised by low attendance have been resolved, the collective skills and experience available to the corporation is reduced by these low levels of attendance. Concerns about attendance have been raised at corporation meetings but were not identified in the self-assessment report. The performance indicator set by governors for themselves this year of 100% attendance at meetings is demanding.

Management

Grade 3

60 The inspection findings confirmed most of the judgements identified in the self-assessment report. However, inspection concluded that several strengths were overstated and some important weaknesses were omitted from the report.

Key strengths

- well-developed management information system
- effective delegation to staff teams
- the efficient use of resources in curriculum planning
- the communication of the strategic plan

- good links with a range of external organisations
- timely financial information

Weaknesses

- the restricted scope of operational plans and irregular opportunities for staff to contribute to the strategic plan
- no coherent strategy to improve student retention
- variable monitoring of some aspects of the equal opportunities policy
- inconsistent financial forecasts
- underdeveloped short to medium-term financial planning

61 The college, while making significant efficiency gains over the last five years, has managed to maintain a broad curriculum provision to meet the needs of much of the community that it serves. The college acknowledges the difficulties that it faces in maintaining the present range of curriculum opportunities. Part of the provision is organised to enable students to progress through appropriate levels of study, combine a suitable range of subjects and benefit from considerable choice over their attendance patterns. It is further developing this approach. It is also making a full evaluation of its approach to curriculum flexibility to identify current good practice and salient issues.

62 The management structure has been relatively stable for the last eight years. Significant responsibilities are effectively delegated to the three directors, and to the four sector managers and the IT manager who report to them. Staff understand the structure and their roles within it. Staff teams are a key feature of management in the college. Times for team meetings are allocated but there is no centrally managed schedule. Records of team meetings do not always clearly identify responsibilities and timescales for the action

Cross-college Provision

that has been agreed. Inspectors only partially agreed with the college's claim that improvements in internal communications constituted a strength. A summary of the strategic plan is widely distributed to staff; they are aware of the key issues facing the college. A well-designed staff bulletin is welcomed by staff as a useful source of information. However, the system of informing staff of the outcomes of committee work is less effective and staff are not always aware of the issues which affect them.

63 The strategic planning process is well documented. Governors and managers have opportunities to contribute to the college's key objectives, other staff are not involved on a regular basis. The college has included performance indicators for the first time in the current strategic plan but, apart from enrolment and retention rates, there is little use of target-setting at course or subject level. The operational plans for curriculum areas do not identify clear targets, responsibilities and timescales for implementation. The planning process is not explicitly informed by the outcomes of the quality assurance procedures and is not consistently used to assist staff appraisal. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Student retention is a key factor in the plans for growth. Some curriculum areas have explored ways of improving retention but currently there is no coherent college strategy to address this issue.

64 Inspectors confirmed that the information system for college management is a useful source of data for managers. Individual managers have direct access to the system and use it extensively. Enrolments, budgets and student retention are closely monitored but not student attendance. The policy and code of practice for equal opportunities covering both staff and students, and the disability statement are regularly reviewed. Factors contributing to equality of opportunity such as childcare and use of access funds are carefully monitored. The academic advisory board equal

opportunities group has not reviewed recently aspects of the curriculum for possible equality of opportunity issues in order to identify priorities for action. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

65 In the face of strong competition from local schools, the college has successfully marketed its programmes to school-leavers. Inspectors agreed that useful information to inform curriculum planning is obtained through these links and through the contacts with employers and external organisations. However, information on the requirements of employers is not systematically collated and enquiries about courses are not effectively monitored.

66 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college has an appropriately staffed and experienced finance team. Timely and detailed management accounts and budget reports are produced directly from the accounting system to a timetable which matches the meetings of the management and finance and premises committees. Management and governors acknowledge the difficult financial position of the college. The college has recently submitted a revised financial forecast return for the years 1997-98 to 2000-01 to the FEFC. The forecast showed a different financial position to that in the internal monthly management account papers. The commentary accompanying the revised forecast does not focus on the main assumptions underlying it. The college has considered various strategic options for its future but the preferred strategy will take time to implement. The financial impact of these options is not clearly dealt with in the financial forecast nor in the college's internal papers. There is no well-defined plan to deal with the short to medium-term financial difficulties the college faces.

Cross-college Provision

Conclusions

67 The self-assessment report was prepared specifically for the inspection. The report provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, they found some weaknesses understated. Some sections of the report do not contain all the key strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors and there is a lack of detailed evaluative comment. The report does not include statistical information and in the curriculum areas there is limited reference to the quality of the teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed with most of the cross-college grades awarded by the college but considered three of the college's own curriculum grades overgenerous.

68 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	8
16-18 years	23
19-24 years	13
25+ years	56
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	11
Intermediate	37
Advanced	28
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	23
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	97	142	9
Construction	5	19	1
Engineering	155	182	12
Business	76	388	16
Hotel and catering	67	21	3
Health and community care	155	236	14
Art and design	171	93	9
Humanities	113	689	29
Basic education	42	160	7
Total	881	1,930	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perman-ent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	57	0	0	57
Supporting direct learning contact	20	0	0	20
Other support	63	0	0	63
Total	140	0	0	140

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£4,320,000	£3,983,000	£4,033,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£18.24	£18.04	£18.22
Payroll as a proportion of income	78%	69%	67%
Achievement of funding target	93%	100%	104%
Diversity of income	29%	29%	20%
Operating surplus	-£515,000	-£421,000	-£336,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	66	90	86
	Average point score per entry	3.5	3.3	3.7
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	24	34	47
	Percentage achieving qualifications	92%	62%	87%
	Position in tables	top third	bottom third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	5	18
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	60%	33%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	bottom 10%

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

FEFC Inspection Report 85/98

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council**

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

© FEFC February 1999