

New College, Telford

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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COUNCIL**

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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.

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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 which 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

New College, Telford

West Midlands Region

Inspected October 1997

New College, Telford was one of the first colleges to be inspected under the FEFC's revised inspection arrangements. Inspectors found the college's self-assessment report generally accurate in its judgements, although it did not fully address all relevant aspects of the quality statements in the inspection framework. Some of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were only included in the background narrative that formed part of the self-assessment report. Production of the report included a programme of lesson observations and some involvement of external assessors.

New College, Telford is a well-governed and effectively managed sixth form college. In line with its mission to promote equality of access and serve the needs of the local community, it has successfully widened its range of courses and students. Courses are offered at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels and there is a programme of evening courses for adults. The broad curriculum gives students the opportunity to develop a range of personal and professional skills. Student numbers have grown significantly, accompanied by substantial efficiency gains. A successful reorganisation of

the management of the college has enabled it to adapt to new challenges without compromising its essential ethos. Within the college there is a good sense of community and an atmosphere of purposeful learning. The college is committed to equality of access. It is closely involved in working partnerships with local schools and colleges, the local TEC, the town and the region. Overall, the standard of teaching and of students' achievement is good. College staff give excellent support to students and, where appropriate, their parents. The college's buildings have a welcoming atmosphere and are well maintained. The college should improve: some less effective teaching and learning; fluctuating retention rates; students' achievement on some courses; systems for assuring quality and for supporting self-assessment; some central learning resources.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Chemistry	2	Support for students	1
Computing	3	General resources	2
Business studies	2	Quality assurance	3
Modern foreign languages	2	Governance	2
Geography	2	Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 New College, Telford was established in 1975 as an open-access sixth form college on the site of the former Wellington Grammar Schools. The college is a major provider of full-time general education for students aged 16 to 19 who live in the areas of Telford, Wrekin and East Shropshire. It offers: a wide range of courses for the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE); some general vocational education including courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) and the BTEC awards of the Edexcel Foundation; and a programme of evening courses for adults. The college places a strong emphasis on the further development of courses in music and the performing arts; it aims to be a local centre of excellence for this work. The provision of science courses is increasing.

2 The college is located about two miles from the centre of Telford. The town is a major growth area within the West Midlands and is attracting high levels of investment. The population of Telford and the Wrekin is 160,000 and is forecast to grow to 175,000 by the year 2000. The area has low unemployment and a significantly higher proportion of jobs in manufacturing than elsewhere in the West Midlands. A high proportion of local companies are owned by foreign firms. Many of the employment opportunities in manufacturing are in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs; there are growing signs of a labour shortage and high labour turnover. The area adjacent to the college and the local centre of Wellington are the subject of a regeneration strategy. There is a significant minority ethnic population in the locality of the college.

3 The participation rate of students in education after the age of 16 is 61 per cent in the area from which the college draws most of its students. Secondary education in the area is

organised on several models; there are schools for students aged 11 to 16 and 11 to 18 in Telford and nearby, including two selective schools for students aged 11 to 18; and a city technology college with a sixth form. The college has 10 partner schools and also draws students from a wide range of other schools. The other major local provider of post-16 education is Telford College of Arts and Technology. The two colleges maintain a close working relationship. They have a joint admissions procedure and some joint curriculum arrangements.

4 During the last three years, the college has increased its full-time equivalent enrolments by 20 per cent and has achieved efficiency savings of 24 per cent. In 1996-97, the college had 1,473 enrolments of which 75 per cent were for students aged from 16 to 18. On 31 July 1997, there were 1,060 full-time and 270 part-time students enrolled on courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and 143 students on non-schedule 2 courses. The college employed 109 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 39 full-time equivalents were support staff. At the time of the inspection the teaching of the college was organised into three divisions: sciences, mathematics and contemporary studies; and arts and creative studies. Inspection took place in each of these divisions.

5 The college's mission makes a commitment to provide equal access to high-quality educational opportunity for students aged 16 and above. The college emphasises the breadth and the balanced nature of the curriculum it offers. There are many opportunities for students to participate in sporting, cultural and community activities, including teams in 13 different sports, a big band, a concert band, an orchestra, and a 70-member choir. The college makes a full contribution to youth music in Shropshire. There are two or three theatrical productions each year which reflect a range of theatrical interests. Students have the opportunity to visit and work in France,

Context

Germany, India and Spain. The college seeks: to play a full role in the wider community; to make its resources available to people from different age groups; to continue to develop its links with schools, other colleges and universities; and to work with the new unitary local authority and other partners to contribute to the development of a culture of lifelong learning in the Telford and Wrekin area.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 20 October 1997. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and the information about the college which is held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1994 to 1997. These were validated by an inspector against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision that was to be assessed. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors, working for a total of 28 days, and an auditor

for five days. They observed 56 lessons, and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. Inspectors met representatives of external bodies such as the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local employers, heads of partner schools, the principal of the neighbouring general further education college, the local education authority (LEA) and community groups. Meetings were also held with governors, parents, managers, college staff and students.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 68 per cent were rated good or outstanding and only 5 per cent were less than satisfactory. This profile compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively for all lessons observed during 1996-97, according to Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected, 88 per cent, was better than the average of 84 per cent for sixth form colleges in 1996-97. The average number of students in the classes inspected was 13.9. The following table summarises the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE AS/A level	8	19	9	2	0	38
GCSE	0	0	3	1	0	4
GNVQ	3	3	2	0	0	8
NVQ and other vocational	1	4	1	0	0	6
Total	12	26	15	3	0	56

Curriculum Areas

Chemistry

Grade 2

8 The inspection covered GCE A level chemistry and the chemistry elements of GNVQ and BTEC science programmes. Eleven lessons were inspected. The self-assessment report identifies some strengths and weaknesses but does not include judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. The report includes appropriate targets and analyses students' achievements thoroughly and accurately. The accompanying action plan includes appropriate aims.

Key strengths

- much high-quality teaching and learning
- significant improvement in the GCE A level pass rate in 1997, well above national average
- good written and number skills displayed by students
- chemistry staff who make a significant contribution to the successful development of vocational science courses
- modern laboratories that provide a good working environment

Weaknesses

- pass rates for GCE A level below the national average in 1995 and 1996
- very poor GCSE results in chemistry in 1997

9 Much of the teaching and learning is of high quality. Of the 11 lessons inspected, eight were graded as good or outstanding. Teachers are skilled at including all the students in discussions and activities, and make a shrewd use of questions to check that students understand the point under discussion. They have good working relationships with their

students and there is a productive and friendly atmosphere in class. Most students were working hard at their tasks. In a small number of lessons explanations from teachers were given too slowly, discussions lacked a clear structure and not all the students were working hard enough. Teachers set their students sufficiently challenging work which is usually completed on time. The department has a clear policy on the amount of work expected from students. Teachers correct students' work in detail and offer supportive and useful written comments. The marks awarded for students' work fairly reflect the standards achieved as noted in the self-assessment report. Students' progress is closely monitored. Practical work is well organised and there is appropriate attention to health and safety.

10 Most students enjoy their work in chemistry and, overall, their achievements are good. GCE A level pass rates were below national averages for sixth form colleges in 1995 and 1996, but they improved in 1997. An analysis of the examination results of GCE A level students, compared with predictions based upon their GCSE results, shows that chemistry students are performing slightly above expectations. Students who entered the subject with weaker GCSE grades performed well above expectations in 1997. Retention rates for full-time GCE A level chemistry are satisfactory rather than good, varying between 73 per cent and 94 per cent. Students perform well in the chemistry elements of vocational science courses, where retention rates and pass rates have generally exceeded national averages. In 1995 and 1996, GCSE chemistry pass rates were comparable with national averages, but they were very poor in 1997. Few students are entered for GCE AS chemistry and results are poor. Most chemistry students have good written and numeracy skills and adequate practical skills. Most of the strengths and weaknesses relating to students' achievements were identified in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

11 The work in chemistry is effectively organised. Teachers work well as a team and are clear about their responsibilities and roles. Schemes of work are closely related to syllabuses. Students are well informed about the assessments that they have to complete. Teachers pay detailed attention to students' performance, using a wide range of measures to indicate achievement. The analysis of the extent to which students improve their achievement in comparison with their GCSE grades at entry is especially strong and this is reflected in the self-assessment report. The performance of different teaching groups is analysed and targets are set to improve the consistency of performance. Performance is improving, and becoming much more consistent across teaching groups. Questionnaires are used well to obtain students' perceptions of their experiences in chemistry.

12 All chemistry teachers are well qualified and hold a teaching qualification. They make an important contribution to vocational science courses. Although they have little industrial experience, appropriate staff hold assessor awards to support their teaching on vocational courses. Technical support is provided by a well-qualified technician. Laboratory and specialist resources for chemistry are well organised. The three chemistry laboratories provide a modern working environment, offer generally good access to preparation areas, are well maintained and have sufficient storage space. Students have access to computers in the laboratories and are provided with appropriate textbooks to support their studies. There is also a suitable range of chemistry texts and journals in the college library, but there are not enough videos and computer software.

Examples of students' achievements in chemistry, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, national diploma)	Retention (%)	100	80	56
	Pass rate (%)	100	75	100
GNVQ, intermediate level	Retention (%)	+	93	97
	Pass rate (%)	+	78	57
GCE AS/A level	Retention (%)	79	94	73
	Pass rate (%)	77	73	95
GCSE	Retention (%)	90	60	83
	Pass rate (%)	44	50	10

Source: college data

+courses not run in 1995

Curriculum Areas

Computing

Grade 3

13 The inspection covered courses in computing including a small part of the college 'open programme' for adults. Ten classes were observed. The college's self-assessment of this curriculum area identified strengths and weaknesses, which were cross-referenced to evidence, and listed subsequent action points. The report only partly covered the quality statements in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The action points did not include some aspects of provision, including teaching and learning. Supporting documentation lacked consistency and contained insufficient evidence to enable an improvement to be made in the quality of provision. For example, the differences in achievement between teaching sets, that were revealed by the college's own value-added measures, have not been fully investigated. Teachers are aware of these issues and are now taking steps to improve the provision.

Key strengths

- many lessons of good quality
- good range of modern hardware and software
- wide range of courses and the opportunity for students to transfer between courses
- excellent GCE A level results in computing for 1997

Weaknesses

- A to C pass rates for some courses below the national average, and some poor retention rates
- inconsistencies between teaching sets
- poor quality of course reports and supporting evidence

- insufficient staff industrial experience and training in use of modern software packages
- unsuitable deployment of technical support staff

14 The subject area offers a variety of GCE AS/A level courses which enables students to transfer between them. The opportunity to transfer also exists on the introductory courses for information technology which are offered as vocational provision or enrichment studies. There are some evening courses for adults and a small amount of off-site provision. Over the last few years there has been a significant increase in the number of students studying computing, especially at the intermediate vocational level.

15 The quality of teaching and learning is generally sound. Teachers have good working relationships with their students, who are enthusiastic about their courses. A small number of lessons lacked appropriate momentum and variety as the self-assessment report notes. Students' achievements have improved over the last three years and are now around the national average. The GCE A level computing course had a 100 per cent pass rate at grades A to E in 1997, with 41 per cent of passes at grades A to C. Pass rates on other courses have reached the national average but with the percentage of grades A to C well below the national average. Students' work mostly reaches an appropriate standard. Teachers often supply sample solutions to help students to improve their performance. The work of some students, whose answers were weak, had been marked too generously. Retention rates have improved but remain a cause for concern on some courses, an issue highlighted in the self-assessment.

16 Teachers have insufficient up-to-date industrial experience, and inadequate training in the use of modern software packages. These weaknesses were identified in the

Curriculum Areas

self-assessment report. They have been partially offset by short periods of industrial placement for staff and by talks to students on GCE A level courses by representatives of commercial companies. Technical support for computing is not always effectively arranged. Some equipment is unreliable. Accommodation is good but the chairs provided for students working at computers are unsuitable.

Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Intermediate vocational (C&G, RSA)	Retention (%)	80	84	93
	Pass rate (%)	62	92	70
Two-year GCE A level	Retention (%)	85	70	84
	Pass rate (%)	76	82	92
One-year GCE, AS	Retention (%)	+	75	61
	Pass rate (%)	+	64	63

Source: college data
+ no entries in this year

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

17 The inspection covered GCE AS/A level, GCSE and GNVQ courses. Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment report underestimated both strengths and weaknesses. For example, there were no references to the generally good standard of teaching or to some poor GNVQ and GCSE pass rates. Some of the weaknesses identified were not addressed in the accompanying action plan.

Key strengths

- the good standard of most teaching
- students who respond well to the high expectations of their teachers
- the detailed feedback given to students on their written work
- very good results on the GCE A level business studies course
- GNVQ intermediate results in 1995 and 1996

Weaknesses

- poor planning of coverage for key skills on courses leading to GNVQs
- lack of work experience for some GNVQ students
- some poor retention and pass rates on GNVQ and GCSE courses

18 The overall standard of teaching was good. Most lessons were conducted with a momentum that maintained the attention of all the students. There was usually a variety of appropriate activities. On GNVQ courses teachers paid careful attention to action planning and to preparation for external tests. In a minority of lessons teachers did not make the objectives clear, their explanations were poorly structured, and often their style of questioning did not succeed in drawing students into discussion.

Students are provided with useful course handbooks and helpful guidance. Teachers set a suitable range of assignments and exercises and return marked work promptly. Their marking is fair, and they give detailed written feedback, particularly to GCE A level students. Spelling errors are generally corrected. Most handouts are well presented. Sound decisions have been made on the structure of courses. For example, GCE A level students sit the case study module in March of their first year, and on courses leading to GNVQs the teaching and assessment of key skills is integrated with the vocational units. However, the coverage of GNVQ key skills has not been effectively planned, so that gaps have to be filled by setting specific assignments for work on key skills late in the course. The college's GNVQ business courses usually include a period of work experience, but this year the college has been unable to find places for all students.

19 The self-assessment report highlights the very good results achieved by GCE A level students. In each of the last three years pass rates have exceeded 90 per cent and in 1997 all 64 students passed the examination. The college's analysis of value-added information shows that students generally achieve results better than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. Retention and achievement rates were good on GNVQ intermediate courses in 1995 and 1996. GNVQ advanced results for the first cohort of students who completed their courses in 1997 were somewhat less satisfactory, with a retention rate of 77 per cent and a pass rate of 47 per cent. The GCSE pass rate improved significantly in 1996 and 1997. In lessons, the students respond well to the high expectations of their teachers. They participate fully in discussions, work effectively in groups and on individual exercises. Their mature attitude to their work contributed to a purposeful atmosphere in the lessons inspected. Students' written work is generally of a good standard. Course files and assessed work show

Curriculum Areas

evidence of effort, progress and some good personal organisation skills. Some work is well presented, making effective use of charts and graphs.

20 Courses are well managed. Small teams of staff deliver both the GNVQ and GCE A level programmes. There are regular team meetings which are also attended by part-time staff. However, inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there was scope to develop further the sharing of teaching resources.

21 Resources to support business studies are satisfactory. The subject area has large base rooms which adjoin a small staff room. Specialist computer equipment is available for timetabled lessons, and students also use the computers in the library and information technology centre which meet their needs at all but peak periods of demand. The library has a limited range and quantity of business studies books and other learning resources. These are supplemented by the subject area's resources which include reference books, videos and class sets of key textbooks.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced level	Retention (%)	+	+	77
	Pass rate (%)	+	+	47
GNVQ intermediate level	Retention (%)	91	86	78
	Pass rate (%)	74	76	56
Two-year GCE AS\A level	Retention (%)	78	71	79
	Pass rate (%)	87	90	98
One-year GCE AS	Retention (%)	*	+	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	+	81
GCSE	Retention (%)	92	65	71
	Pass rate (%)	17	43	50

Source: college data

+courses were not offered/did not run

*only one student entered

Curriculum Areas

Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered the three languages, French, German and Spanish, offered at GCE A level, plus GCSE Spanish and NVQ units in French and German. The subject area's self-assessment report covered most of the issues identified during the inspection. Some were included as background information and in the action plan rather than as strengths and weaknesses. In particular, the very high quality and consistency of classroom teaching, and the growth in enrolments were not listed as strengths.

Key strengths

- well-planned, imaginative, effective teaching
- good use of foreign language assistants
- the support for students with individual needs
- students take responsibility for their own learning
- good teamwork leading to production of useful policy documents
- the record of examination results over the past eight years
- excellent resources in language centre
- exchange and work experience opportunities abroad

Weaknesses

- poor results in all languages in 1996
- insufficient identification of students' linguistic potential at enrolment
- decline in the use of the language centre

23 The modern languages provision in the college is characterised by efficient, imaginative teaching, underpinned by clear lesson planning and detailed schemes of work. Teachers are consistent in their use of teaching methods and

most of the work is undertaken in the language being taught. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that foreign language assistants bring an added dimension of authenticity to the classroom, working alongside teachers in lessons as well as providing conversation practice for individual students. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning at an early stage, both in lessons and in the language centre. Students with specific weaknesses or needing extra challenge are directed to the study skills centre or to weekly workshops in the language. Staff are fluent, well trained and enthusiastic. Many lessons were well taught in an atmosphere that students clearly enjoyed. Although there is no overall team leader for languages, good teamwork has led to the production of useful policies on methodology, marking and diagnosis of linguistic aptitude.

24 Examination results over the last eight years have generally been above national averages. The exception was in 1996 when results were lower than expected. In this year group sizes were increased, there was a widening of the ability range at enrolment and some poor attendance. The college identified the problem in the self-assessment. Strategies put in place by the department to support students largely rectified the problem in 1997, although GCE A level results at grades A to C were still below those achieved in 1995, a weakness acknowledged in the college self-assessment and action plan.

25 The inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the accommodation is inviting and welcoming, with attractive displays of students' work. The language centre is especially well resourced; it has self-study materials in various media in 30 languages and daily satellite recordings in the three main languages. Financial constraints have prevented the college from sustaining a scheme in which all students were encouraged to develop their linguistic skills in the language centre.

Curriculum Areas

26 Exchange visits and opportunities for work experience ensure that most language students can supplement their study by a visit abroad during their time in college. A significant number of students are studying two languages at GCE A level. Students are encouraged to read widely and to record their reading. The library actively supports visits abroad, for example by providing funds for teachers to purchase materials when accompanying groups.

Examples of students' achievements in modern foreign languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	83	83	76
	Pass rate (%)	89	62	79
GCSE	Retention (%)	*	*	70
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	93

Source: college data

**fewer than 20 students entered*

Curriculum Areas

Geography

Grade 2

27 The inspection included observation of 12 lessons in GCE A level and GCSE courses: nine in geography and three in geology. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment somewhat overestimated a number of the strengths.

Key strengths

- courses and most lessons well planned
- students who achieve well in relation to their predicted results
- courses and curriculum effectively managed
- good accommodation and teaching resources
- good participation in external activities

Weaknesses

- some teaching which is lacklustre
- lack of analytical comments on some written work
- some poor attendance and punctuality

28 The college's self-assessment somewhat overstates the quality of teaching and learning in geography and geology. Overall the quality is good, but there was a wider variation in quality than was reported. In more than half the lessons inspected teachers used methods which developed students' interest and understanding, but some lessons lacked flair and generated little enthusiasm amongst students, while a few were not well planned. Teachers set, mark and return work regularly, but their comments often lack the analysis that can help students to improve their work. Some significant grammatical errors are not corrected. Students' standards of literacy are variable, and sometimes poor.

29 Pass rates at GCE A level are at about the national average in geography and geology at grades A to E, and students achieve well in relation to their predicted grades based upon their GCSE results. In geology, the percentage of students achieving passes at grades A to C is below the national average; in geography it is around the national average but fluctuates widely from year to year. Retention rates vary from year to year and from course to course, but overall are satisfactory.

30 Courses are well planned and effectively managed. Staff meet regularly, both formally and informally. Formal meetings are minuted. The college's self-assessment makes little specific mention of issues relating to the management of these subjects. Staff have a good range of expertise, including some experience in industry. Provision of specialist equipment and classroom resources is mostly good. However, the number of students in the largest GCE A level geography sets sometimes exceeds the number of some key texts, and library and specialist information technology resources are very limited. Accommodation is good. The college's self-assessment makes little specific mention of resources in this area.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in geography, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	95	79	87
	Pass rate (%)	86	85	87
GCSE	Retention (%)	75	77	90
	Pass rate (%)	37	70	67

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

31 Inspectors identified a number of important strengths which had not been included in the self-assessment report, for example, the effective system of advice and guidance on careers, and entry to higher education. They concluded that the self-assessment had underestimated the strengths of this area.

Key strengths

- high-quality and impartial pre-enrolment guidance
- a clear structure for the organisation of student support
- a range of good-quality additional learning support
- an effective system of advice and guidance on careers and entry to higher education
- good-quality counselling and welfare service
- use of external professional expertise to assess the requirement of students for additional learning support

Weaknesses

- the planning and delivery of group tutorials
- lack of college-wide procedures to ensure all students have their learning support needs assessed
- insufficient written records of action planning for additional learning support

32 Support for students is the responsibility of the director of student services, who is assisted by senior and personal tutors and a student services team. There is a clear structure for the organisation of support for students. Most students find tutors helpful and supportive. Students receive regular timetabled tutorials, for

which a programme of activities is clearly set out. There were a number of examples of useful materials that support tutorials but the overall scheme of work lacks sufficient detail. There are some inconsistencies in the quality of group tutorials; for example, some students did not have any activities or work to do during this time. A key objective of tutorials is to monitor the academic work of students. The performance of most students is monitored satisfactorily through regular progress reviews but a recent survey conducted by the college revealed that some students had concerns about how their progress was monitored. Most of the strengths and weaknesses of tutorial support did not feature in the self-assessment report.

33 Pre-enrolment guidance is impartial. Head teachers who met inspectors praised the college's systems for the recruitment and induction of students. There are clear policies and procedures for admissions and induction. The joint admissions system run in collaboration with the neighbouring college of further education ensures that students can be placed on the most appropriate course. Staff visit partner schools and other venues to provide advice and guidance about courses and career progression routes. Interviews for potential students from most partner schools take place at their school; other interviews are held at the college. All prospective students are invited to attend 'taster' and open days and guidance interviews to help them to decide what to study. Students found staff at interview, enrolment and induction friendly and approachable. As the self-assessment report notes, they said that their induction to the college had been useful. Those students who had changed courses said that they had received helpful support and guidance.

34 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a range of good-quality additional learning support for all students which includes help with communications, numeracy, languages and study skills. Materials are adapted to meet the needs of students with

Cross-college Provision

specific disabilities. Students can obtain support through an appointment system or by calling at the college's study centre. External professional expertise is used effectively to assess the support required for students with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties. There are effective systems to refer students for additional learning support, which are linked to the regular reviews of students' progress carried out by subject teachers. Some students are assessed early in their courses to identify any additional support they may need. Written documentation on students receiving support is generally thorough but the action plans lack specific targets and often do not contain sufficient detail to help students to improve their performance.

35 The college has an effective system of advice and guidance on careers and entry to higher education which is well used by students. It includes: a programme of visiting speakers; extensive and well-planned work experience; a higher education careers convention and a resource area with CD-ROM database, videos and books on specific careers. The college has a contract with Shropshire Careers Service Limited, whose advisers are present in college for four days each week to provide students with individual guidance interviews and career talks. Support staff offer a service after examination results are published to provide guidance and help for students and their parents.

36 The college has a good counselling and welfare service. The counsellor holds a professional qualification. Students are referred to outside agencies for help when appropriate. The self-assessment report suggests that student awareness of this service could be stronger. The college has taken action by supplying students with more information at induction and during tutorials. The college welfare officer helps students with personal problems which include housing issues, income support and disability allowances. Students who had used these services considered that their needs had been met.

General Resources

Grade 2

37 Inspectors found the self-assessment report for resources to be generally accurate but it made more reference to specialist than general resources. Many of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report have been implemented. Several central support and curriculum areas have been relocated in order to extend the service offered to students, and to make better use of accommodation.

Key strengths

- accommodation that is suitable, well maintained and decorated
- some excellent communal accommodation
- the revised five-year maintenance programme
- excellent subject area displays
- good sports and recreational facilities
- some excellent equipment for music and media
- a good ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers and up-to-date software

Weaknesses

- provision for information technology requires further development
- the inadequate level and deployment of technician support

38 The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report together with the significant expansion in student numbers and course provision have led the college to reorganise several aspects of its central support and curriculum area provision. The accommodation to support learning is generally suitable and well decorated. Rooms are

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allocated by subject area and divisional grouping which has helped in the development of subject identity. Sufficient and appropriate workrooms and storage spaces are available for staff. All areas have excellent displays of curriculum information, records of study visits and artwork, all of which improve the quality of the college environment.

39 There is a small proportion of unsuitable accommodation. The recently revised five-year maintenance programme identifies and establishes an order of priority for work on this accommodation. Although many areas of the college can be reached by students with restricted mobility there are still parts where access is impossible or difficult. When such problems do arise, staff and resources are relocated to accommodate such students. The college in its self-assessment report identified problems over the refectory and has now refurbished the area to provide an improved facility for students and staff. The refectory is also used as a student social area, together with two smaller areas in other parts of the college. The pressures on refectory and social accommodation have been reduced by staggering the lunch periods for student groups.

40 There is some excellent accommodation in the Hayward arts centre, including a theatre and dressing-rooms, which is used for music and theatre productions, as well as for community activities and public events. The arts centre and its adjacent areas house up-to-date music, media and recording studios. There are good sports and recreational facilities on site. The college also makes effective use of off-site pitches and swimming pools for other sporting activities.

41 The ratio of full-time equivalent students to modern computers is good, at 9:1. Students can gain immediate access to the equipment and suitable software except at periods of peak demand. However, much of the equipment is not networked, there are insufficient printing facilities, and throughout the college there is

insufficient access to the Internet for students and staff. These weaknesses are identified in the self-assessment report and plans are in hand to improve these services.

42 Students make good use of the 20 CD-ROMs in the library. Periodicals, daily newspapers, and video and audio facilities are available, and the library catalogue is computerised. The bookstock of 12,000 volumes is small for a college of this size and there are shortages of books to support some specialist areas. Monitoring of the use of the library needs to be improved. The college recognised in its self-assessment report that there are insufficient study places in the library and study areas. Library opening times have been extended into evenings and holidays to offer a better service to students. Liaison between the library staff and subject area staff is good. Most subject areas maintain their own sets of specialist books and many students are provided with the necessary books for their studies. The production of teaching handouts is supported by the college's media services staff who provide a desktop publishing service.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

43 The college has been developing a framework for quality assurance but it is not yet fully and effectively implemented. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment by the college overrated the arrangements for quality assurance.

Key strengths

- quality assurance arrangements that are understood by staff
- the emphasis on, and acceptance of, constructive self-critical review and teamwork
- thorough, objective subject reviews by the academic standards committee

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- well-developed and effective analysis of the added value in assessment of students' achievements
- very searching questions in the college's survey of students' perceptions

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements in support service areas
- inconsistent use of performance indicators and of precise targets, for example, in analysis of retention rates
- lack of a cross-college analysis and response to students' perceptions of the college
- failure to establish priorities for and to monitor staff development
- application of staff appraisal

44 The process of self-assessment built upon existing quality assurance procedures. Each major curriculum team completed a self-assessment report. The tight timescale meant that the college had to draw upon some evidence relating to 1995-96, for example subject area reviews. Other sources of evidence included an analysis of examination results, and of students' achievements in relation to their prior attainment. A programme of lesson observations was undertaken by the college's principal and two senior managers specifically for the purpose of producing the self-assessment report. Internal consultation included presentation of the self-assessment reports to the corporation, the use of a college-wide student survey questionnaire, feedback from 'focus groups' and the involvement of the academic standards committee of the college. Most subject areas made presentations to this committee. There was some limited external consultation through the presence on the quality steering group of three external members: the principal of a nearby sixth form college, the head of a local school and a representative from the newly established Wrekin Education and

Training Service. The self-assessment report received formal corporation approval. There were some weaknesses in the format of the self-assessment report and in the cross-referencing and level of detail of supporting evidence. The action plans accompanying the report identify areas for improvement relating to some, but not all, of the identified weaknesses.

45 The college's self-assessment for quality assurance concentrates almost entirely on the operation of its mechanisms for monitoring quality. The self-assessment includes few judgements on other issues that are included in the quality statements in Council Circular 97/12, Validating Self-assessment. For example, it does not address the standards that the college sets or the improvements in performance that may result. It does not include any evaluation of staff development or appraisal. The evidence given in the self-assessment is not shaped to explain why the strengths and weaknesses are listed but simply consists of reference to college documents.

46 The college's mission statement, strategic plan and supporting documents confirm that the college's aim is to provide a high-quality service for its students. The college is strongly committed to a three-year programme designed to raise achievement. Its operating statement sets achievement targets. However, it has made little progress in agreeing service or quality standards and measuring its performance against those standards. The college began a two-year programme in 1995 to develop its quality assurance systems. A new quality framework was designed in 1995, updated in September 1997, and is being implemented over the period 1996 to 1998. The college has established a quality steering group that is at an early stage in its development; its role and membership are still under discussion. The framework includes a system of team-based self-reviews that lead to action plans which set targets for further improvement. For curriculum areas, the self-reviews commenced in March 1997 and were updated in September

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and October. The college acknowledges in its self-assessment that the development of the quality assurance arrangements for other parts of the college has been much slower. For example, support services staff are being organised into teams and have received some training; some teams have started to review their work. The college recognises that there is an urgent need to develop full quality assurance in this support service area. A service standards committee has been established to consider the reviews conducted by support services teams.

47 College managers have established amongst the staff a sound degree of acceptance of the need for critical review of performance. Central provision of helpful information on students' achievements has encouraged staff to take a strong interest in improving their courses and examination results. There are some good examples of effective team reviews, which include a thorough analysis of students' achievements and useful action plans to improve results between 1996 and 1997. The college provides some guidance for teams on what the reviews should include but also leaves scope for teams to choose the focus for their reviews. Some reviews are thorough and comprehensive but others lack substance. The use of precise measurable targets and performance indicators in the action plans varies; for example, a significant proportion of teams have not set specific targets for the retention of students on their courses.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college that its monitoring of academic performance is a strength. The college's academic standards committee carries out rigorous reviews of academic performance for all curriculum areas. Each area presents its report to the committee once every two years and receives a response and recommendations on which it is required to take action. These responses are thorough and help to provide an external view of the strengths and weaknesses within each curriculum area. In reviews of curriculum areas, and also in

reviews undertaken by course teams, excellent use is made of value-added analysis to compare students' examination results with their GCSE scores on entry. The college uses two systems, one external and the other internal, for measuring added value. Scores are calculated for each teaching set in every GCE A level subject, a full comparative survey is made, and appropriate action is taken to raise achievement and spread good practice.

49 The college's surveys of students' perceptions have both strengths and weaknesses. A recent college-wide survey included questions which helped teachers and college managers to gauge students' opinions on the quality of the teaching and support which they had received. However, the level of analysis of the responses varied across curriculum areas and there was no college-wide analysis or accompanying action plan. The self-assessment acknowledges the need to address these issues.

50 The college's systems for staff development and appraisal have a number of weaknesses. The staff development budget has been drastically reduced and is now at a low level of expenditure in relation to the range and number of college priorities. Other budgets and strategies, including the recent increase in the use of college professional development days, have helped to add to the resources available. The staff development training plan for 1997-98 lists a large number of staff development objectives, but fails to state priorities or systematically to relate objectives to planned expenditure and monitoring. The college has recently introduced a new staff appraisal system which is a significant improvement on the previous scheme. All staff are now included in a single scheme, regardless of where they work in the college. At present the contribution of appraisal to the college's effectiveness is limited. Only a small number of staff have been appraised under the new scheme; many staff did not have a full appraisal during the final years of the former scheme.

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Governance

Grade 2

51 The inspection team agreed with the college's overall self-assessment of governance.

Key strengths

- a broad range of skills within the existing membership of the corporation
- governors committed to and appropriately involved with the college
- good attendance by governors at corporation and committee meetings
- appropriate involvement of governors in the development of strategic plans
- appropriate cycle for consideration and approval of budgets
- effective working relationships between governors and senior management
- appropriate clerking arrangements

Weaknesses

- no formal procedure for the recruitment of governors
- despatch of strategic plans and financial forecasts to FEFC before receiving approval by corporation
- reports to corporation do not clearly inform them about progress towards achieving short-term objectives
- governors not in receipt of sufficiently detailed financial management information

52 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government, and it substantially fulfils its responsibilities under its financial memorandum with the FEFC.

53 The current membership of the corporation comprises the principal, two staff governors, two

parent governors, three co-opted governors and nine business governors, including a nominee of the TEC. In spite of considerable efforts to recruit suitably qualified governors, there are two vacancies for business governors. A search committee has not been established to consider proposals for new members of the corporation and potential new governors are nominated by existing members. New governors receive induction and appropriate guidance documentation when appointed. Some training is given but there is no ongoing development and training programme for serving governors.

54 Governors conduct their business efficiently. They take an active interest in the college and clearly understand the distinction between governance and management. They come from a wide range of backgrounds and their expertise has been effectively used to support the college. Governors are well known to many staff through their involvement in college activities. The corporation has recently begun to evaluate its own effectiveness, but needs to develop more specific indicators for measuring its performance.

55 The clerking arrangements for the corporation are effective, although the clerk to the corporation does not have a job description. The corporation meets at least termly. Meetings are well attended and supplied with well-written reports and minutes which give sufficient detail. Corporation papers, apart from a small number of confidential items, are available for public inspection. Early in its existence the corporation adopted a model code of conduct and a register of interests for its members. The code is not sufficiently detailed. The register now needs to be extended to include: comprehensive details of governors' personal and financial interests; and college staff with significant financial responsibilities.

56 Governors have a number of opportunities to comment on the college's mission statement and strategic objectives and on the strategic plan itself. Due to the timing of corporation

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meetings, strategic plans are not formally approved by the corporation before being forwarded to the FEFC. Instead, the final versions are discussed in detail with the corporation chairman. The strategic plan includes an operating statement summarising specific targets, timescales and responsibilities for those aspects of the plan that the college intends to implement in 1997-98. Although the principal's reports inform the corporation of college activities and governors regularly discuss progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives, the corporation does not receive written reports detailing specific progress in the delivery of short-term objectives. The college does not provide the corporation on a regular basis with sufficient non-financial management information.

57 The college's budget is debated fully by governors. Financial forecasts fully reflect the financial implications of the college's strategic plans; the estimates of income and expenditure reflect anticipated levels of activity within the college. Governors are well aware of the college's financial position but do not receive some of the key summary financial information necessary to give advance warning of budget variances, an essential indication of the solvency of the college.

58 The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure and meetings are generally well attended. The terms of reference for the finance and general purposes committee do not adequately define its role and responsibilities. The committee does not receive financial management information at monthly intervals.

Management

Grade 2

59 At the time of the inspection the college was in the final stages of a major reorganisation. There have been significant developments since the self-assessment report on management was produced and some of the weaknesses in the report have been resolved. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment did not fully identify key strengths and weaknesses and for some judgements there was insufficient evidence.

Key strengths

- effective arrangements for strategic planning
- well-managed reorganisation of the college
- staff clear about their responsibilities and their place in the management structure
- good team working at all levels
- some useful arrangements for communication
- staff generally well deployed
- outstandingly good links with schools, colleges, local authority and the TEC
- a finance team which is appropriate to the needs of the college
- effective financial management

Weaknesses

- lack of specific objectives in directorate plans
- weaknesses in the management of accommodation
- inadequate policies in a number of areas directly related to the strategic objectives
- weaknesses in the management of equal opportunities

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60 The college's strategic plan was drawn up following extensive internal and external consultation, including the close involvement of the local TEC. The consultation was supported by detailed briefings. Team reviews were used to inform the plan and staff had good opportunities to contribute. While comprehensive data about the college's partner schools were used effectively to support planning, the self-assessment report and inspectors identified gaps in market information in other areas. Since the report, a number of initiatives have been taken to improve links with, and knowledge of, the business community. The development plans produced by college teams are linked to the strategic plan. Planning started with a full consideration of the college's strategic objectives, which were clearly cross-referenced to team objectives. However, there were weaknesses in the curriculum directorate plans that followed. Many of the objectives and actions listed in these plans are not specific enough to ensure the implementation of the plans and enable review of their progress to take place.

61 The reorganisation of the college over the last two years, based on a sound analysis of the college's needs, has been carefully managed. The new structure builds on the strengths of curriculum areas and enables identified weaknesses related to communication and the management of cross-college aspects of provision to be tackled. Many of these weaknesses have been rectified. Staff have been kept well informed about the reorganisation and are clear about their responsibilities and their place in the structure. Recently updated job descriptions have effectively supported the reorganisation. Some teachers who are accountable to more than one director find that this can lead to conflicting demands. College managers are aware of this problem and are exploring ways of providing better support for staff who hold both teaching and personal tutor responsibilities.

62 The self-assessment report identifies a number of weaknesses that relate to communication in the college. Significant improvements have taken place, including the introduction of a number of cross-college committees, some of which are not yet operational. There is good team work at all levels in the college. The college committees and the process for action planning that has recently been introduced have effectively promoted team working. Time is set aside for divisional teams to meet regularly. Staff who are not based in divisions do not have this opportunity for briefings and are not always fully aware of important day-to-day operational matters. There are useful arrangements for the distribution of general information, including the principal's weekly briefing for all staff.

63 The self-assessment report identifies the significant improvements which have taken place in the utilisation of resources over the last few years, particularly in the deployment of staff. Reductions in the staffing establishment and changes to the balance of staffing have been effectively managed during a period when enrolments have increased in the college. Additional support staff have been employed to carry out some of the work previously done by teachers. There are weaknesses in the utilisation of accommodation, including a lack of information for planning and managing purposes. The college has engaged consultants to carry out an accommodation review which will be used to help to formulate a new strategy. A simple and effective system of course costing is used to inform senior management decisions on course and resource planning.

64 A major priority for the college has been to strengthen links with local organisations. The college has good links with partner schools, other colleges in Shropshire, local authorities and the chamber of commerce. Inspectors' meetings with representatives of these groups indicated that the self-assessment report understates the strength of these links. The

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college is highly responsive to external requests for help and has been active in developing partnerships and taking a lead on a number of initiatives in the locality. Employers who provide work experience for students have found the college very supportive and well organised. All of the representatives commented on the openness of the college and on the significant efforts made by staff to meet the individual needs of their students.

65 The self-assessment report did not identify the absence of policies for some of the strategic objectives of the college, for example on key skills and on the modularisation of the curriculum. The curriculum committee which has recently been reconstituted will lead on these and related curriculum developments that affect the whole college. The college's commitment to equality of opportunity is made clear in the mission, strategic plan and other documentation. The equal opportunities policy, however, needs to be reviewed and the arrangements for its implementation require further attention; for example, there is confusion over responsibilities, and reporting arrangements are not fully effective.

66 Within the scope of its review the FEFC's audit service concludes that the financial management of the college is adequate. The finance team, led by the director of resources, has an appropriate number of suitably qualified and experienced staff. Financial forecasts fully reflect the college's strategic plans and the procedure by which they are established is clear and well understood. Management accounts are produced within five working days and are regularly considered by senior management. Budget holders receive timely reports on expenditure, and expert advice when required. Financial regulations have not been thoroughly revised since incorporation. The college's internal and external auditors have not identified any weaknesses in the college's internal control system.

Conclusions

67 The process of self-assessment built upon existing quality assurance procedures. Inspectors found the self-assessment report generally accurate in its judgements; although it did not fully address all relevant aspects of the quality statements in the inspection framework. Despite this, inspectors considered that the self-assessment report provided a useful starting point for planning and carrying out the inspection. They agreed with the curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected and with the major findings of the college's self-assessment of its cross-college provision. In one area the inspection team found the college to have been overgenerous, while in another they considered that it had understated the strengths of its provision.

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	0
16-18 years	75
19-24 years	3
25+ years	21
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	14
Intermediate	10
Advanced	66
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	10
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	316	154	32
Business	115	31	10
Art and design	146	9	11
Humanities	479	213	46
Basic education	4	6	1
Total	1,060	413	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perm- ament	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	58	7	5	70
Supporting direct learning contact	9	1	0	10
Other support	27	2	0	29
Total	94	10	5	109

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

College Statistics

Three-Year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,090,000	£3,296,000	£3,259,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£21.68	£19.75	£21.49
Payroll as a proportion of income	78%	76%	79%
Achievement of funding target	109%	115%	114%
Diversity of income	3%	4%	5%
Operating surplus	-£30,000	-£37,000	-£167,000

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)

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	320	367	468
	Average point score per entry	4.7	4.7	5.0
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	8	8	17
	Percentage achieving qualification	100%	75%	41%
	Position in tables	top 10%	middle third	bottom 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	66	61
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	80%	56%
	Position in tables	*	top third	middle third

Source: DfEE

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	83	79	86
	Retention (%)	84	72	66
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	51	55	51
	Retention (%)	87	80	83
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	100	88	64
	Retention (%)	100	89	68
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	75	80	72
	Retention (%)	86	84	89

Source: college data

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