North Nottinghamshire College

Contents

Grade Descriptors

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

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Sample size: 112 college inspections
Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

Summary

North Nottinghamshire College

East Midlands Region

Inspected November 2000

North Nottinghamshire College is a medium-sized general further education college. Its main site is in Worksop. There are other sites in Retford and courses are offered in 55 community locations throughout Bassetlaw and adjoining areas. The college's self-assessment process has been improved and refined over the last three years. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and thorough. The college procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are effective. The number of classes graded good or outstanding by the college was in close agreement with the inspectors' judgements. By the time of the inspection, the college had rectified some of the weaknesses highlighted in the action plan based on the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

The college provides courses in all 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in five of these areas was inspected. A concurrent inspection was undertaken by the TSC. Courses offered by the college are mainly at levels 1 to 3. Achievement rates are, overall, above the averages for general further education colleges in the sector. The college is well managed. Strategic and operational planning are linked effectively. Financial management is sound. Governance is outstanding. Governors are closely involved in determining the academic and strategic direction of the college. Procedural aspects of governance are of a high standard. The management of student support has been successfully reorganised. Students receive good support to help them complete their studies including the use of targeted financial support. Quality assurance procedures have been significantly improved since the last inspection. Thorough self-assessment procedures are leading to improvements in many areas. Staff development activities are well organised and effectively linked to appraisal. The accommodation has been extensively upgraded since the last inspection; there has been a good mix of new build and thorough refurbishment. The college should improve: the student retention rates on some courses; the underdeveloped procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of support for students; some poor accommodation; the insufficient use of data to support judgements in some course reviews; and the deficiencies in management information.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Information technology and computing	2	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Office technology	2	Quality assurance	2
Health and social care	2	Governance	1
Learning support	3	Management	2
Basic skills	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1   North Nottinghamshire College is a medium-sized general further education college. It serves a population of around 106,000 people, most of whom live in the local authority district of Bassetlaw or the nearby communities in South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire. Geographically Bassetlaw extends across approximately one-third of the county of Nottinghamshire but contains only 10% of its population. To widen participation in further education and expand opportunities for lifelong learning in Bassetlaw and nearby areas, courses are offered at 55 community locations in addition to the sites in Worksop and Retford.

2   The area is economically and culturally more associated with, and dependent upon, employment and other opportunities in South Yorkshire rather than Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands. Travel-to-work patterns and progression to higher education reflect the proximity of Sheffield and Doncaster. Since the pit closure programmes of the 1980s and 1990s the area has suffered considerable industrial decline; unemployment levels have risen and for many, income levels have declined. Difficulties associated with the isolation of rural communities have become an increasing problem, especially in East Bassetlaw. A new enterprise zone has been successfully established on the site of an old colliery in Worksop. Key college priorities are to work through and co-operate in partnerships and to make a significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural regeneration of the area. College staff play a prominent role in partnerships aiming to regenerate localities.

3   Achievement rates at 16 are below the national average. Only 29% of students in Worksop gained five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grades A to C compared with 48% nationally in 1999. Eight schools in Bassetlaw have sixth forms ranging in size from less than 80 pupils up to 160 pupils. The Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority (LEA) has recently announced large-scale proposals for the restructuring of education for pupils aged 11 to 18 in Bassetlaw schools. The options identified in the consultation document are likely to affect the college.

4   The college provides courses in all 10 of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Courses are mainly at levels 1 to 3. There is an increasing emphasis upon information technology (IT) and occupations in the service sector. The local training and enterprise council's (TEC's) modern apprenticeships and national traineeships are popular. The college is one of several managing agencies contracted to run such programmes. The college also has New Deal contracts, which it delivers mainly through its own programme areas. The college business development unit specialises in training in health and safety, management and the running of small businesses. The national fluid power centre based at the college provides specialist hydraulic, pneumatic and systems engineering training to clients drawn from the UK and abroad. The college is accredited with the National Coaching Foundation as a premier coaching centre, one of only two such centres in Nottinghamshire.

5   In November 2000, the college had enrolled 9,582 students of whom 1,351 were full time. Of the college's students, 84% are aged 19 or over. Over the past three years the number of students on roll at the college has continued to grow. The FEFC's funding unit target has been achieved in each of the last four years. The college, which is an associate college of Sheffield Hallam University only runs a few courses at higher education level. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups in the college at 0.4% is the same as the proportion of such groups in the local population.

Context

6   The executive team at the college comprises the principal, deputy chief executive, assistant principal operations, assistant principal curriculum and quality, assistant principal student services and community development, and the managers for quality and standards, human resources and curriculum development. Three of the assistant principals and the curriculum development manager also manage divisions. Each division contains between three and five programme area teams. In November 2000, the college employed 281 full-time equivalent staff of whom 92 were full-time equivalent support staff.

7   Following an extensive consultation process, the college has recently revised its mission statement to put a greater emphasis on raising the aspirations of people living in the area and on the role of the college as a major partner in the regeneration of the community.

The Inspection

8   The college was inspected during the week beginning 13 November 2000. In planning and carrying out the inspection, the team used the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1998 and 1999 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR) and supplemented by data provided by the college on students' achievements for 2000. These were checked against primary sources such as registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The data were found to be largely accurate. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 51 days. They observed 71 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students.

There was a Training Standards Council (TSC) team of six inspectors, three of whom worked jointly with FEFC inspectors on the inspection of engineering and office technology. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

9   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 71 lessons inspected, 65% were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% less than satisfactory compared with national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ/NVQ	4	3	2	0	0	9
Other vocational	4	16	13	3	0	36
Other*	2	17	6	1	0	26
Total (No.)	10	36	21	4	0	71
Total (%)	14	51	29	6	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

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

Note: percentages subject to rounding

*includes GCSE, GCE A/AS level and basic education

10   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Average levels of attendance may have been affected by the severe flooding in the areas surrounding the college.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
North Nottinghamshire College	11.1	75
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

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

Information Technology and Computing

Grade 2

11   Inspectors observed 11 lessons and one tutorial. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- a wide range of courses

- imaginative and effective teaching

- effective tutor guidance and feedback to students

- good achievement on level 1 and most level 2 courses

- good curriculum organisation and management

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses

- insufficient additional learning support for some courses

- some inadequate resources

12   The self-assessment report recognises the wide range of IT and computing courses offered at levels 1 to 3. The full-time courses are general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate IT, BTEC national diploma in computing and general certificate of education advanced supplementary (GCE AS) computing. The part-time courses include general IT courses, such as City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7261 at levels 1 to 3, and specialist courses in programming, computer maintenance and web design. Most part-time courses are offered at the main college site and the two IT learning centres at Retford and Bolsover. These courses attract a wide range of students from the local communities. Inspectors agreed with the college that the curriculum is well organised and well managed. Recent management changes have brought IT and computing into a single programme area. This reorganisation has increased the level of co-ordination and improved the sharing of information and materials between teachers. Regular staff meetings are held and include student course representatives. Course files are well maintained and contain appropriately detailed schemes of work. Most annual course reviews are evaluative but insufficient attention is paid to students' achievements in target-setting. The progress of students is tracked closely on all courses.

13   Teaching is effective and in theory lessons frequently imaginative. Lessons are usually well planned and there is an appropriate use of a variety of teaching aids. The aims of lessons are shared with students and are linked to previous work. There is good use of questions to confirm that students understand the work. Theory lessons often use presentation graphics facilities. Good handouts provide spaces for students to make their own notes. One of the community centres uses automated presentation graphics to provide an introduction for new students starting an IT course. In many instances theory is effectively linked to relevant and readily understood applications. Some teaching was less successful. There were occasions when some students had insufficient work to keep them occupied productively in lessons. In some lessons the lack of resources reduced their effectiveness. The self-assessment recognises that the opportunities for work experience for full-time students should be improved. Full-time students benefit from the effective guidance given by tutors. There are regular formal one-to-one meetings where progress, targets and further support are discussed. Most support for students in lessons and at the IT centres is good. However, the support to improve basic skills in the open learning centres

is less well developed. This shortcoming prevents some students from benefiting fully from their IT course. Feedback to students on the standard of their assignments is thorough. In the IT centres, the organisation of students' work folders and the marking of students' work is not always satisfactory.

14   The workstations and accommodation used for teaching computing and IT are of a high quality. The learning materials used in the IT centres are of a high standard and students find them easy to use. The self-assessment fails to recognise that the resources which are intended to support some of the relatively new courses have not kept pace with requirements of these courses. Some of the software for teaching visual basic is not available on the computer network. The computer maintenance and network courses have insufficient equipment and facilities. The library stock has not kept pace with course developments. The lack of connectivity between the staff and student networks restricts opportunities for students to use electronic mail as a routine part of their courses.

15   The standard of students' work is good. The early work from the current GNVQ intermediate group is well organised and reaches a good standard. Achievement rates on level 1 and most level 2 courses are good. The computer literacy and information technology course has had consistently good levels of achievement over a number of years. The levels of achievement on the C&G level 1 and 2 courses and the BTEC national diploma have improved over the last three years and are now above the national averages for further education colleges. Student retention and achievement rates on courses for GCE A level computing have been poor. This course has now been replaced in 2000 by GCE AS. The rates of retention on the computer literacy and information technology programme have been at or above the national averages for further education colleges over the last three years.

There have been improved rates of retention on many of the courses over the last three years but, overall, the retention rate remains poor on two of the college's major programmes in computing and IT. This weakness was understated in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in information technology and computing, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G 7261 IT	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	510 52 75	237 70 87	278 66 95
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	635 84 70	925 81 72	751 80 88
C&G 7261 IT diploma	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	190 44 55	136 48 82	116 55 94
GCE A level computing/IT	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	14 64 33	26 61 57	15 66 50
C&G 7261 advanced diploma	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	14 29 75	36 33 67	44 45 62

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

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

16   Inspectors observed 11 lessons. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment but found that others were overstated. They also identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors from the TSC observed work-based training in fabrication and welding, motor vehicle and mechanical engineering.

Key strengths

- an effective range of courses

- well-organised practical work in fabrication and welding

- good levels of achievement on level 3 courses

- an excellent specialist fluid power centre

- effective procedures for course review

Weaknesses

- low rates of retention and achievement on some courses

- dull and uninteresting teaching in many theory lessons

- failure in some lessons to confirm students' understanding of the work

- failure to share assignment schedules with students

17   Inspectors agreed with the college that engineering offers a good range of courses which are linked to the requirements of local industry and students. Courses in fabrication and welding, motor vehicle, fluid power, mechanical and electronic engineering are offered in full-time and part-time modes of attendance. Course levels range from pre-apprentice training in motor vehicle through to national diplomas and certificates in mechanical and electronic engineering. Some classes on different courses are brought together to share a number of lessons where the work is in common. This helps to ensure that the courses can continue to be offered and remain economically viable. Courses in fluid power and fabrication and welding are also offered on a 'full-cost' basis. An increasing number of mature students are enrolling on day-release courses to improve their work skills. Most engineering provision is well organised. Course teams meet regularly and the results of these meetings are recorded well. An annual process of course review effectively identifies strengths and weaknesses. The review forms the basis for the engineering self-assessment report and resulting action plan. The monthly staff meetings provide a positive focus for the development of engineering. Internal verification procedures are carried out effectively.

18   Teachers have appropriately detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Teaching in practical lessons is well organised and students' practical skills are developed effectively. This strength was not recognised by the college. For example, in fabrication and welding classes, students are able to work at a pace which suits them and at different levels on individual practical tasks. By contrast, teaching in many of the theory classes is dull and uninteresting. In these classes there is an over-dependence on the use of the whiteboard and on the substantial number of handouts. In some classes, teachers fail to confirm that individual students are understanding the work. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Assignment task sheets on national certificate courses are well written. Students on these courses receive sufficiently detailed feedback on the standard of their work. However, students are not aware of the schedule of assignments and tests for the year. This omission often causes a clash of deadlines.

19   The new fluid power centre is an excellent specialist resource. At present, students on standard college courses do not benefit from this resource. It is planned to extend its use later this year to teach fluid power and control technology to both craft and technician students. Tools and equipment are generally adequate for courses. However, the cars used on motor vehicle courses are ageing. The machine tools in the mechanical workshop are adequate but dated. Engineering courses do not have a dedicated computing provision but most classrooms have at least one computer. Modern drawing software provides a good resource for current courses and contributes to the development of higher level courses. The library bookstock is good and a number of relevant CD-ROMs and tapes are also available. All teaching staff have a teaching qualification and all have appropriate training awards. Assessment of students in the workplace helps to keep teaching staff up to date on current industrial practices.

20   Students' practical and written work is good. The self-assessment identified achievement rates at levels 1 and 2 as a strength, but inspectors did not agree with this statement. Achievement rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 courses are below the national average for further education colleges. Achievement rates on level 3 technician courses are a strength. For example, on the national certificate electronics courses the achievement rate has been 100% for the last three years and 100%, 86%, and 86%, respectively, for the mechanical course. These rates are significantly above the national averages for further education colleges. However, the rates of retention on the same courses are below the national averages. The self-assessment did not accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' achievements.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Craft courses	1	Number of starters	18	9	50
		Retention (%)	67	67	74
		Achievement (%)	100	67	76
NVQ	2	Number of starters	28	26	29
		Retention (%)	79	58	69
		Achievement (%)	60	46	60
Craft courses	2	Number of starters	67	53	72
		Retention (%)	84	75	76
		Achievement (%)	86	82	67
Technician courses	3	Number of starters	29	29	47
		Retention (%)	72	62	70
		Achievement (%)	100	94	93

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

Curriculum Areas

Office Technology

Grade 2

21   Inspectors observed 11 lessons in administration and business IT. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Inspectors from the TSC observed work-based training in administration.

Key strengths

- well-planned and well-managed lessons

- good teaching

- good rates of retention and achievement on most courses

- effective management of courses

- the high standard of specialist equipment and resources

Weaknesses

- poor achievement on NVQ level 3 courses

- some poor accommodation

22   The college offers NVQ courses in administration at levels 1 to 3 and IT at level 2, the Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) certificate and diploma in administrative procedures and a wide range of single subject qualifications in secretarial subjects and business IT. Most students are adults. Part-time day students are normally modern apprentices or are sponsored by their employers. An NVQ in administration is run in the workplace for two local large organisations. Office technology courses are based in the Newcastle Street annexe in Worksop. There is a small amount of provision in Retford. Inspectors agreed with the college that the range of provision has been increased in recent years to reflect the increase in demand for business IT. The college has been successful in developing new courses in integrated business technology and Internet

technology. The effective management of courses is an additional strength identified by inspectors. The regular staff meetings are well attended and fully recorded. Teaching staff take a full part in the annual review and evaluation of all courses, and in action-planning and target-setting.

23   As identified in the self-assessment report, teaching is good or outstanding in most lessons and learning is effective. Lessons are well planned and well managed. In business IT lessons, particular care is taken to address individual students' needs. In most lessons where students are working towards a range of different qualifications, teachers prepare individual learning programmes with the student. These programmes allow students to progress at their own pace without waiting for further work. Teachers provide excellent individual support where required and monitor progress closely. Inspectors agreed with the college that in a few lessons, where there is a mix of students, the needs of individual students are not always met and some students find the tasks which they have been set insufficiently demanding. Computer-linked projection is used effectively to demonstrate the use of computer software. Advanced secretarial students are set appropriate assignments to develop their research skills and to improve their knowledge of local issues. Teachers mark and return work promptly and make helpful and encouraging comments. The business centre provides an administration service for staff and a reception facility for the annexe. Students work in the centre on a rota basis and undertake supervised and structured work to develop their skill competences. Work experience outside the college is organised for NVQ level 2 students but not for other full-time students.

24   Specialist equipment is good. The new high specification hardware and software provide sufficient facilities for all courses. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. The annexe used for office technology

programmes in Worksop is an old building previously used as a primary school. It is well decorated and staff have improved the appearance of rooms with appropriate and attractive wall displays. However, there are some shortcomings in this accommodation. The rooms are small, the height of the ceilings creates problems over acoustics and there are insufficient facilities for staff and students. In particular some rooms are cramped and some furniture layouts prevent students being able to see the demonstration screen. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that the weaknesses in the accommodation reduce the opportunities for effective teaching and learning.

25   Students are well motivated and positive about their learning experiences. Students' files are well presented and include work of a high standard. Students make good progress

towards qualifications and combine a number of single subject qualifications with their NVQ course. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that rates of retention and achievement are good on most courses and are generally above the national average for further education colleges. For example, in each of the last three years retention rates on the NVQ level 2 administration course have been around 90% and achievement rates have risen year on year to be significantly above the national average for further education colleges. However, on the NVQ level 3 administration course enrolments have been low and achievement poor. This weakness was recognised by the college and alternative qualifications more suitable for full-time students are now offered.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in office technology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ administration	1	Number of starters	30	36	23
		Retention (%)	83	94	65
		Achievement (%)	83	85	73
NVQ administration (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	31	28	27
		Retention (%)	90	89	89
		Achievement (%)	78	80	83
Wordprocessing	2	Number of starters	117	124	114
		Retention (%)	85	97	86
		Achievement (%)	85	66	81
Audio transcription	2	Number of starters	36	61	40
		Retention (%)	89	95	76
		Achievement (%)	90	60	71
Integrated business technology	2	Number of starters	151	147	167
		Retention (%)	95	96	87
		Achievement (%)	85	71	79
Integrated business technology	3	Number of starters	9	69	38
		Retention (%)	100	80	87
		Achievement (%)	50	55	71

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care
Grade 2

26   Inspectors observed 16 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but did not consider that it provided a coherent and accurate review of the standard of the provision.

Key strengths

- well-written lesson plans and schemes of work

- good teaching

- good student achievement rates in level 3 full-time provision

- good progression from the GNVQ advanced in health and social care

Weaknesses

- narrow range of provision for students aged 16 to 19

- poor rates of completion and achievement on NVQ in care

27   The full-time courses include an Edexcel first award in care, a GNVQ advanced in health and social care and an Edexcel national diploma in childcare and education. Part-time courses in care, childcare and access to nursing are attracting a broad range of adult students. Arrangements for attendance on courses are not flexible enough to attract certain groups of adult students. The range of provision at all levels is too narrow for 16 to 19 year old students. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The part-time access to nursing and social care course introduced in 1998 recruits well and is providing good opportunities for students to gain employment and training within Bassetlaw. Poor rates of retention and achievement on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses led to their

withdrawal in 1998. A good range of relevant short courses is offered to enrich overall learning opportunities for students. Courses are well organised. Teachers have good working relationships with a range of providers of care and childcare services.

28   Inspectors agreed with the college that lessons are prepared carefully and that schemes of work are well written and contain appropriate detail. Most lessons have comprehensive lesson plans and a suitable balance of teaching methods, including lectures, small group discussions, classwork and practical exercises. There are many opportunities for students to contribute to discussions or to ask questions. Staff are enthusiastic and use their experience of health and social care work effectively to guide students towards learning about the sector. Teachers listen attentively when students express personal views and opinions. Good teaching of GNVQ students encourages them to use a range of source materials such as case studies and to draw from knowledge gained from other parts of the course before arriving at conclusions. There are consistently good opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and understanding to health, care and childcare issues. Some teachers successfully summarise what has been covered and harness students' enthusiasm and motivation for the preparation of new work by explaining what will be expected from them in the next lesson. All full-time students gain experience from working alongside trained staff in the health and care sector. Teachers monitor and support this training opportunity effectively. These strengths in the quality of teaching are recognised in the self-assessment report.

29   Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. The high proportion of part-time teaching staff provides a good range of expertise. Inspectors did not find any evidence to support the weakness identified in the self-assessment report that this dependency on part-time teachers reduces the quality of

teaching. Accommodation is good and student work is displayed effectively. Practical resources are satisfactory and include craft materials for early years learning and a specialist teaching room for childcare at Retford.

30   Most students take part willingly in structured work for small groups and in class discussion to explore some of the complex issues associated with providing support to those in care. Students in childhood studies produce consistently good assignment work that is relevant to their professional practice. Students who achieve the full award on the GNVQ advanced course are appropriately prepared for professional training or higher education. Progression to these areas is good. Rates of retention and achievement on the GNVQ advanced exceed the national averages for further education colleges. These features were not identified as a strength in the

self-assessment report. Achievement and retention rates at level 2 are uneven. The rates of achievement and retention of adult students on the first certificate are consistently good. The number of students who successfully achieve the first diploma in care shows improvement but is still below the national average for further education colleges. There have been no successful completions in NVQs in care in the last two years even though the retention rate has improved significantly. This shortcoming is not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Recent changes to the structure and management of the Sherwood Care Consortium are planned to address aspects of this issue. Overall, the self-assessment report identifies the need to raise rates of student achievement and retention but does not identify specific weaknesses.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
BTEC first diploma/certificate care	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	14 79 71	40 65 40	54 70 84
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 77 100	16 63 44	19 68 100
BTEC national diploma childcare and education	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	40 58 100	29 64 100	33 75 90
Access certificate to nursing and social care	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	† † †	16 50 100	38 73 52

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Learning Support

Grade 3

31   Inspectors observed 11 lessons across the range of discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses. Some recent action had been taken to address significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching

- good support for individual students

- effective links with external agencies

- successful celebration of students' achievements

- good link provision with schools

Weaknesses

- insufficient opportunities for progression

- insufficient specific targets for students

- inappropriate programmes and activities for some students

- poor accommodation in annexe to main site

32   The course structure and curriculum model is appropriately based on the development of individual learning plans for students. This new model has started to address some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment. Students follow a core of basic skills and of opportunities for personal development and then choose vocational or practical courses. National Open College Network (NOCN) units are used to accredit learning where appropriate. The content of some courses and the process by which students are placed or make choices in relation to their identified needs are not fully developed. Some students spend too much time on activities that do not contribute to their overall aims. Course teams are beginning to track groups of students, set targets and develop action plans for courses. There is a strong and developing link provision with local schools. A vocational 'taster' programme has been introduced for year 10 pupils. Year 11 pupils attend existing college courses. Effective arrangements help to ensure that pupils with a history of challenging behaviour are not grouped together and that pupils follow courses that meet their individual needs and interests. There are effective procedures for supporting link pupils and tracking attendance and progress. Inspectors agreed that there are strong links with other external agencies.

33   Most lessons are well planned and well taught. Most schemes of work are modified to meet the individual needs of students with different levels of ability. In some lessons, however, the ability range of the class is so wide that policies of differentiation do not always succeed. Some students either waste time repeating tasks which they can already do or are unable to learn from the work which they have been set. Such mismatch is most apparent where students lack the necessary literacy skills. Support assistants work well with teachers in helping students to learn more effectively. In some lessons, low student numbers not only reduce the opportunities for students to work together but also restrict the use of other methods of learning. Teachers monitor students' learning. They are also in the early stages of establishing effective ways of assessing the progress that students are making in developing their social and communication skills. Targets based on work outlined in a student's own learning plan are assessed by class teachers. However, the targets are often imprecise and the subsequent assessment of students' progress in these skills often describe activities or work covered rather than individual progress achieved. At present students do not have clear ownership of their plans and targets.

The self-assessment report recognises the strengths in teaching and learning but is not clear about some of the weaknesses.

34   Staff are strongly committed to their work and provide good support for individual students. Support assistants are well trained and most have, or are working towards, a relevant learning support qualification. Assistants provide a well co-ordinated service and respond effectively to changing student needs. Much of the accommodation used is in an annexe separated from the main college site. Both the standard of the accommodation and the physical separation create difficulties for teachers and students. For example, a practical childcare lesson took place in an old classroom without running water and all the resources had to be brought across to the class in the annexe by the teacher. A well-equipped room is used for IT classes. However, although the IT facilities are suitable for helping students to learn, their use is underdeveloped. Some of the rooms used for basic skills classes are too small for the groups using them. Access to other practical basic skills resources is poor.

35   Students are well motivated. They appreciate the help and high level of commitment which they receive from teachers and assistants. In a catering lesson, students were helped to prepare and serve food to paying customers. Students were professional in their approach and clear about their tasks. Progression to mainstream courses is hampered by the unavailability of sufficient suitable courses at foundation level. This weakness was noted in the self-assessment. Weaknesses which were identified in the progression of students to supported or open employment are being addressed by a new work experience co-ordinator and by the development of a transition course. Interviews with students and comments which they made in their records of achievement confirmed two other features of this curriculum area which were both highlighted in the self-assessment report: the

value that students place on the use of college certificates; and the recognition that they all gain from the college's celebration of their achievements. Not all students take formal qualifications, therefore no data table has been included as it would not be a reflection of all students' achievements.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

36   Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment but considered some weaknesses had been understated. Many of the issues identified in the self-assessment had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good teaching

- the good progress of most students

- effective negotiation of learning programmes with individual students

- effective design of learning materials

Weaknesses

- inappropriate accommodation for some classes

- some poor resources

37   Basic skills are taught in various locations throughout the college and in local community venues. The provision includes: discrete adult basic education classes; literacy and numeracy courses up to and including level 1; learning support for students in other curriculum areas; and additional support in small groups or on a one-to-one basis for students with identified literacy or numeracy difficulties. Recent organisational changes have ensured more effective management of the many strands of the basic skills provision. Roles and responsibilities of staff have been redefined and an additional manager has been appointed. There are good communications between staff and students, and a shared vision of basic skills as an integral part of all college courses. These strengths in provision are having a positive impact on the standard of basic skills teaching. Many of the issues identified as weaknesses in the

self-assessment had been addressed by the time of the inspection. There are, however, no targets aimed at increasing student recruitment to basic skills. This shortcoming is not identified in the self-assessment.

38   The introduction of curriculum 2000 has led to an increase in key skills provision. Support is provided for 250 students who are on courses below level 2. Students are able to request support at any stage of their courses; the number receiving additional support fluctuates throughout the year. Some students need help for a short period while others need support for much of the year. Currently seven students have classroom-based support, 32 have one-to-one help and 40 are being taught in small groups. Twenty-seven adult basic education classes are held in the college and in local community venues spread over an extensive geographical area. There are four family learning courses, one held in college and three in community venues. There are 40 numeracy and 35 literacy students on the 'Freshstart' return-to-learn courses.

39   Teachers have worked together to produce a basic skills curriculum which is comprehensive and flexibly arranged. They have developed a range of units which have been validated by the NOCN. Student learning is based on a process of initial assessment, the development of a learning programme based on identified needs including the student's own expressed needs, regular review, and the setting of new targets. Individual learning goals are clear.

40   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teaching is good and that students benefit from individual learning programmes tailored to their needs. Appropriately detailed lesson plans linked to good record-keeping enable teachers and students to identify the aims and objectives of lessons and to set them in the context of previous lessons and longer-term goals. Teachers have a good knowledge of their

students. Their experience of working with basic skills students enables them to create an atmosphere which is welcoming and supportive and helps students to want to learn. Teachers maintain students' interest by judging the content of the lesson well and introducing new topics when appropriate. One class had visited a local castle and produced a wall display which included the written work of the students reproduced in a variety of formats on the computer. Marking of work and feedback to students are of a high standard. Students are encouraged to know that they are making progress. They appreciate the help that they are receiving and are proud of their achievements. All students are making sound progress, which is confirmed by their work files, their own comments and their records.

41   Teachers are well qualified. Most have sound experience of teaching basic skills. All teachers are well briefed about curriculum issues through the regular staff meetings and newsletters. Good use is made of volunteer tutors and learning support assistants. Most college-based classes are held in the mathematics workshop and communications study area. The mathematics workshop has no computers and few resources for practical work. Work on basic numeracy takes place alongside other mathematics courses in the workshop and has succeeded in encouraging students to progress to level 2 numeracy and GCSE courses. The communications study area has some pleasant rooms but they are too small for some of the classes which use them. The rooms in the communications study area used for confidential interviews, one-to-one tuition and small group work are not suited to their purpose. The three computers in the communications study area do not have appropriate software designed for basic skills or access to the Internet. There is not enough space to store learning materials in the communications study area so that they are easily accessible to students and teachers. The

college understated the significance of these weaknesses in resources and accommodation. There are plans for improvement in both areas. Not all students take formal qualifications, therefore no data table has been included as it would not be a reflection of all students' achievements.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- well-managed improvements to the co-ordination of student support

- clear and effective procedures for admissions, guidance and initial assessment

- well-publicised and well-targeted financial assistance to students

- effective personal, welfare and careers support

- a well-designed tutorial framework

- good support for students with sensory impairment

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of support for students

- gaps in coverage for some aspects of support beyond the main site

43   There have been significant improvements in the overall management and co-ordination of all aspects of support for students. This progress was partly the result of bringing together the work of staff running student support, student services and assisted learning support. Inspectors agreed with the college that a relocation of these functions within the learning resources complex provides a more coherent and accessible service to students. The college acknowledges that procedures for the routine monitoring of the effectiveness of student support functions are underdeveloped. There is insufficient statistical tracking or analysis of key data concerning, for example, student uptake of places, and the progression and destinations achieved by students.

44   Most college publicity materials are good. The college is well represented at local promotional events and careers fairs. A team of community correspondents assists in promotional work and liaises with community groups in outlying areas. Inspectors agreed with the college that the procedures for admissions, guidance and initial assessment are clear and well structured. Student interviews are based on a checklist of common criteria which assists consistent and objective practice. Students have opportunities to sample courses and to attend pre-course meetings but there is no overall programme issued to prospective students. Course enquiries are logged carefully. Potential students' applications are followed up through the use of various strategies including the sending of 'good luck' cards when external examinations are about to be taken. There is effective and impartial exchange of information between staff running admissions, guidance and programme areas. Good use is made of a range of initial assessment methods which are well matched to each student's level of ability. All full-time and substantive part-time students are screened to identify their additional support needs. At the time of the inspection, approximately 71% of those students identified as needing support had taken up the offer.

45   Inspectors agreed with the college that significant improvements have been made to the tutorial process since the previous inspection. A comprehensive audit of existing practice was undertaken. A follow-up action plan, linked to appropriate staff development activities, preceded and prepared for the introduction of a new, carefully designed framework. The procedures within the framework apply to both full-time and part-time students. Full-time students have a minimum of four progress

reviews each year. For those on curriculum 2000 the review includes the tracking of enrichment activities and progress on developing key skills. A well-designed student handbook provides helpful guidance and the details and format of progress reviews. Lead tutors in each programme area co-ordinate and oversee the arrangements for implementing the procedures. Most tutorials are effective even though some staff have yet to fully adopt the new system. There are variations in the implementation of procedures on some courses. The college has identified the need to brief, train and prepare part-time staff more thoroughly on all tutorial processes.

46   Students have access to helpful careers and higher education guidance provided by well-qualified staff. Useful careers presentations are incorporated into the tutorial programme. All full-time students are offered a careers interview. The college recognises the need to supplement this offer with more careers education and guidance within the context of each programme area. There is a good careers library. Associated resources include a video room for mock interviews.

47   The support provided to students with sensory impairment is a particular strength of provision. The college has its own well-established team which has the specialist expertise to support dyslexic, hearing and visually impaired students. There are effective referral arrangements and links with programme areas and external agencies. A confidential counselling service is offered on the main site by a professionally qualified counsellor. In recognition of the need to widen this service and increase accessibility from other sites a helpline has been established. There is inadequate coverage of some other aspects of support for students studying away from the main site. There are no additional support or guidance staff based permanently at the outcentres, though referrals can be made to the main college.

48   The college demonstrates a strong commitment to meeting the welfare needs of its students. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that the college is responsive to the financial difficulties experienced by a number of its students. The student support fund is well publicised. It is effectively targeted to meet individual need. Relevant information and advice is available for students. Appropriate subsidies are provided for transport and childcare, as well as assistance with examination fees. There are effective arrangements for managing the support funds and applications from students are responded to promptly. Many students who have received help comment that the support has been a critical factor in their capacity to both start and sustain their studies. College statistics show that retention rates for this group of students are higher than for students on comparable courses who are not in receipt of support. Students speak positively of the convenience and quality of the childcare facilities on the main site.

General Resources

Grade 2

49   Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. Progress had been made on areas of weakness by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- much effective renovation, refurbishment and new build

- good access to modern computing equipment

- the spacious and well-equipped learning resource centre

- clean and well-maintained accommodation

Cross-college Provision

50   The main college site is in Worksop. A nearby annexe is used for office technology courses and learning support. The centres in Retford and Bolsover are used for IT and a mix of other courses. Many of the proposals in the current accommodation strategy have been achieved. The college has a much higher proportion of its work on the main site than at the time of the previous inspection. Surplus annexes and community locations have been closed. Parts of the main site offer good purpose-built accommodation. The fluid power centre provides modern, state-of-the-art training and conference facilities. The new plastering workshop provides a modern working environment. Imaginative conversions include the renovated community theatre and a new sound studio. A number of areas have been refurbished including an attractive suite of hair and beauty salons. A modern entrance to the main site provides a welcoming reception area. External signposting to the college and internal signposting within the college are clear. Inspectors agreed with the college that some accommodation on the main site is of a lower standard. The exterior appearance of one block is poor. Unattractive mobile classrooms continue to be used. Some of the older buildings have areas unsuitable for teaching.

51   Most sites are clean, well decorated and well maintained. The college has invested in a major redecoration programme to improve the general appearance of teaching and circulation areas. Most classrooms are well furnished and contain suitable teaching resources. The site services team provides a valued level of service for cleaning, caretaking, maintenance, audiovisual and reprographic services.

A helpdesk service responds to requests effectively. The self-assessment identified the need to upgrade reprographic equipment in order to provide a more efficient service. A desktop publishing service is available to staff, offering them assistance in preparing materials.

52   Although not clearly identified in the self-assessment report, the learning resource centre on the main site is a strength of the provision in the college. The centre provides a spacious and well-equipped area for accessing information and for study. During term time the centre is open for four evenings each week and on Saturday mornings. It contains a bookstock of some 17,000 items, which is just adequate for current student needs. The college recognises the need to increase the stock level. Stock is reviewed regularly and in most curriculum areas provision is up to date. There is appropriate liaison with curriculum areas. There is a good selection of periodicals and journals. The Internet and CD-ROMs provide access to an extensive range of material. The video stock provides for most curriculum areas. The centre does not hold details of recordings which are stored in other college locations. The college recognises that there are insufficient spaces for quiet study for students. The use of a Braille printer and an enhanced computer screen assist visually impaired students.

53   Students have good access to modern computing equipment. The self-assessment recognises the considerable investment in IT resources. The quality and quantity of general-purpose computer hardware and software are good. There are 262 computers in classrooms. Another 160 computers are available on a 'drop-in' basis in the IT centre and the learning resource centre in Worksop, the IT centres in Retford and Bolsover, and at two centres in rural locations. The community development team has 20 laptop computers. Overall, this gives a ratio of one computer for every six full-time equivalent students. There is good Internet access for most students. The

college noted in its self-assessment that the IT resources in general staff work areas were insufficient. Improvements have been made to most of these work areas. By the time of the inspection, most staff rooms had access to a computer and the staff development centre provides five additional computers. Twenty laptop computers are available for overnight and weekend loan to staff.

54   Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements that the catering facility on the main site provides a reasonable service to students, but that further improvements in furniture and layout are required. Students have access to a well-equipped fitness suite. The sports hall on the main site is small and not suitable for many activities. The college does not have playing fields. Suitable alternative arrangements are made for the use of nearby community sports facilities. As recognised in the self-assessment, for people with restricted mobility some areas of the college are inaccessible or extremely difficult to reach. Some of the older accommodation has narrow and difficult stairways and passages. One of the main blocks has no lift to the second floor which prevents access to the fitness suite and other rooms. Improvements have been made to a number of areas, including improved access to the main entrance. Wherever possible the college attempts to relocate classes which include students with restricted mobility.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

55   Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report, but gave a different emphasis to some of the strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good quality assurance procedures
- thorough self-assessment activities
- effective arrangements for the observation of lessons
- effective staff development

Weaknesses

- some poor rates of student retention
- underdeveloped service standards in some business support areas
- insufficient analysis of data in course reviews

56   The college's commitment to quality assurance is demonstrated by the considerable development and improvement of procedures since the previous inspection. Inspectors agreed with the college that it has well-structured and well-written quality assurance procedures which are linked effectively to business planning. The quality unit has a high profile in the college. Staff are aware and supportive of quality assurance arrangements. Clear and helpful standardised documents support self-assessment activities and encourage sound performance across programme areas. The procedures are followed effectively by most staff. Action plans resulting from self-assessment are closely aligned to business plans. Programme area self-assessment reports undergo thorough validation by a panel consisting of the quality management group and governor representatives. A corporate action plan ensures that actions from cross-college's self-assessments are incorporated into the college-wide operating statements and business planning. The quality group meets weekly to monitor progress on issues within its remit. It reports to the academic board and the quality and standards subcommittee of the corporation. Governors are actively involved in monitoring

the quality of provision. There are appropriate arrangements for monitoring the franchised provision. The national fluid power centre has held ISO 9001 accreditation for the last five years.

57   Quality assurance activities based on thorough self-assessment have led to improvements. This strength was partially recognised in the self-assessment report. Students' achievements have been raised over the three years from 1997 to 1999 at levels 1, 2 and 3 and achievement is now above the overall national average for further education colleges. However, some retention rates remain below sector averages. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Course and programme area reviews contribute to the overall college report. Data on students' achievements and retention, student surveys, lesson observations and team discussions also contribute to the identification of strengths and weaknesses across the college. Analysis against national averages is regularly undertaken. Full-time and part-time staff at all levels take part in the self-assessment process which is thorough at programme area level. However, in some course reviews there is insufficient use of quantifiable data to support judgements.

58   The college has introduced effective arrangements for the observation of lessons. Staff are trained in the use of clear observation criteria. All full-time staff are observed annually and part-time staff every two years. Community and franchised provision is included within the arrangement. Grades awarded are compared with national statistics from the chief inspector's annual reports. Action is taken within the college to identify and disseminate good practice or to address identified weaknesses. The internal grading of lesson observations is well judged. The college profile recorded 61% of lessons as good or outstanding in 1999-2000 compared with the inspection profile which recorded 65% of lessons as good or outstanding. The college calculates grades for part-time staff and full-time staff separately.

59   Inspectors agreed with the college that service standards are underdeveloped in some business support areas. All areas have produced self-assessment reports to a common format. Specific standards are established in a few areas; at the time of the inspection, work was in progress to identify standards across all areas. The college charter has been reviewed and simplified. Consideration has been given to how performance against charter commitments will be monitored and assessed. No comprehensive, formal review of performance has been undertaken although some elements of the charter have been evaluated. The college has concluded that more could be done to gain the views of its customers but inspectors did not see this as a key weakness. A survey to gauge the satisfaction of employers has been undertaken and the results analysed and acted upon.

60   The college provides well-organised and effectively targeted opportunities for staff development for all staff. These are linked to an established system for appraisal. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Business plans, self-assessment and classroom observation all contribute to the identification of aims of the college staff development programme. Individual staff development needs are identified through appraisal. Strategic and national priorities are taken into account. A comprehensive analysis and report on staff development activity is undertaken annually. The report contains some evaluation of the effectiveness of staff development activity. As a result of one report, and information from classroom observations, part-time teachers were targeted to increase their participation in development activities. As a consequence their participation rate increased from 26% to 77%. In the staff development unit a resource bank is being developed to provide further support for teachers. The college has been recognised as an Investor in People.

Governance

Grade 1

61   Inspectors and auditors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Some strengths were understated. Inspectors concluded that the weaknesses which had been identified in the report were of minor significance.

Key strengths

- effective development of the strategic direction of the college

- good use of governors' skills and expertise

- a well-planned and effective cycle of business

- highly effective monitoring of financial performance

- very good policies for openness and accountability

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

62   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.

63   Governors are committed to furthering the success of the college. The process for determining the strategic direction of the college is thorough. The review of the mission and the strategic direction of the college was informed by a comprehensive needs analysis and included risk assessment as part of the process. A strategic planning guide was used to further inform the review. Academic progress is closely monitored through the quality and standards

committee which scrutinised appropriately detailed reports on such issues as teaching and learning, tutorial support and information learning technologies. The full corporation has received comprehensive reports on target-setting and monitoring college performance. Reports included data on student retention and achievement rates and compared the rates with national averages and with results at similar sector colleges. The data are used effectively to set strategic targets.

64   Auditors and inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that the corporation can call upon a broad range of skills and experience. There are 16 members, including two staff governors. They are drawn from a wide range of business, educational and community backgrounds. Governors have a good understanding of the social and economic characteristics of the area. They use their skills effectively in the college. For example, governors with construction expertise have contributed effectively to the working group for new building projects.

65   Governors have established appropriate nomination and appointment procedures. Public advertising has been used in the search for new governors. Newly appointed governors are effectively prepared for their role and receive a comprehensive range of induction materials. The college has established a formal process to identify training and development needs for governors which leads to an annual programme of training. 'Succession planning' anticipates the retirement of board members. Skill audits which were used by the search committee identified the need to recruit governors with manufacturing or engineering expertise.

66   The self-assessment of governance was thorough. A critical review of the board's performance began with a development day when three governors attended programme area validation panels to gain valuable insight into

the self-assessment process. Questionnaire responses were useful in identifying key strengths and weaknesses. Subsequently an external panel validated key strengths and weaknesses.

67 Governors attend opening ceremonies and award ceremonies within curriculum areas. The self-assessment notes that closer links with curriculum areas are underdeveloped. However, inspectors did not think that this was a significant weakness. A programme of presentations to governors by managers of curriculum areas has begun. There is no clear set of objectives for the presentations which will be completed over a two-year cycle. Governors have been asked to indicate which curriculum area they would choose to link with; the form or extent of such links have not been defined.

68 The self-assessment recognises that the cycle of corporation and committee meetings is effectively planned. A calendar of meetings is set one year in advance. Attendance at committee meetings has been good but there has been poor attendance by some governors at meetings of the full corporation. There is an appropriate range of committees. Each committee has a membership which draws effectively on governors' skills. Committees operate in accordance with appropriate terms of reference. All committee minutes are presented to the corporation for its consideration. Key committee recommendations, which are cogently drafted to assist decision-making, are considered as separate agenda items by the corporation.

69 As stated in the self-assessment, governors are very well informed about the college's finances. The corporation has approved the college's financial strategy. All governors receive the monthly management accounts. The finance and general purposes committee and full corporation consider the college's financial reports which include activities of the college's company. Financial implications are thoroughly

reviewed. The remuneration committee has considered and advised the full corporation on awards to the senior management team. Governors have not set clear criteria or targets against which the performance of all managers can be appraised.

70 The corporation has adopted sound policies for openness and accountability, which include standing orders, the code of conduct, and a 'whistleblowing' policy. Policies have been reviewed and appropriately modified to address issues and concerns as they emerge within the sector. Governors annually update a register of interests which has been extended to senior staff. Agendas, papers and minutes, except confidential items, are available for public inspection.

71 The college's solicitors provide efficient clerking arrangements under a separate contract. Governors are very supportive of these arrangements. They have established good procedures for appraising the clerk who services all committees and receives good administrative support. Agendas and supporting papers are well organised and circulated in good time. Governors' discussions and decisions are well minuted.

Management
Grade 2

72 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered that by the time of the inspection, progress had been made to rectify some weaknesses.

Key strengths
- strong leadership
- clear management structures and lines of accountability
- effective strategic and operational planning

- good internal communications

- effective financial management

- strong external links and partnerships

- thorough monitoring of health and safety

Weaknesses

- some deficiencies in management information

- unsuitable financial software

- insufficient monitoring of the equal opportunities policy

73   Since the previous inspection the college has improved the effectiveness of its management arrangements. Strong leadership by senior managers has enabled the college to improve its financial position significantly, to undertake necessary efficiency measures and achieve a clear sense of direction to meet the needs of the local community. Staff appreciate the open and consultative management style. Senior and middle management roles and responsibilities are clearly assigned and understood. There are regular management meetings at executive, divisional and programme area levels. Agendas, minutes and action points are clear. The activities of management, operational and project groups enable the college to function effectively. The self-assessment notes that the college has improved its overall performance during the last three years against targets linked to a range of performance indicators. It also acknowledges that student achievement and retention rates within and across programme areas remain uneven. Managers have established plans which seek to improve these areas of fluctuating performance.

74   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that strategic and operational planning is effective. The college has a strong tradition of sound business planning. A detailed and

well-researched analysis of local needs supports the current strategic plan which contains a clear set of aims and targets. Staff have been closely consulted during the production of the strategic plan. Key objectives are identified for each area of the college. Each set of objectives has a related operating statement, cross-referenced to the relevant action points from the self-assessment report. Not all operating statements contain measurable targets. Clear targets are set for student enrolments, FEFC funding units and student retention and achievement, and are monitored regularly.

75   Communications within the college are good. The principal holds regular briefing sessions for all staff. A monthly staff newsletter provides useful updates on a wide range of college issues. Increasing use is made of electronic mail and the college intranet. The college recognises that communications with some of the college's centres in the community are unsatisfactory.

76   The self-assessment recognises that the college has extensive and effective external links. There are strong partnership arrangements with Nottinghamshire County Council, the LEA and schools. Through the Nottinghamshire Lifelong Learning Partnership the college works co-operatively with two other colleges. Considerable emphasis is given to work on the economic and community regeneration of the former coalfield areas. The college works closely with the North Nottinghamshire TEC, Bassetlaw Development Agency and major local employers to deliver employment-related skills training. Collaboration with the regional health services is developing.

77   The college has recognised the need to improve the availability of, and access to, computerised management information. A high level of staff turnover in the management information unit has hindered the provision of timely reports for managers. By the time of the

inspection the situation was improving. Managers now have on-line access to up-to-date information on, for example, student enrolments and retention rates. The recent introduction of specialist software for analysing students' achievements enables more accurate and useful data to be obtained. However, other sources of data, for example relating to entry qualifications and student destinations, are less easy to obtain.

78   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The executive team has taken successful action to bring about the financial recovery of the college. The strategic and operational plans have targets to help to maintain the sound financial footing now established. The college has established a comprehensive course-costing model which is regularly updated. It allows management to monitor the college's performance against unit targets and costs of delivery. The college has a good history of achieving unit targets. Clear and timely management accounts are produced monthly and are regularly considered by the college executive and governors. These reports include results for the college's company. The finance software is not suitable for the needs of the college. The information needs of budget holders cannot readily be met and the alternative processes adopted to maintain tight budgetary control are time-consuming and inefficient. The finance team is appropriately resourced. The financial regulations are comprehensive. Any control concerns raised by college auditors have been addressed promptly by management.

79   The college promotes and monitors thoroughly issues affecting health and safety. The health and safety policy is reviewed annually. A health and safety management group, chaired by the principal, meets each month. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out at regular intervals and appropriate training is provided for staff. Equal opportunities is a standing item on the agenda of the academic board but there is no annual report which examines equal opportunities issues. There is insufficiently detailed monitoring of the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy. Reporting on equal opportunity matters to the corporation is inadequate.

Conclusions

80   The self-assessment report prepared by the college is the third to be produced under the current inspection framework. It provided a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. There was good use of evidence to support each judgement including the extensive use of the results of lesson observations and of students' achievements which were compared with FEFC benchmarking data. An update on the self-assessment produced shortly before the inspection showed that progress had been made to remedy many of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded one curriculum area a higher grade than the college and agreed with the other grades. Inspectors awarded two cross-college areas higher grades than the college and agreed with the other grades.

81   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 (November 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	14
19-24 years	12
25+ years	72
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	27
Level 2 (intermediate)	28
Level 3 (advanced)	21
Level 4/5 (higher)	3
Level not specified	21
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	220	2,208	25
Agriculture	134	194	3
Construction	47	294	4
Engineering	52	1,030	11
Business	175	883	11
Hotel and catering	118	334	5
Health and community care	225	1,640	20
Art and design	107	413	5
Humanities	104	786	9
Basic education	169	449	7
Total	1,351	8,231	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 16% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 2000)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	95	0	63	158
Supporting direct learning contact	31	0	0	31
Other support	92	0	0	92
Total	218	0	63	281

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Income	£8,186,000	£8,361,000	£8,869,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.16	£16.84*	£17.37
Payroll as a proportion of income	54%	59%	64%
Achievement of funding target	102%	102%	100%
Diversity of income	21%	22%	22%
Operating surplus	£790,000	£151,000	£41,000

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

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)
Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	*1999*	*2000*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
1	Number of starters	299	515	633	1,541	1,505	1,562
	Retention (%)	79	82	68	69	71	67
	Achievement (%)	70	67	81	75	75	84
2	Number of starters	710	687	868	1,450	1,545	1,796
	Retention (%)	77	71	72	67	68	78
	Achievement (%)	67	55	78	79	68	85
3	Number of starters	515	562	616	895	1,025	1,287
	Retention (%)	63	69	71	70	75	75
	Achievement (%)	68	52	75	68	63	77
4 or 5	Number of starters	2	15	12	209	205	169
	Retention (%)	0	80	100	70	74	82
	Achievement (%)	n/a	82	73	91	62	74
Short courses	Number of starters	441	504	696	2,815	3,473	4,913
	Retention (%)	97	96	93	96	95	92
	Achievement (%)	91	76	93	92	85	94
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	96	71	247	236	568	599
	Retention (%)	51	58	79	76	79	73
	Achievement (%)	79	28	83	59	67	90

Source: ISR

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