

Rowley Regis College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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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.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Rowley Regis College

West Midlands Region

Inspected April 1999

Rowley Regis College is a sixth form college in the borough of Sandwell in the Black Country between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. It is one of a group of colleges which recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. The college's self-assessment involved all staff. It was built up from the reports of individual teams, included the results of lesson observation and made extensive use of surveys of students' perceptions. The report was moderated by senior managers and approved by the corporation. Inspectors agreed with some judgements in the report but considered that the significance of the weaknesses had been underestimated. Insufficient attention had been given to the importance of students' retention and achievements. Too much weight was awarded to recent developments, the effectiveness of which could not yet be judged.

A new senior management team has come into office recently and has begun to address many of the college's problems. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of many of their actions. The open and consultative style of the new management has been welcomed by staff. The number of full-time students has declined recently. The college has been successful in increasing the numbers of part-time students and developing provision at centres at a distance from the college. This is helping to widen participation. This provision, which is mostly in the areas of IT and business, is with

community and commercial organisations and through collaborative partnerships. It accounts for about 25% of the college's provision. Work in four of the FEFC's programme areas was inspected and six grades were awarded. The quality of teaching in IT and computing and science was unsatisfactory. In the weakest lessons, teachers failed to take account of the needs of the wide range of students' ability, and did not check students' learning sufficiently. Achievement and retention rates are poor on some courses. Students' achievements declined significantly in 1998. Students generally receive impartial guidance before enrolment. There is effective induction and a comprehensive and effective range of career services. Major investment has taken place to improve accommodation. There are many useful links with local groups. The governors have failed to pay due attention to the college's financial health, and financial management is weak. Although quality assurance arrangements have improved they have not been effective in improving students' achievements. The college should improve: retention and achievement rates; the rigour of quality assurance; the understanding and use of added value measures; course reviews; the use of performance indicators; the system for staff appraisal; arrangements to offer students additional support; access for students with restricted mobility; the deployment of staff; financial management; the corporation's monitoring of college finances; and the quality of the college's educational performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	4	Support for students	3
Biology, chemistry and physics	4	General resources	2
Business studies and accounting	3	Quality assurance	4
Art and design and performing arts	2	Governance	4
English and communications	3	Management	4
Law, psychology and sociology	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Rowley Regis College is in the borough of Sandwell in the Black Country between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. It was founded in 1974 as an open access sixth form college. In recent years it has developed a large community provision for adult students. The college occupies a single site in extensive grounds. The buildings, which date from 1962, have been adapted and refurbished. Recent developments include new information technology (IT) workshops, improvements in art and design and performing arts, an enterprise centre and a day nursery.

2 The college draws students principally from the boroughs of Sandwell and Dudley, in both of which there are low post-16 participation rates and modest rates of achievements for school pupils at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). The college enrolls many students from socially deprived areas in its immediate vicinity. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. There are three general further education colleges, a sixth form college and a tertiary college serving the local area. There are several schools in both Sandwell and Dudley with sixth forms. The college has established partnerships with local schools, the local authority, local employers, the training and enterprise council (TEC) and others.

3 The college employs 84 full-time equivalent staff. The curriculum is organised into 21 curriculum teams. In November 1998, there was a total of 503 full-time and 863 part-time students. In recent years there has been a decline in full-time students and a growth in part-time students. The college has many general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and some general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses. The largest curriculum areas are science and

humanities. There is a substantial range of courses in the community, some of which are provided by partners, particularly in IT and business.

4 The local economy's share of manufacturing industry is well below the national average for high technology industries. The services sector is relatively small. There has been some growth in wholesale and retail businesses but areas such as financial services and computer related services are underdeveloped. There is a generally recognised need to raise the skills of the local workforce in order to meet rising technical demands from industry. The local unemployment rate in July 1998 was 7.2% compared with 4.8% for the West Midlands region. A quarter of the unemployed were under 25 and 48% have been out of work for six months.

5 The college's mission is 'to raise the aspirations, achievements and qualifications' for all members of the community over 16. To achieve this, it has extended its provision for adult students, developed its provision in the community and evening and weekend courses. There is an emphasis upon widening participation, particularly to meet the education and training needs of the area which the college serves. The college has sought to ensure that the location and timing of its courses in the community enable ready access by students.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 26 April 1999. Two weeks earlier the college's collaborative provision was inspected. Before the inspection, inspectors studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. For the two years 1996 and 1997, data contained in the FEFC individualised student record (ISR) were used to provide data on students' achievements.

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The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1998. These were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The data were found to be mostly accurate but some under-reporting of students' withdrawals and achievements was found, and this was confirmed during the inspection of collaborative provision.

7 This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

8 The college was notified in February 1999 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 56 days. They observed 78 lessons, scrutinised students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, students, employers, and representatives of schools, Sandwell TEC and local community organisations.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 78 lessons inspected, 60% were judged to be good or outstanding and 7% were judged to be less than satisfactory or poor. This profile compares unfavourably with the average of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	9	19	11	3	0	42
GCSE	0	3	4	2	0	9
GNVQ	1	3	5	0	0	9
Other vocational	0	6	3	0	0	9
Other, including higher education	1	5	3	0	0	9
Total (No.)	11	36	26	5	0	78
Total (%)	14	46	33	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

Note: includes one tutorial

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Rowley Regis College	9.8	78
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 4

11 Fourteen lessons were observed, at the main site and seven other sites where there was collaborative provision. The courses inspected were GCE A level computing, GCSE IT and RSA Examinations Board (RSA) computer literacy and information technology. The college's self-assessment report identified many of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision but did not recognise some significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the effective contribution of part-time courses to widen participation
- good-quality course materials
- efficient and flexible use of the IT centre

Weaknesses

- the lack of specialist staff for computing
- the restricted breadth and depth of the curriculum
- the low retention and achievement rates
- poor and erratic attendance in some classes
- lack of access to up-to-date resources for computing

12 The self-assessment did not recognise as a weakness the small range of computing and IT courses which the college offers. There are no full-time vocational courses and recruitment to the GCSE IT course and other full-time courses has been irregular. Recent developments in part-time courses enable students to progress from foundation to advanced level study. Numbers enrolling on part-time courses have increased significantly between 1996-97 and 1997-98. Around 50 students enrolled on full-time computing courses in September 1998. Approximately 1,200 students studied RSA

computer literacy and information technology during 1997-98. The collaborative provision responds effectively to the needs of the local community. One example of this, run in collaboration with the YMCA, is the 'Foyer' project. This offers homeless young people IT and life skills training while they are staying at the YMCA.

13 Of the 14 lessons observed, seven were judged to be good. This is lower than the national figure for the area in 1997-98. In some lessons, teachers failed to vary their teaching methods appropriately. Attendance is often poor and some lessons were interrupted by the late arrival of students. Students are attentive in lessons. As identified in the self-assessment, they value the support they receive from staff both during and outside lessons. Computing students are not adequately introduced to developments in computing such as networks or the internet. Full-time courses have detailed schemes of work. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the effective use of learning materials for part-time courses is a strength. Most students value the opportunity the materials give them to work at their own pace. However, some students had difficulty understanding the language in which they were written. A few students were not able to make effective use of the prolonged periods of time given to them for self-directed study. Homework is set regularly for GCE A level first-year students. Monthly tests monitor GCE A level students' progress. Some students consistently fail to hand in work. Students' work is marked to appropriate standards but teachers' comments on completed assignments are brief. In some cases, teachers' feedback on students' work is inadequate.

14 Poor pass rates and completion rates were identified as a weakness by the college. Pass rates on GCE A level computing courses are declining. In 1998, only 50% of students who completed the course gained the qualification. Pass rates on RSA computer literacy and

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information technology courses have improved since 1996 but they are still below the national average. Retention rates are also unsatisfactory. In 1998, only 71% of RSA computer literacy and information technology students completed the course. The completion rate for GCE A level computing in 1998 was 63%.

15 A broad range of staff teach the part-time courses. The shortage of computing specialists to teach full-time courses was not identified in the self-assessment report. The organisation, staffing and resources of the recently refurbished IT centre, which allow a diverse range of activities to take place simultaneously, is identified as a strength by the college and inspectors agreed. Practical components of full-time computing courses are taught in the IT centre which has up-to-date computers and a range of modern software. The computers are

not networked and there is insufficient access to the internet. Students can use the centre outside formal teaching times. The self-assessment did not recognise that the college lacks appropriate resources to teach some aspects of the curriculum. At one centre in the community lecturers had to use simulation to demonstrate electronic mail. GCE A level students learned about the internet in theory lessons but no practical demonstrations were given. The college uses 'portable classrooms' for some of its teaching in the community. Portable computers, printers, course handbooks and other teaching materials are taken from site to site to enable courses to be taught at community venues. Some of these classes were observed taking place at the YMCA and in a library.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in computing and information technology, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Pitman data processing intermediate	2	Expected completions	*	36	108
		Retention (%)	*	100	87
		Achievement (%)	*	53	59
RSA computer literacy and information technology (short)	2	Expected completions	38	251	1,170
		Retention (%)	71	78	71
		Achievement (%)	4	51	48
RSA computer literacy and information technology (one year)	2	Expected completions	72	242	*
		Retention (%)	54	63	*
		Achievement (%)	20	36	*
GCE A level computing	3	Expected completions	22	16	10
		Retention (%)	55	63	63
		Achievement (%)	91	56	50

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

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Biology, Chemistry and Physics

Grade 4

16 Fourteen lessons were observed, covering all three subjects. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment recognised many of the strengths and weaknesses. It did not, however, identify sufficiently areas of poor students' retention and achievements and underestimated the value of recent improvements to laboratories.

Key strengths

- good use of a variety of teaching aids
- students' competent practical work
- good students' achievements in GCE A level physics

Weaknesses

- teaching not meeting the wide range of students' abilities
- low retention rates on some courses
- pass rates on some courses below the national average
- little work experience and extra-curricular science activities
- some students enrolled on courses inappropriate for their ability

17 The college offers a broad range of GCSE, GCE A/AS level courses and a GNVQ advanced science course. The self-assessment report recognised as a weakness the absence of evening and access provision. Course management includes regular, minuted meetings involving both teachers and technicians.

18 The teaching is well planned to give a good coverage of the syllabus. Detailed schemes of work, well adapted to modular courses, are shared with students. Assessments of practical work include assessment criteria and involve experiments which meet the requirements of the syllabus. Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching aids. In a chemistry lesson, the

teacher made good use of colourful demonstrations to illustrate the effect of changes in concentration and temperature on the position of equilibrium. The use of a computer simulation followed by typical examination questions, consolidated this work. Biologists make extensive use of videos in teaching. Students' practical work is well integrated with other aspects of their courses and students paid appropriate attention to safety. In physics, students devise experiments on optical phenomena. Chemistry students use colorimeters in quantitative experiments. Although teachers recognise the wide range of abilities in some classes, their teaching methods do not always take account of this. In the weaker lessons the pace of work was slow, and teachers made excessive use of duplicated worksheets or note copying without making sufficient checks on individual students' understanding. The self-assessment identified the need to provide additional workshop support for individual students. Currently, this is limited to occasional lunchtime support before examinations. Practical assignments are thoroughly assessed. Homework is set and marked regularly. The comments on biology homework are detailed and supportive. In physics, the model answers to physics questions supplied by teachers are valuable, but in marking students' work teachers do not always indicate clearly why students have lost marks.

19 Students valued a recent opportunity to meet Russian cosmonauts who visited the college to give an illustrated talk about space flight. There have been few other opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. The department has identified the need to develop links with local industry to increase students' opportunities to undertake science-related work experience.

20 Resources are adequate. The updated self-assessment did not recognise the recent improvements in equipment and IT. The two recently refurbished biology laboratories are

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attractive working environments but the other laboratory is suitable only for certain kinds of practical work. Students in wheelchairs cannot use the physics laboratory. Wall displays show the range of recent research in the sciences and indicate the subject identity of each area. Teachers are experienced and have a sound knowledge of the subjects which they teach. Staff who have recently taken responsibility for teaching physics have received no specific in-service training. The experienced technicians provide good support.

21 Retention for most courses was near to the national averages in 1997 but declined in 1998. In physics retention levels are well below the national average. Students with a poor attendance record have remained on courses although they are unlikely to pass the examination. Pass rates for those students who complete GCE A level physics courses are above

the national averages but those for chemistry are slightly below. The proportion of students achieving higher grades in GCE A level physics in 1998 was well below the national average. In both subjects, results are consistently better than those predicted on the basis of GCSE grades at entry. In GCE A level biological subjects and GCSE science, which have the majority of science students, achievements are considerably lower than the national averages and are declining. In both of these areas there are students enrolled on courses which are inappropriate for their level of ability. The self-assessment report did not identify this as a weakness. Numbers studying the GNVQ advanced science are small and achievement is below average. Some students who did not achieve a pass last year have since passed some units of the course.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in biology, chemistry and physics, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE sciences	2	Expected completions	*	36	45
		Retention (%)	*	75	62
		Achievement (%)	*	26	19
GCE A level biological subjects	3	Expected completions	63	40	60
		Retention (%)	67	78	70
		Achievement (%)	76	56	40
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	38	25	30
		Retention (%)	71	80	63
		Achievement (%)	76	78	74
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	26	16	26
		Retention (%)	85	69	50
		Achievement (%)	86	100	85

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

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies and Accounting

Grade 3

22 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering business studies, accounting, administration and office technology courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but considered that there was insufficient analysis of achievement and retention.

Key strengths

- well-planned and highly supportive teaching
- well-organised, constructive assessment and feedback on students' coursework
- effective integration of work experience with vocational courses
- good pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses
- good opportunities for all students to gain additional qualifications

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on short programmes
- lack of variety in teaching methods used on GCE A level courses
- low expectations of students' oral and written communication skills
- lack of individual review of students' progress on courses in collaborative provision
- some students on programmes inappropriate to their ability

23 The college offers a broad range of business studies courses at intermediate and advanced level, including GNVQ, GCE A level in business studies and accounting, national vocational qualification (NVQ) business administration and the Association of Accounting Technicians foundation programme.

Recent developments include short courses in office skills. The number of students taking short courses on wordprocessing and text processing increased significantly from 1997 to 1998, primarily through expansion of provision in the community. Courses do not meet the needs of entry and level 1 students.

24 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teaching is well planned and supportive. Teachers use appropriate methods, including skilful use of questioning, to extend students' interest, knowledge and skills. Case studies relate theory to commercial contexts. Students are encouraged to discuss critically some of the ideas presented. Some students demonstrate good levels of vocational knowledge and skills. The self-assessment recognised that some teachers fail to vary their teaching methods appropriately on GCE A level courses. Students' poor oral and written communication skills are often not identified in classroom and assessed work. Students make effective use of IT to prepare coursework. An advanced level GNVQ business second-year student prepared a presentation in the IT centre. She used a commercial package on a laptop computer to project onto a screen in a classroom. This use of key skills in IT provided a good preparation for work. The lack of workshops means that students rely heavily on informal support from teachers. Assessment and feedback of students' work are effectively managed. Teachers' feedback ensures that students are clear about their individual achievements and future needs. Students speak highly of the encouragement they receive. On short courses, the use of specialist markers ensures that assessment is accurate, consistent and timely. The lack of individual feedback and review for students on courses in collaborative provision means that they are unsure about their achievements and progress.

25 There were good pass rates on GNVQ intermediate business courses and on NVQ level 3 administration and management courses in

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1998. Pass rates on short courses were consistently below national averages in 1997 and 1998. For example, pass rates on level 1 wordprocessing courses were 55% and 20% in 1997 and 1998, respectively. There were low pass rates on information business technology level 2 in 1997 and 1998, and for level 2 wordprocessing in 1998. Consistently poor pass rates on GCSE accounting and business studies courses resulted in the withdrawal of these courses in 1998. Retention on GCE A level courses varied significantly from 1996 to 1998. For example, retention on GCE A level business studies and accounting courses was 58% in 1996 and 67% in 1998.

26 There is a wide range of courses at level 3. The lack of foundation level courses means that some students are inappropriately placed on intermediate and advanced level courses. Some GNVQ advanced level students take additional advanced level courses, which they subsequently find too demanding. Flexible attendance arrangements for short courses enable students to take courses at times to suit them. As the self-assessment indicated, the college makes good use of its community-wide links with the public and private sector to provide extensive work experience for vocational students. Assessed activities help students to identify the clear links between their course and vocational practice. Students on business and accounting courses have few opportunities to work with students from other courses who are studying similar topics.

27 Most accommodation for business courses is satisfactory and well used. The failure to use screens for overhead projection means that some students experienced difficulty in taking notes. Students' access to specialist facilities in the resource centre is restricted by its use for general teaching. Business studies make good use of IT equipment in the resource centre. All collaborative provision tutors are required to attain appropriate qualifications for the courses that they teach, and also to gain formal teaching

or IT qualifications. Good-quality workbooks for short courses ensure that students are able to work at their own pace. These are not shared across course teams.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Short programmes in wordprocessing	1	Expected completions	*	118	112
		Retention (%)	*	99	85
		Achievement (%)	*	55	20
Integrated business technology	2	Expected completions	*	45	286
		Retention (%)	*	93	59
		Achievement (%)	*	45	23
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Expected completions	20	28	26
		Retention (%)	80	57	81
		Achievement (%)	88	81	71
GCE A level	3	Expected completions	53	57	60
		Retention (%)	58	84	67
		Achievement (%)	76	70	75
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	41	24	26
		Retention (%)	66	79	81
		Achievement (%)	73	88	71
NVQ administration and management	3	Expected completions	*	*	59
		Retention (%)	*	*	61
		Achievement (%)	*	*	69
NVQ training and development	3	Expected completions	*	*	129
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	*	*	39

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

*courses not offered

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design and Performing Arts

Grade 2

28 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. The inspection covered GCE A/AS level, GNVQ, GCSE and BTEC courses in art and design, music, music technology, popular music, performing arts, dance and theatre studies. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in self-assessment report but considered that it did not address the failures to meet targets for recruitment or to take steps to improve retention.

Key strengths

- the broad range of staff expertise
- imaginative and demanding tasks set for students
- the consistently good achievements in music, performing arts and dance
- high-quality artwork
- effective use of the new art space
- good resources

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention
- inefficient small classes on some courses

29 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of teaching and learning is a strength. Staff are effective in dealing with different groups of students and in classroom management. Teaching concentrates on the development of skills through the careful planning of projects and the use of clear and detailed handouts. The stimulating variety of media and materials used in art allows students to experiment with metal, fabric, wood, papier mâché, plastics, junk materials, print making and graphic programmes as well as paper and paint. Students' work is very varied and individual. It is displayed with justifiable pride

throughout the college. Students demonstrate good levels of skills and expertise. For example, one student could competently explain the relative merits of different methods of sequencing music on a computer. Students' practical work is based on a wide variety of supporting research. They visit galleries and exhibitions and see the work of professional performance companies. While most teachers' marking is precise and informative, there were a few examples of inadequate marking which did not assist students to improve their work.

30 Targets are set for the improvement of retention and achievement and these are closely reviewed at an annual planning day.

Achievement is improving and there have been consistently good results in performing arts, music and dance, including 100% pass rates in 1998. In theatre studies, results have been poor over the past two years and the subject has now been dropped. Retention was 62% in 1998 in GCE A level art courses and the pass rate was 84%. Students do achieve better than their GCSE grades at entry predict and achievement is monitored against a target minimum grade. Students' achievements are recognised and valued. For example, the Sandwell Urban Growing Spaces project provided students with an exciting opportunity to design a logo for allotments. The prize-winning entry received publicity in the local press. Students gain places in higher education.

31 The departments offer a wide range of courses across two levels. There is a restricted offer of places in art at level 2 and GNVQ does not recruit well. Low enrolments this year, 50% of targets in both areas, have left many classes with very low numbers. Only popular music has recruited well. The departments face challenges in ensuring effective future recruitment. Efforts are being made to improve liaison with schools and to consider other course offers. Small teams work effectively on planning and discussion of the management within the departments. Students are provided with good

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materials that identify the nature of their course and its particular demands. Teachers are beginning to make good use of the opportunities for collaboration across the area. Music technology students were able to use graphic packages to design a compact disc cover.

32 The accommodation for the department has much improved since the previous inspection. The art department is housed in one building that draws together all its varied facilities, allowing students to use them easily. The building has been transformed into a very attractive space that offers students discrete work areas, quiet study areas and larger spaces for working on a grander scale. Dance is

housed in a clean spacious hall, and music has two good spaces well equipped with computers and a virtual studio for use in music technology. Teachers have a wide range of complementary skills in music technology, graphics and textiles in addition to painting and drawing and three-dimensional artwork, dance, music and drama. Their relevant industrial and specialist knowledge enriches their teaching. Several are current practitioners in their art form. The library has a particularly good bookstock for art. This is well used by both staff and students. Drama, music and dance students have access to a good stock of play texts, scores and dance videos.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art and design and performing arts, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level art	3	Expected completions	45	31	65
		Retention (%)	46	62	62
		Achievement (%)	70	73	84
Performing arts courses; dance, music, performing arts and theatre studies	3	Expected completions	43	43	47
		Retention (%)	69	72	65
		Achievement (%)	100	89	80

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

Curriculum Areas

English and Communications

Grade 3

33 Twelve lessons were inspected. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that other strengths had been overstated and that some additional strengths and weaknesses had not been recognised.

Key strengths

- a good and developing range of provision
- development of GCE A level students' ability to offer critical and constructive opinions
- thorough and constructive marking of students' work
- consistently good achievement in GCE A level English

Weaknesses

- failure of teachers to pay sufficient attention to the learning needs of the whole ability range
- insufficiently detailed schemes of work
- some poor achievement at GCSE
- declining achievement in GCE A level communications
- some poor punctuality, attendance and retention

34 Students are able to choose from a good range of courses, a strength identified in the self-assessment. The college recruits well to GCE A level English literature, offers a combined GCE A level English language and literature course and GCE A level communications. The college has introduced Wordpower recently. College staff teach the first year of a BA English literature degree which enables local students to proceed to higher education. The curriculum is reviewed and the team works actively to broaden its range.

35 GCE A level students are encouraged to formulate opinions and develop a critical approach. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. They are expected to express their own views and provide the evidence to support them. In a GCE A level English literature lesson, second-year students watched a television version of a Shakespeare play. They were then given newspaper reviews about the production and encouraged to contribute their opinions. All students participated in a lively and constructive discussion which consolidated their previous learning and extended their understanding. In a GCE A level communications lesson, a first-year group of students were required to make editorial decisions about the content and running order of a local radio news programme. Students worked purposefully and enthusiastically in small groups to agree the content and decide priorities. In weaker lessons, teachers dominated discussions, provided insufficient opportunities for students to participate and made few checks on students' understanding. In one lesson students read parts from a play but did not participate in discussion and the teacher even answered the questions posed before giving students the opportunity to respond. No task was set either in the lesson or for homework. In some lessons, teachers used methods which did not take account of the needs of students of varying abilities. Schemes of work are insufficiently detailed. They do not define the aims, objectives and teaching methods required. Nevertheless, the majority of GCE A level students are enthusiastic about their learning and many are fired by the ardour of their tutors for the subject they are studying. A good proportion progress to related subjects in higher education. Students' work is marked conscientiously and thoroughly. Teachers' comprehensive and constructive comments provide individual students with clear guidance about how to build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses.

Curriculum Areas

36 Inspectors agreed with the assessment that the consistently good achievement in GCE A level English is a strength. Results are also good in GCE A level communications, although they declined in 1998. Arrangements for monitoring coursework and ensuring that students' work is submitted on time have been strengthened. The self-assessment report identified as a weakness some poor achievement in GCSE English. In response, Wordpower has been introduced as an alternative for some students. During 1997-98, 11 students were transferred from GCSE to this course and 10 achieved the qualification. Further consideration needs to be given to the provision of alternatives for students for whom GCSE English is inappropriate. More effective individual guidance and advice is required.

Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that retention, poor punctuality and attendance are weaknesses which need to be addressed across all courses. Students are being encouraged to use IT in the production of coursework.

37 The college provides students with the set texts required for examination work. There are sufficient audiovisual resources. Many library books for English are dated. The improved accommodation for communications, which includes an editing suite, provides a good environment for learning. The accommodation for English is poor. An attempt is made to brighten rooms in need of redecoration with subject-related wall displays. Soundproofing in some rooms is poor. Noise from corridors and adjoining rooms is distracting. Some rooms are too small for the size of classes using them.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English language	2	Expected completions	146	146	138
		Retention (%)	75	80	67
		Achievement (%)	28	52	38
GCSE English literature	2	Expected completions	7	97	15
		Retention (%)	71	85	80
		Achievement (%)	43	47	33
GCE A level communications	3	Expected completions	102	84	94
		Retention (%)	80	82	72
		Achievement (%)	67	79	69
GCE A level English language	3	Expected completions	94	73	54
		Retention (%)	67	79	83
		Achievement (%)	81	85	100
GCE A level English literature	3	Expected completions	25	36	36
		Retention (%)	88	75	81
		Achievement (%)	95	93	90

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

Curriculum Areas

Law, Psychology and Sociology

Grade 3

38 Inspectors observed 11 GCSE and GCE A/AS level lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but found weaknesses in teaching which had not been recognised.

Key strengths

- well-planned programmes of study
- appropriate and carefully marked assignments
- high pass rates in GCE A level law
- good progression to higher education

Weaknesses

- poor attendance in a few lessons
- insufficient checking of students' learning in some lessons
- expectations too low in some lessons
- low retention rates

39 The college offers GCSE courses in law and sociology, and GCE AS/A level courses in law, psychology and sociology. Some courses in law and psychology are offered in the evening. As the self-assessment report indicated, all the courses have extensive schemes of work, with useful handbooks and other guidance materials for students.

40 The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that lessons are carefully planned as part of a well-prepared sequence of study. Teachers give clear and well-structured explanations of topics and make good use of teaching aids. The treatment of contentious topics is balanced and students are encouraged to read widely. Students are given good opportunities to consolidate and develop their understanding, and to practise their skills. Teachers checked that students understood what they had learned, and gave

additional help where necessary. In a law lesson the teacher approached a complex topic in logical stages, giving clear spoken explanations and a well-prepared handout to students. Students were enthusiastic, made good progress and consolidated their learning. In weaker lessons, students listened to expositions by teachers, read extensive handout materials and watched video-tape recordings. Opportunities to ask questions, to assimilate and practise what they had learned were insufficient. In some lessons, teachers did not check how much students had understood and their expectations were too low. Students were given insufficient opportunities to join in debates. Teachers often provided students with conclusions which they could have been expected to work out for themselves. The self-assessment did not note these weaknesses in teaching.

41 Students are attentive and responsive in class, contribute willingly to discussions, and work co-operatively in groups when required to do so. Attendance is below average overall. It is very good in some lessons and poor in a few. Clear guidance is given on what is required in assignments and marking of coursework is careful. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that students are clearly informed of the standard of their work and how it can be improved. Students achieve appropriate standards in their written work. Students' responses to questionnaires indicate that they are appreciative of many aspects of their experience but are critical of some teaching methods.

42 Recruitment to GCSE and GCE A level has fallen in the last three years, and GCSE courses are not offered in all subjects every year. Retention and pass rates on GCSE courses fluctuate around the national average. As the self-assessment acknowledged, retention rates on GCE A level courses are often low. Those for GCE A level psychology declined from 1996 to well below the national average in 1998. Pass

Curriculum Areas

rates and the proportion of students achieving the higher grades A to C in GCE A/AS level law courses have consistently exceeded the national averages for sixth form colleges. In 1998, 71% of those who completed the GCE A level courses in law achieved the higher grades A to C. Pass rates in GCE A level courses in psychology and sociology have risen in the last three years from a low base but remain below national average. Law students for GCE A level have consistently achieved significantly better than predicted from their GCSE grades at entry and students of psychology and sociology have performed as expected. Many students who successfully complete GCE A level progress to higher education.

43 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teachers are suitably qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. The teaching and learning of subjects benefit from well-decorated and furnished specialist accommodation with displays, including those of students' work. Classrooms are well equipped with teaching aids. There is a good range of handouts, textbooks and other published material and videotapes. Departmental collections and the library, which has a useful collection of up-to-date material, support students' learning. The size of the stock does not reflect the number of students currently studying the different subjects. As the self-assessment acknowledged, students do not use the library as much as they should.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of achievement and retention rates in law, psychology and sociology, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE law	2	Expected completions	26	26	17
		Retention (%)	69	88	100
		Achievement (%)	56	26	20
GCSE psychology	2	Expected completions	24	10	*
		Retention (%)	96	80	*
		Achievement (%)	48	50	*
GCSE sociology	2	Expected completions	21	14	*
		Retention (%)	62	64	*
		Achievement (%)	54	67	*
GCE A/AS level law	3	Expected completions	*	32	57
		Retention (%)	*	81	92
		Achievement (%)	*	73	85
GCE A level law	3	Expected completions	58	40	19
		Retention (%)	69	70	78
		Achievement (%)	84	86	93
GCE A level psychology	3	Expected completions	86	65	48
		Retention (%)	74	58	48
		Achievement (%)	56	76	83
GCE A level sociology	3	Expected completions	79	39	20
		Retention (%)	62	79	70
		Achievement (%)	65	65	86

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

*courses not offered

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

44 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They found some other strengths and weaknesses which the college had not recognised. The college has already started to take action to rectify several weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective induction
- impartial pre-course advice and guidance
- effective careers guidance for higher education and employment
- thorough systems to monitor students' progress
- wide range of useful student services

Weaknesses

- failure of recruitment methods to prevent a decline in full-time enrolments
- an ineffective system for identifying additional learning support
- failure to improve retention
- unclear action plans to improve students' performance

45 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that prospective students receive impartial advice and guidance before enrolment. Where appropriate, courses at other colleges are considered and recommended. Recruitment methods include extensive liaison with local schools, open and 'taster' days, advertisements on local radio and a home page on the internet. Prospectuses and course leaflets are informative and attractive. Recruitment methods have failed to prevent a decline in full-time enrolments, although part-time enrolments have grown. Some students are enrolled on inappropriate

courses. There are well-organised procedures for admissions. All prospective full-time students receive an interview before enrolment. Students confirm that the application and interview procedures are informative. They are particularly appreciative of the friendly approach of staff.

46 The college has mostly effective enrolment and thorough induction arrangements. During enrolment teachers confirm each student's course or give guidance on alternative courses. There is a comprehensive system for handling late enrolments. Induction is thorough and covers both college and course-related issues. Students' satisfaction with induction is high and they confirm that it helped them to settle in well. All tutors are provided with enrolment and induction training and a checklist to ensure that they follow common procedures. Students receive a copy of an informative and comprehensive diary and handbook at enrolment.

47 There are clear arrangements for tutorials. All full-time students receive a weekly group tutorial, a half-termly individual interview and a termly review session. All students are allocated a tutor. For part-time students this is the class teacher. The self-assessment identified that the quality of tutorials is uneven and attendance is unsatisfactory. Inspectors found that most tutorials were good but agreed that attendance was low. Schemes of work for tutorials consist only of a list of topics for lessons. The system for monitoring students' progress is thorough and, where appropriate, parents are kept informed. Actions planned as a result of issues identified from the review of progress are often unclear and lack target dates. Invitations to parents' evenings are provided in minority community languages. The college has attempted to improve retention but on many courses it remains low.

48 The college provides a range of adapted materials and services to meet the needs of students requiring additional learning support.

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Students obtain support through timetabled group sessions, their programmes of study, individual appointments or by calling at the learning support centre. Tutors are not systematically informed of students' progress or whether they attend additional support sessions. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the system to identify students' requirements for additional learning support is not effective and is a weakness. The college relies mainly on analysis of application forms and the students' own or tutor referral. This system identified only a small number of students in need of support and only half of these receive assistance. The college has recently opened a learning support centre and appointed additional learning support staff to address this.

49 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that it provides effective support to students applying for higher education and employment. There is a clear policy for careers education and guidance, helpful student packs on how to apply for higher education and regular careers bulletins which indicate employment opportunities. Careers education and guidance are a key part of the tutorial programme. There is a small but well-resourced centre for careers with well-organised and up-to-date information. This includes software packages, books and university prospectuses. There is a partnership agreement with the local careers service, whose adviser gives guidance interviews and careers talks. After publication of examination results the college, in partnership with the careers service, offers guidance on courses and career options to students and their parents.

50 The student services area provides helpful guidance for students. Services include advice and assistance on student travel arrangements, social security and accommodation. Students who had used these services considered that they had met their requirements well. The self-assessment recognised as a weakness that there

was no personal counselling service. The college appointed a counsellor but at the time of the inspection the counsellor had recently left the college. Arrangements for the administration and allocation of monies from the access and hardship funds are clear. Childcare facilities are available at the college for children aged between six months and five years. In addition, the college supports childminding arrangements for adult students through the access fund. The college has a detailed disability statement. The college offers some enrichment activities, mostly in sports, music and self-defence.

General Resources

Grade 2

51 The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, the report lacked detail.

Key strengths

- the well-equipped IT centre
- the well-located student services area
- major investment in refurbishment

Weaknesses

- poor access for students with restricted mobility

52 The college buildings, which date from 1962, stand on a single site of 16 acres commanding panoramic views. From January 1998, a programme of redecoration and refurbishment has greatly improved some areas and developed others. The outside of the buildings has been redecorated. Teaching areas have been refurbished and signing has been improved. Rooms and corridors are well maintained. Many areas of the college make good use of displays of students' work. With the installation of ramps, access to all ground-floor

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areas is now available to all students and a lift gives access to the refectory area for wheelchair users. Teaching areas on upper floors are not accessible to students with restricted mobility.

53 The resiting and refurbishment of the reception area presents visitors with a welcoming introduction to the college. The student services area has been relocated near reception. The new learning support centre is not accessible to all students. More suitable accommodation has been provided for the art and design and music departments. The refurbished enterprise centre includes conference facilities and a crèche has recently been opened.

54 The college identified as a strength in its self-assessment report the rationalisation of the IT provision and the establishment of a well-equipped IT centre and inspectors agreed. All computers have been updated. There are 115 machines available for students' use with a range of printers and modern software. The IT centre is made up of three teaching areas operating on an open-plan basis. A minimum of 14 machines is always available for open access and, depending on the time and day of the week, this can increase to 65. There are eight computers in the learning support centre and 17 in the enterprise centre. There are also 13 computers in the art and design and music areas. Although the number of machines is sufficient to meet many students' needs, the machines are not networked and there is only limited access to the internet. There is good technician support but additional expertise would maximise the potential of this resource. The introduction of the IT centre has already led to an increase in the use of IT across the curriculum.

55 The refurbished library has increased space, new shelving, 50 study areas and seven computer workstations. There are sufficient books to meet students' needs in all subjects with the exception of computing and IT. There is an adequate range of journals and

newspapers. CD-ROMs are available for students' use and there is access to the internet on one computer. There is a computerised catalogue. Where appropriate, all students attending the college during the day are issued with text books. There is useful liaison between subject heads and the librarian. There is a qualified librarian but low staffing levels restrict the growth of the service available to students.

56 The principal social area is the refectory, which has not been refurbished. Adult students also have their own separate social centre. The college gymnasium offers a range of lunchtime and after-college activities to both male and female students. The college has not carried out a survey of space utilisation since the recent accommodation changes.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

57 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered that the college had overemphasised its strengths in several areas and had not identified some other strengths and significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the quality management group's leadership
- the wide application of quality assurance
- use of service standards
- well-organised self-assessment report

Weaknesses

- failure of quality assurance to raise the quality of teaching and achievements
- uneven analysis of students' achievements and retention
- inconsistent reporting of added value

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- insufficiently broad use of performance indicators to measure success
- lack of rigorous monitoring of improvement plans
- the incomplete appraisal

58 The college has made significant progress in establishing its quality assurance system since the last inspection. Elements of the system are designed to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and the level of achievements. These, however, have not yet led to improvements in all areas.

59 There is a cross-college quality management group which has contributed significantly to the creation of positive attitudes to quality assurance. It seeks to review and develop the arrangements that are used for assuring quality. Examples of this include better questionnaires, the development of quality characteristics, standards and measures, and consideration of quality audit reports within the college. There is little discussion of the findings from quality monitoring activities.

60 Quality assurance arrangements cover all areas of the college. The well-defined service standards are a particular strength. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Standards have been set for many areas of the college. Performance is compared with the desired standard, usually through the use of questionnaires. A good example is the monitoring of the extent to which the desired standards are achieved in the main office. Respondents are asked to rate their level of satisfaction with various aspects of the services provided. Some of the questions used in questionnaires are not matched precisely enough to the standards that need to be measured.

61 Course reviews have several weaknesses. The college is considering how to integrate aspects of course review with self-assessment. There is an annual review of students' retention

and achievements but the level of analysis is low. There is no analysis of trends.

Comparisons of levels of achievement and retention with national averages or other benchmarking data published by the FEFC are underdeveloped. Course reviews make insufficiently broad use of performance indicators to measure success. Reporting of the value added to students' achievements as a result of their courses at the college is good in a few areas but is underdeveloped in many. Some curriculum area self-assessment reports provided little comment on these matters. The college has recognised the need to review performance against targets. Curriculum teams have recently started to set targets on retention and achievement.

62 The self-assessment report failed to identify that action-planning is not implemented rigorously. Action plans for improving weaknesses in curriculum areas are presented in yearly retention and achievement reports. There is no clear record of whether the plans are relevant and satisfactory nor of the outcomes of progress reviews against the actions indicated in the plans. Subject self-assessment reports also contain action plans, but again, there is no formal process for monitoring progress.

63 Students' views are regularly sought and communicated to the appropriate managers. Data collected through surveys are summarised as a basis for action. Some good use is made of the data. For example, improvements have been made to college facilities in response to students' concerns. Students' views have been effectively used as evidence for judgements in the self-assessment report but the questions in the survey do not address the quality of teaching adequately. The self-assessment report noted that some survey reports have not been completed on time nor reported to the relevant group. Procedures for checking on whether all the necessary actions have been identified and implemented are inadequate. The findings from

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the college's lesson observations scheme have been overgenerous. Few suggestions for improvement are formally incorporated into quality assurance processes.

64 Responsibilities for quality assurance in relation to collaborative provision are clearly allocated. Relationships with partners are close and include regular visits. The college keeps appropriate documentation. The monitoring of data such as student feedback, findings from lesson observations and achievement rates are not adequately summarised to provide comprehensive reports on the quality of partners' courses.

65 Inspectors did not agree that staff development was a major strength of quality assurance. They identified a number of gaps in teaching skills. The staff development policy does identify priorities. College documents do not show how individual staff development is related to college objectives so it is difficult to establish how well they are linked. The new system of staff appraisal is not linked to other aspects of the college's quality assurance system. Appraisal does not make a sufficient contribution to the identification of staff development needs although it is the college's intention that it should do so. A deadline for the completion of all appraisals has been extended to allow all to be completed.

66 Arrangements for the production of the self-assessment report were systematic and involved all staff. The report is well organised and contains useful sections on action taken in relation to the findings of last inspection and helpful tables of students' achievements. There was some good use of evidence which had been collected through the college's quality assurance arrangements. An action plan to address weaknesses allocates responsibilities and gives a timescale for implementation.

Governance

Grade 4

67 Inspectors and auditors did not agree with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report. They considered that a number of significant weaknesses had not been identified.

Key strengths

- procedures for induction of governors
- governor links with staff and students
- comprehensive handbook of governance practice
- full governor involvement in self-assessment

Weaknesses

- insufficient attendance at corporation and some committee meetings
- inappropriate appointment of governors
- insufficient action on FEFC audit recommendations
- inadequate monitoring by governors of college finances
- lack of monitoring of students' achievements and retention
- poor monitoring of equal opportunities

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct its business in accordance with the college's instrument and articles. It also does not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

69 The corporation has been successful in recruiting governors to fill all vacancies and also has a list of potential governors. The self-assessment report acknowledged the lack of female governors and governors from minority

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ethnic groups. The written appointment procedure was put in place after vacancies were filled. Public advertising has not been used to recruit governors. The recently-formed governance committee has documented search procedures and has undertaken a governor skills analysis. This did not identify the lack of financial expertise on the corporation. Recent appointments were made after prospective governors had visited the college, observed corporation meetings and had discussions with senior staff. New governors undertook a formal induction. Focus groups comprising governors, staff and students have recently been established to improve governors' general knowledge of the college.

70 During 1998, two meetings of the corporation were inquorate. New governors were appointed in the absence of a quorum. At other corporation meetings the business governors were in a minority and the minutes do not record whether they were given the right to defer the business to a later date. Poor attendance has led to the cancellation or rescheduling of some committee meetings. The corporation does not formally monitor governors' attendance and one committee chair has not attended corporation meetings for over a year. As recognised in the self-assessment report, attendance at the corporation is now improving.

71 The clerk to the corporation's responsibilities are adequately set out in a separate job description. A timetable of corporation and committee meetings has been established. Agendas are clear and distributed in good time. Corporation minutes are publicly available in the college library and committee minutes and supporting papers are publicly available from the clerk.

72 The corporation has established an appropriate range of committees in order to discharge its responsibilities. Committee terms of reference have recently been reviewed. Those for the finance committee do not make

reference to approving and monitoring capital expenditure programmes. The frequency of meetings of the curriculum planning and general purposes committee has improved. The audit committee has co-opted a member with specialist skills. It did not ensure that many key recommendations made in previous reports by the FEFC's audit service have been implemented. The minuting of the remuneration committee does not give clear information upon attendance and withdrawals from the meeting. There is no minuted record of the corporation's consideration of the minutes of the remuneration committee.

73 The college recently sold land and buildings and some of the substantial funds received are being invested in capital projects. Inspectors and auditors considered that the finance and resources committee did not closely monitor the college's finances or take sufficient action to safeguard the college's assets. The corporation failed to obtain the approval of the FEFC, as required by the financial memorandum, for the capital projects. The opportunity to obtain grants for this expenditure was not fully explored. Governors did not set clear limits for spending on each project and failed to monitor adequately this expenditure. The college's three-year financial forecast for 1998 to 2001, which was approved by the finance and resources committee but not the corporation, omitted the college's capital expenditure programme. Financial monitoring information is distributed routinely only to members of the finance and resources committee. The college's annual budget for 1998-99 was approved by governors after the start of the financial year. These weaknesses were not acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report.

74 A register of governors' and senior managers' interests, code of conduct and standing orders have been established but there are some omissions in scope. The college has a draft 'whistleblowing' policy. Key policies and

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procedures of the college are usefully collated in a governors' handbook.

75 About one-quarter of the college's work is through collaborative provision. Governors receive regular reports about the level of this activity. The corporation does not closely monitor the college's equal opportunities policy. Inspectors agreed that the corporation does not receive regular health and safety reports.

76 Governors receive an annual report that provides some analysis of students' achievements. The reports are not comprehensive. They do not compare year-on-year movements and there is no improvement plan for poor achievements. No information is supplied on student destinations. Governors scrutiny of this information is insufficiently thorough. None of these weaknesses were acknowledged in the self-assessment.

77 The governors have contributed to the strategic plan and its update. The corporation has recently established criteria to evaluate its own performance. Inspectors agreed that there has been full corporation involvement in the self-assessment process. A governors' inspection working party was set up to co-ordinate the preparation of the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report identified a number of issues which the college is addressing.

Management

Grade 4

78 Inspectors agreed with a number of the college's judgements but identified some additional weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- open and consultative style of management
- well-defined lines of communication

- the constructive links with external organisations
- comprehensive marketing information and research

Weaknesses

- the failure to address the decline in students' retention and achievements
- imprecise targets and unclear actions in the annual operating statement
- inadequate monitoring and deployment of staff
- inadequate content of monthly management accounts
- deficiencies in financial forecasts

79 The college's management has changed significantly in the last 15 months. The senior management team is new. The principal and the four other senior managers took up their posts in 1998-99. A revised middle management structure will be introduced soon. Most staff clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Staff value the open and consultative style of the new management which they believe has improved staff morale. Inspectors agreed that the many and varied methods of communications used in the college are good. Daily briefings to staff by managers on key items are minuted for those unable to attend the meeting. The college is recognised as an Investor in People.

80 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the college has good, constructive links with a wide range of external bodies. The college undertakes many joint initiatives with other local providers of further education, local schools, community and civic groups in the Black Country. The links with Sandwell TEC include the college's role as the pilot college for a new student learning initiative in the Sandwell area. The enterprise centre provides some useful vocational courses for industry.

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81 Staff have a clear understanding of the strategic and operating plans. The college mission and objectives are well communicated to staff, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. Links between the strategic plan and the operating plan are not always clear. Management target-setting and monitoring is being developed in the college. The monitoring of the operating plan is minimal. Actions are reviewed three times a year and completed actions are checked by management. Many actions are unclear and targets are imprecise. Lack of clarity and, in some cases, the lack of attention to cost implications make their effectiveness difficult to assess. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment. Recent thorough reviews of a number of college policies have included amongst others, those for the curriculum, and for collaborative partnerships.

82 This year, the number of full-time students, mainly aged 16 to 18, has fallen substantially. FEFC funding units targets have been met by a significant growth in part-time adult students. The college has not taken effective measures to improve the low levels of student retention and unsatisfactory pass rates in some curriculum areas. Pass rates for GCE A levels and GCSEs declined in 1998.

83 The deployment and monitoring of staff, especially teachers, is not effective. There has been no effective evaluation of the efficiency of the use of teaching staff. There is a cursory review of teachers' time through the college course timetables. A working group has recently been formed to look at these weaknesses. There is no efficiency performance indicator target for staffing. Course costing is in the early stages of development.

84 The college's marketing information and research is comprehensive. This has led to some important new course developments and the identification of further learning needs in the community. Business representatives

commented favourably on the college's market research. There is a thorough analysis of different types of marketing methods, including value for money. There is good use of local postcodes analysis to aid and direct marketing effort. There is a comprehensive marketing strategy and action plan.

85 The college sent ISR data returns late to the FEFC before autumn 1997 but submissions now meet the required timescales. The timeliness and accuracy of the data are now generally good although there are some differences between data held in some registers and in the management information system. There are some problems with the accuracy of data for students on flexible enrolments. The management information system only partially records data on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

86 The equal opportunities policy has recently been substantially revised to aid staff and the equal opportunities committee. In some parts of the operating statements and the self-assessment report there is no reference to equal opportunities in teaching and learning. Equal opportunities are not fully established in all areas. There are no targets for the recruitment of students in terms of gender or minority ethnic groups for curriculum areas. Monitoring, staff training and communications are all areas where equal opportunities issues need greater attention. The college is not fulfilling the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by providing a weekly opportunity for students to participate in an act of worship and by offering religious education for those who wish to receive it. An inter-faith working party has recently made recommendations to meet students' spiritual needs.

87 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. This was recognised in the self-assessment. The small

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finance team is headed by the newly-appointed executive director of finance, information and audit, who is suitably qualified. The timeliness and content of the monthly management accounts has recently been improved. The management accounts contain little forecast information and no analysis of the substantial expenditure by the college on capital items. Senior management reviews the management accounts but this does not extend to the monitoring of actual and budgeted capital expenditure. The current inadequate financial accounting system is to be replaced. Financial regulations and procedures have not been comprehensively updated for some time.

88 There are deficiencies in assumptions in financial forecasts. The recent sale of surplus assets has significantly improved the college's solvency. The college's financial forecast for 1998 to 2001 omits the college's extensive capital expenditure projects plans. The college faces financial pressures arising from the reduction in its average level of funding and also as a result of changes to funding of franchised provision. Large increases in other income and funds from European sources are forecast, partly to compensate for these pressures. Financial forecasts are not supported by detailed risk analysis or contingency planning. At the time of the inspection, the college was in the early stages of a proposal to convert collaborative provision to direct provision.

Conclusions

89 The college's self-assessment report provided a helpful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Although the inspection team considered that the report identified many strengths, it considered that some significant weaknesses had not been recognised. Inspectors did not agree with the majority of the college's judgements for the curriculum areas primarily because the self-assessment, including an updated version, did

not give sufficient weight to students' retention and achievements. The grades for curriculum areas had been decided before the examination results for 1998 were known. The college's lesson observation grades were higher than those awarded by inspectors. The inspection team found that the college had been overgenerous in the grading of the majority of cross-college provision. This was partly due to the tendency to accord weight to recent developments, the effectiveness of which could not yet be judged.

90 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 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	40
19-24 years	11
25+ years	49
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	44
Intermediate	17
Advanced	36
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	116	480	44
Agriculture	1	5	0
Construction	6	0	0
Business	59	179	17
Hotel and catering	10	0	1
Health and community care	22	56	6
Art and design	68	7	6
Humanities	198	86	21
Basic education	23	50	5
Total	503	863	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 64% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	40	2	0	42
Supporting direct learning contact	9	0	0	9
Other support	28	5	0	33
Total	77	7	0	84

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,314,000	£3,056,000	£2,942,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£21.17	£20.97	£20.53*
Payroll as a proportion of income	67%	69%	53%
Achievement of funding target	101%	96%	98%
Diversity of income	6%	5%	10%
Operating surplus	-£141,000	-£322,000	£135,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	56	114	57	99	428	389
	Retention (%)	64*	64	46	45	49	55
	Achievement (%)	46	24	15	29	60	43
2	Expected completions	838	792	597	125	484	370
	Retention (%)	64	76	78	54	62	57
	Achievement (%)	82	36	44	58	55	60
3	Expected completions	–	1,019	868	–	293	200
	Retention (%)	–	68	75	–	56	65
	Achievement (%)	79	74	75	58	61	66
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	1	0	–	0	2
	Retention (%)	–	100	n/a	–	n/a	100
	Achievement (%)	n/a	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
Short courses	Expected completions	27	74	173	293	1,135	944
	Retention (%)	70	86	95	89	69	91
	Achievement (%)	38	70	76	47	68	68
Unknown/ unclassified	Expected completions	520	7	134	112	112	71
	Retention (%)	93	86	22	66	42*	41
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	20	55	50

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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