

# Royal Forest of Dean College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**2000-01**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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*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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# Contents

Paragraph

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## Summary

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### Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	6

---

### Curriculum areas

Mathematics and information technology	10
Engineering	17
Business	24
Health and care	31
English and modern foreign languages	37
Basic skills	43

---

### Cross-college provision

Support for students	50
General resources	57
Quality assurance	64
Governance	71
Management	79
Conclusions	88

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### College statistics

## Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 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

## Royal Forest of Dean College

### *South West Region*

#### Inspected January 2001

Royal Forest of Dean College is a tertiary college serving the communities of the Forest of Dean in South West Gloucestershire. The college's self-assessment process is thorough and involves all staff and governors. Inspectors judged the report to be generally accurate, but not comprehensive. They agreed with many of the judgements in the report. However, they also identified further strengths and weaknesses in all curriculum and cross-college areas and placed greater significance on some of the weaknesses than the college. Inspectors awarded lower grades than those in the self-assessment report to one curriculum area and to two of the five areas of cross-college provision. At the time of the inspection, the college had made good progress in addressing many of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

The college offers courses in all programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in five of these and in basic skills was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Prospective students are well informed about the range of courses and opportunities available. Students benefit from much good teaching and good individual support from their tutors. The proportion of good and outstanding lessons is

higher than in the previous inspection and higher than the average for all lessons observed by inspectors in 1999-2000. Teachers and managers have worked effectively to introduce changes for curriculum 2000. Students' achievements have improved and on many courses are above the national averages. Pass rates at GCE A level and GCSE in most subjects are particularly good. The college has strong and effective external links. These have led to a growth in community and work-based provision. There is a thorough approach to quality improvement. Managers and governors closely monitor the college's financial position. The college should further improve: the provision of learning support to those who need it; links between initial assessment, learning programmes and achievement targets in the teaching of basic skills; the quality of theory teaching in some areas; the standard of some accommodation; the quality of course reviews; the rigour of strategic and operational planning; the use of performance indicators and targets; the monitoring of key policies and action plans; and its financial position.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics and information technology	2	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	3
Business	2	Quality assurance	2
Health and care	2	Governance	2
English and modern foreign languages	2	Management	3
Basic skills	3		

## The College and its Mission

1 Royal Forest of Dean College is a tertiary college serving the rural communities of the Forest of Dean in South West Gloucestershire. It was established as a tertiary college in 1985 following the merger of a further education college and a school sixth form. The college occupies two main sites. The majority of students are based at the Five Acres campus near Coleford. The college shares this site and some common sports facilities with an 11 to 16 school. The Enterprise Centre, some 7 miles to the east at Cinderford, concentrates on engineering and construction courses with some provision of information technology (IT) and basic skills. The college also runs courses at over 30 community centres and has linked provision with local schools as well as for pupils at risk of exclusion.

2 The Forest of Dean covers an area of 500 square miles. The area is sparsely inhabited with a population of 76,000. It is a largely rural district with no major urban centres. The local economy relies heavily on small manufacturing companies and land-based industries. About one-third of the working population is employed in manufacturing. Most local businesses employ less than 10 people. There is one multi-national manufacturing company which employs 1,500 people. The public and service sectors now employ over 60% of the local workforce, many of whom travel to work in Gloucester, Cheltenham and Bristol. The average income for the area is below the national figure and there are significant pockets of rural deprivation. In September 2000, the unemployment rate across the area was above the average for the county, but low when compared with the national rate of 3.7%. Less than 1% of the population are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

3 There are three other further education colleges in Gloucestershire within a radius of 25 miles from the college. Competition for school-leavers is keen. There are nine secondary

schools in and around the Forest of Dean; four 11 to 16 schools and five 11 to 18 schools. Approximately 78% of school-leavers proceed to further full-time study after the age of 16. The overall educational achievements of school-leavers in Gloucestershire are in line with national averages. In 2000, 48% of year 11 pupils achieved five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or above.

4 The college offers courses in all programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). It is committed to sustaining a wide range of courses to meet the needs of the local community and is working with a local college of higher education to promote progression to higher education. The college is involved in many local partnerships. There are strategic links with employers and community agencies. These have led to the development of a basic skills training centre at a local manufacturing business. The college is also a major provider of programmes sponsored by The Link Group (Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council) and has contracts with Gloucestershire Local Education Authority (LEA) for adult and community provision. In July 2000, the college had enrolled 7,386 students, of whom 996 were full time and 6,390 were part time. Of these students, 65% were female. The college employs 184 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 132 are involved in teaching and learning.

5 The college mission is to maintain and develop its role as the main provider of post-16 education and training for its community. The college aims to achieve its mission through offering equality of opportunity for staff and students in all aspects of college business, providing lifelong learning opportunities at work and in the community, delivering a curriculum which maximises community participation and provides opportunities for progression, and expanding opportunities to improve basic skills in the community'.

# Context

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 22 January 2001. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information held about the college by other directorates of the FEFC. The inspection included an inspection of the scope of basic skills provision below level 2 and the college's response to curriculum 2000. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 2000 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. These data proved to be substantially reliable when checked against these sources.

7 The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 51 days in the college. Inspectors observed 70 lessons, examined students' work and looked at college documents. They met with governors, managers, staff, students and representatives of external groups and organisations.

8 The following table shows the grades given to lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 70 lessons observed, 71% were judged to be good or outstanding. This figure represents an improvement since the last inspection and is well above the national average of 62% recorded for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. The percentage of less than satisfactory lessons was 9%, slightly above the average of 6% recorded for all lessons observed during 1999-2000.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	6	3	4	0	15
GCSE	2	5	0	0	0	7
GNVQ	0	7	3	0	0	10
NVQ	2	3	1	0	0	6
Other vocational	1	13	5	1	0	20
Other*	2	7	2	1	0	12
Total (No)	9	41	14	6	0	70
Total (%)	13	58	20	9	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 basic skills

# Context

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Royal Forest of Dean College	10.0	80
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*



# Curriculum Areas

## Mathematics and Information Technology

### Grade 2

**10 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with much of the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses, especially in teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- good pass and retention rates on many courses in 2000
- effective use of the college intranet on IT courses
- good teacher feedback on students' written work

#### Weaknesses

- underdeveloped course planning
- low achievements on some City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7261 courses
- lack of some high level programming software

11 The college offers a good range of computing and IT courses from foundation to advanced level. However, there is no vocational IT course at foundation level. Courses in website design and for the European computer driving licence have been successfully introduced. Computer literacy and information technology courses are offered so that students can attend at times to suit their individual circumstances. Mathematics courses are available at pre-GCSE, GCSE and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). Student enrolment on IT courses increased considerably in 2000.

12 There is much good teaching. In the most successful lessons, teaching is well planned and well managed. Teachers give clear explanations of the topics to be covered and of what the

students will achieve during the lesson. Many teachers make good use of a range of examples familiar to the students to explain topics and to maintain students' interest. In a lesson on simultaneous equations the examples of hamburgers and chips were used to represent the unknown quantities of  $x$  and  $y$ . Lessons sometimes incorporate resources that are of special relevance to the subject. For example, students learning how to use a computer-based drawing programme had to draw and label computer circuit boards rather than use an object not related to IT. In some weaker lessons, teachers fail to arouse the students' interest or enthusiasm and do not meet the needs of some students in the class. Some teachers do not encourage students to ask questions or attempt to find out whether they understand the lesson.

13 The curriculum is well managed at course level. Common schemes of work and marking policies are drawn up and followed. Individual students' progress is monitored effectively and discussed at course team meetings. Students who are judged to be experiencing difficulty with course work may be referred to the college's student support team for help. Course review is not consistently good and information such as achievement targets, value-added data and lesson observations are not used to support course planning.

14 Pass and retention rates for mathematics and IT courses have improved steadily over the last three years. As the college identifies in its self-assessment report, pass rates and retention rates for many courses in 2000 were better than the national averages for the sector. In 2000, 95% of GCE A level students achieved a pass with a national average of 73%. In the same year, all 12 students completing the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced IT course passed. There are low pass rates on some of the C&G 7261 courses. The website building course and European computer driving licence course introduced recently are successful.

# Curriculum Areas

15 As identified in the college's self-assessment report, the college intranet is used effectively for teaching IT courses. Teachers publish course notes on the intranet and these provide a useful study resource for students. Teachers encourage students to use electronic mail to submit course work. Much of the project work completed by IT students is incorporated into their own websites and published on the college intranet. On the best websites, students have integrated databases and show a good understanding of how they work. A few sites were incomplete and had broken hyperlinks. Most of the students' written work is of an appropriate standard and well presented. Students studying mathematics show a good level of understanding of tables and graphically presented data. IT students make good use of the Internet in project research. Written comments by teachers on students' work are often positive and encouraging.

16 Specialist resources for IT students are appropriate for the courses offered. Computers use up-to-date operating systems and software for wordprocessing and database work. There is a lack of higher level software for vocational students wishing to follow careers in website design. Inspectors agreed that there is insufficient use of computers in the teaching of mathematics. Some good software for use by students of mathematics has been purchased recently. Most teaching rooms for mathematics and IT lessons are good. Staff are enthusiastic and are suitably qualified to teach the courses offered.

# Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G 7261 IT short course	1	Number of starters	100	42	25
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	53	26	40
Computer literacy and information technology short course	1	Number of starters	70	62	53
		Retention (%)	74	95	91
		Achievement (%)	40	24	88
Computer literacy and information technology (one-year course)	1	Number of starters	156	320	298
		Retention (%)	81	81	92
		Achievement (%)	81	74	99
GCSE mathematics (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	115	107	92
		Retention (%)	68	67	75
		Achievement (%)	19	56	40
NVQ IT (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	15	14	27
		Retention (%)	67	100	78
		Achievement (%)	100	71	100
GCE A level mathematics (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	14	33	28
		Retention (%)	71	61	79
		Achievement (%)	50	50	95
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	18	13	12
		Retention (%)	89	69	100
		Achievement (%)	69	100	100

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 3

**17 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in electronics, mechanical engineering and welding. They broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good practical teaching
- good retention and achievement rates on many courses in 2000
- effective links with industry
- imaginative enrichment programme

#### Weaknesses

- some unimaginative theory teaching
- underdeveloped use of IT in lessons
- lack of rigour in course reviews
- no work experience opportunities for full-time students

18 The college offers a range of courses in electronics, mechanical engineering and welding. Students may progress from level 1 to 3 in electronics, but progression in mechanical engineering and welding is only possible up to level 2 unless students are on a modern apprenticeship scheme and achieve a national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 in the workplace. The majority of enrolments are in engineering craft courses at levels 1 and 2. As stated in the self-assessment report, the college has good links with industry. This enables teachers to keep up to date with current technology and reflect these developments in their teaching. For example, teachers are working with a local company to develop programmable logic controllers courses at the college. Local companies have provided valuable materials and up-to-date measuring and test equipment for students to use in lessons. The college does not make

arrangements for students on full-time courses to have a regular period of work experience in industry.

19 Teaching in practical lessons is good. Students work independently through a structured programme of tasks to develop their practical skills and achieve appropriate levels of competence. In welding, students' practical skills are improved by an opportunity to work on real jobs from industry. Tutors keep comprehensive records of progress and students know what they have to achieve. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. In some good theory lessons, teachers work with individual students providing one-to-one support and assess their progress as they work through well-planned learning materials. However, inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the majority of theory lessons are unimaginative. Some teachers talk too much and fail to arouse the students' interest or enthusiasm. They do not encourage students to ask questions, and they fail to make regular checks on students' learning. Teachers rarely relate the theory to relevant industrial examples or to the work done in practical lessons. The use of IT in theory lessons is underdeveloped. Relevant software is available, but this is seldom used to develop students' knowledge and understanding. Opportunities to use spreadsheets to process data and produce charts are often missed.

20 As part of an enrichment programme, students on the national diploma in electronics course study GCSE in Spanish in their second year. They then have a three-week visit to Tenerife and work in a bottling plant to develop engineering maintenance skills. Students also stay with local families to develop communication skills in Spanish.

21 Course teams meet regularly to review their courses but the meetings lack rigour and the achievement of action points is not monitored. Annual course reviews are cursory with little evidence of evaluation against

# Curriculum Areas

national benchmarks, the setting of targets and action plans for improvement.

22 As stated in the self-assessment report, retention and achievement rates are good on many courses. In 2000, retention and achievement rates on C&G mechanical engineering competences level 1, C&G electronics servicing course and NVQ level 1 welding were all above the national average. Retention has been good on the C&G 4351 computer-aided design course for the last three years but achievement rates are consistently below the national average. The achievement of some students on the national diploma electronics programme is poor as they are failing to achieve pass standards in mathematics

tests and assignments. These students have poorly organised files with missing or incomplete work.

23 The self-assessment report judges that the mechanical engineering and welding workshops offer an effective, realistic working environment and inspectors agreed. The electronics laboratories are adequate. Teachers are well qualified in their subject. They have relevant industrial experience and many hold assessor and verifier qualifications. Teachers are able to take secondments in industry to update their technical skills. Appropriate attention is paid to health and safety, with machines well guarded and students wearing personal protective equipment.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ joining materials by welding	1	Number of starters	*	*	36
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	*	*	72
Electronics servicing	1	Number of starters	60	46	19
		Retention (%)	98	87	100
		Achievement (%)	56	35	68
Basic engineering competences	1	Number of starters	*	*	17
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
C&G 4351 computer-aided design	2	Number of starters	94	59	63
		Retention (%)	84	90	97
		Achievement (%)	39	57	52
C&G engineering	2	Number of starters	*	*	58
		Retention (%)	*	*	90
		Achievement (%)	*	*	83
National certificate/national diploma electronics engineering technician	3	Number of starters	*	*	15
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	*	*	91
Electronics servicing	3	Number of starters	11	27	16
		Retention (%)	82	85	88
		Achievement (%)	78	91	62

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Business

### Grade 2

**24 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- much effective teaching
- good retention and achievement on many courses
- broad range of courses from level 2 to 4
- the high quality of students' portfolios
- students' skill in using IT

#### Weaknesses

- declining retention on GNVQ advanced courses
- underdeveloped realistic work environment for administration students
- little development of study and key skills in some lessons
- lack of rigour in curriculum planning and review

25 The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time business studies courses. Students can progress from level 2 to level 4 on business, accounting, management and administration programmes. Text and wordprocessing are the only courses offered at level 1. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Several single-subject qualifications are available in administration. Students on the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) in business can study GCSE mathematics and English and select from a good range of GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) courses, including IT and law, as part of the arrangements for curriculum 2000. The college has recently introduced the certificate in working and operating safely as a distance learning course. This course successfully attracts students with

few qualifications who would not usually decide on a college course. Links with employers are through work experience. Teachers provide good support to all full-time vocational students to arrange effective placements.

26 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is much effective teaching. Students participate well in lessons and speak with enthusiasm about their studies. Lessons are well planned and appropriate learning activities sustain students' interest. Much teaching is based on case study material. GCE A level economics students' understanding of European monetary policy was enhanced through analysis of a video of an interview with the president of the European Central Bank. In a GNVQ intermediate business lesson, the teacher used question-and-answer techniques effectively to revise cashflow forecasts and breakeven analysis. All students were involved and the teacher was able to check their understanding of the subject. Teachers sometimes accept one-word answers rather than encouraging students to speak fluently about a topic.

27 In a secretarial administration lesson the teacher effectively supported students working on assignments and portfolio building. Students were given individual feedback on assignments, and small groups were brought together to review their work and to explain how to build it into a portfolio. Most students' work is carefully marked, but teachers often fail to give helpful written feedback. Students are expected to adopt business standards. Students value the support they receive on vocational programmes. Inspectors agreed that the arrangements for administration students to work in a realistic office environment are not satisfactory. Students undertake reception duty in a small student office. They use the telephone, fax and other basic office equipment, but the volume of work is insufficient to imitate the pace and stresses of the workplace.

28 Student achievement on most courses is good. Pass rates for management courses,

# Curriculum Areas

GNVQ advanced, text processing and administration level 2 are well above the national average. Wordprocessing results for those students who enter the examination are very good. The college has taken steps to address the decline in retention on GNVQ advanced programmes by increasing the level of support for students. Retention on the Association of Accounting Technicians intermediate course is below the national average. Most students' written work is of a good standard. Students make effective and confident use of IT for research and presentation of their work. Their portfolios are well organised and students take pride in their work.

29 Schemes of work include assessment opportunities for key skills, but rarely identify opportunities to develop study and key skills within the vocational context. There are few

strategies to improve the take up of learning support by students who have been identified as in need of additional help. The use of targets and performance indicators is underdeveloped and at programme level there are no operational plans. Course team meetings enable staff to review the course, but minutes of these meetings often lack agreed actions and target completion dates.

30 Classrooms used for business studies are appropriately furnished. Students have good access to IT facilities, books and other reference material. Most teachers have appropriate qualifications. Part-time staff often have current commercial experience and are encouraged to obtain teaching qualifications. The high proportion of part-time staff feel well supported and have good links to full-time staff, although it is often difficult for them to attend course meetings.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Text and wordprocessing	1 and 2	Number of starters	177	168	195
		Retention (%)	97	87	92
		Achievement (%)	82	85	54
NVQ administration	2 and 3	Number of starters	39	36	36
		Retention (%)	85	75	94
		Achievement (%)	76	93	76
NVQ accounting	2, 3 and 4	Number of starters	31	41	40
		Retention (%)	87	80	65
		Achievement (%)	59	64	69
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	42	30	31
		Retention (%)	83	73	71
		Achievement (%)	91	100	100
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	13	22	14
		Retention (%)	69	45	75
		Achievement (%)	100	90	100
National Examing Board for Supervisory Management certificate and diploma	3 and 4	Number of starters	25	19	15
		Retention (%)	88	100	93
		Achievement (%)	95	95	93

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Care

### Grade 2

**31 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in childcare and social care. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified further strengths and further weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- good achievement rates on most courses
- good links with the local community
- effective course management

#### Weaknesses

- low retention on some courses
- declining enrolment on some courses
- inappropriate classrooms for active group learning

32 The college offers a wide range of provision in health and social care, childcare and education, and counselling. Through the introduction of curriculum 2000, many full-time students can achieve further qualifications in food hygiene, first aid, key skills and modern languages. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that provision is responsive to the needs of the local community. Childcare training is offered in a community centre in association with the local playgroup and toddler association to help local people improve provision in local playgroups. A successful mediation course is a joint venture between the Monmouthshire Mediation centre and the college. The college is a member of the Gloucestershire Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and plays an active role in developing courses for early years workers. The college judged progression routes provided by these courses to be a strength and inspectors agreed. Most students on counselling courses progress from level 1 to level 3. Level 3

students work as trainees in the college counselling agency which provides a service to the community and to the college. On completion, many progress to employment. Many students in health and social care and in childcare progress to employment or higher education. A sound work experience programme enables students to relate college lessons effectively to the world of work.

33 There is much good teaching. Lessons are well planned and linked to detailed schemes of work. Teachers are skilled at preparing effective materials to stimulate learning. In many lessons, students enjoy their learning. In one lesson, students experimented with different types of play dough. This simulated early years' experience and allowed them to understand fully the sensory experiences of young children when they explore malleable materials. In another lesson, students were presented with dress-up props and asked to assume the role of a character and dress accordingly. The activity was then extended to the writing of some simple plays in which the characters performed. This enabled students to understand more effectively the imaginative experiences of the young child. Teachers frequently draw upon students' work experience to enhance theory lessons. In some lessons, teachers fail to structure group activities appropriately and do not prepare extra work for those students who complete tasks quickly. In a few lessons, teachers do not provide stimulating or interesting work. They do not use questioning effectively to engage the more reticent students or to check their understanding. The teaching of key skills is effective. Students spoke positively with inspectors about the quality of support they receive from their personal tutors.

34 Course management is effective. Teams set and monitor targets and, when these are not achieved, establish appropriate action plans. Students' progress is reviewed periodically and individual action plans are written and monitored. Courses are evaluated by staff and



# Curriculum Areas

students and these evaluations inform the self-assessment report.

35 Students' written work is usually of a high standard. They receive regular feedback about their work and their progress. Students report that this feedback is supportive and enables them to improve their performance. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' pass rates on GNVQ courses at advanced, intermediate and foundation levels, the advanced certificate in therapeutic counselling and the combined certificate in counselling skills and therapeutic counselling are consistently above national averages. Retention rates are more variable and, on the diploma in nursery nursing and the GNVQ at foundation level, are low and declining. Strategies employed to improve retention have

been only partially successful. Student enrolment on these courses has declined over the past three years.

36 Staff are appropriately qualified and have relevant vocational experience for the subjects they teach. Learning resources in the classrooms meet the needs of students. IT facilities are accessible and well used. The library stock is adequate and students appreciate the support and help they receive from library staff. Classrooms and corridors contain attractive displays of students' work. Most of the classrooms are too small for the numbers of students and this limits opportunities for group work and other participatory activities which are so appropriate for teaching and learning on care courses.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ health and social care	1	Number of starters	7	6	5
		Retention (%)	71	67	60
		Achievement (%)	80	75	100
Combined certificate in counselling skills and therapeutic counselling	2	Number of starters	21	22	13
		Retention (%)	87	77	92
		Achievement (%)	100	88	100
GNVQ health and social care	2	Number of starters	18	23	17
		Retention (%)	67	83	82
		Achievement (%)	92	100	94
Advanced certificate in therapeutic counselling	3	Number of starters	12	22	13
		Retention (%)	92	100	92
		Achievement (%)	0	95	92
GNVQ health and social care	3	Number of starters	†	19	20
		Retention (%)	†	53	80
		Achievement (%)	†	80	88
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	29	31	16
		Retention (%)	83	71	56
		Achievement (%)	67	82	100

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

†course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## English and Modern Foreign Languages

### Grade 2

**37 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, although they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good pass rates on most courses
- stimulating well-planned teaching in most lessons
- good range of modern foreign languages provision for vocational students
- effective teamwork amongst staff

#### Weaknesses

- declining retention rate on GCE A level English language and literature
- underdeveloped use of IT in lessons
- lack of specialist accommodation and equipment for languages

38 The college offers a wide range of courses in modern foreign languages and an appropriate range in English which allows students to progress from introductory to advanced level. Ninety students on NVQ and vocational GCE A level programmes have taken the opportunity to study NVQ language units at levels 1 and 2 as part of the curriculum 2000 programme. English is offered at GCSE and GCE A/AS level and is a core subject of the access course. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the variety of extra-curricular activities provided is a strength. English students enhance their studies through visits to the theatre. Vocational students studying languages are encouraged to take a period of work experience or a study visit to the country whose language they are learning. Nursery nursing students teach introductory level French

in after school language clubs at four primary schools.

39 Most teaching is good and lessons are carefully planned. As the self-assessment report indicates, students have the opportunity to experience a range of appropriate learning methods. In the majority of modern language lessons, the language being taught is used effectively as the medium of instruction. Emphasis is put on the students' development of confidence and enjoyment in speaking the language. Teachers on GCSE courses for adults successfully seek stimulating contexts in which students can use the foreign language. Most English teachers are skilful at drawing thoughtful and articulate responses from students. GCE A level English literature students considered the theme of bereavement through a detailed incisive critique of W H Auden's *Funeral* and an extract from *Anthony and Cleopatra*. In some less successful lessons there is too much reliance on whole-class debates or the teacher talks too much. In these lessons, students contribute little and do not have the opportunity to develop their analytical or linguistic skills. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The use of IT to help learning is not yet fully exploited. While some students use the Internet for their assignments and send them to their teacher by electronic mail, these practices are not universally encouraged by all teachers. Homework and coursework are set regularly and marked thoroughly. Students receive constructive comments to help them improve their performance. Their work is well presented and course files are highly organised. These strengths were not identified in the self-assessment report.

40 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the examination results are a strength. In GCE A level English language and literature and GCE A level literature, there have been 100% pass rates for full-time students for the last two years. The numbers of students obtaining high grades have been significantly

# Curriculum Areas

above the national average for the last three years. GCSE English language pass rates are also well above the national average. While retention rates in GCSE are above the national average, in GCE A level English language and literature they have declined from 86% in 1998 to 72% in 2000 which is below the national average. In French and German, GCE A level pass rates are significantly above the national average but retention rates have declined in 2000. GCSE language pass rates are significantly above the national average. Retention rates in 2000 for Italian are comparable with the national average and are significantly above for French and Spanish.

41 Courses are well planned. Regular team meetings are held and effective communication arrangements are in place for staff who are

unable to attend. Teachers work well together to plan courses, devise common materials and develop schemes of work.

42 All teachers are well qualified and very experienced. Subject classrooms have colourful displays of posters and students' work. There is not enough specialist accommodation and equipment for languages and this restricts the methods teachers use. The language section does not have a language laboratory. Access to the Internet is restricted and there is little use of satellite television programmes. There are enough specialist learning materials for students' needs. However, the English bookstock in the library is small and the range of English newspapers and modern foreign language periodicals is poor. These weaknesses were not fully identified in the self-assessment report.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and modern foreign languages, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	112	182	121
		Retention (%)	71	85	78
		Achievement (%)	*	70	70
GCSE French	2	Number of starters	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	89
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
GCSE Italian	2	Number of starters	*	*	24
		Retention (%)	*	*	75
		Achievement (%)	*	*	78
GCSE Spanish	2	Number of starters	*	*	22
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	85
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	51	49	43
		Retention (%)	86	78	72
		Achievement (%)	82	95	89
GCE A level French and German	3	Number of starters	28	18	17
		Retention (%)	64	83	76
		Achievement (%)	66	80	92

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Basic Skills

### Grade 3

**43 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but identified some additional strengths and particular weaknesses in the management of learning programmes.**

#### Key strengths

- imaginative community basic skills provision
- much good teaching
- good attendance and retention

#### Weaknesses

- lack of coherence in planning learning
- lack of clear targets for individual and overall achievement
- undeveloped systems for course review and target-setting

44 Inspectors observed basic skills provision in discrete courses on college premises, in community venues and as support for mainstream vocational courses. The college provides a range of accreditation schemes to suit individual needs. The college organises its support in a range of ways through one-to-one and small group teaching, 'drop-in' support, and on-course support for key skills. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the range of courses is good and includes an imaginative community provision. College targets to establish three family learning projects and two work-based projects in the community have been met. The work-based basic skills provision is nationally recognised by a Beacon award. Community classes are held in a range of venues, including schools and business premises.

45 There is much good teaching in basic skills lessons. This was recognised in the self-

assessment report. Students are motivated and work well in lessons and attendance is good. They are enthusiastic about the learning support they receive and also use the study centre in their free time. In most cases teachers give each student individual tasks. They give clear explanations, check learning, and use examples from the students' courses or everyday experience. For instance, students in a parents' group were asked to discuss and write about their first day at school and compare this with their children's experiences. Teachers are successful in encouraging students to work on their own. Students effectively use reference materials, verify their answers in mathematics and work independently with computers. The standard of students' work in lessons and in portfolios is of an appropriate standard for their level of study.

46 However, there is a lack of coherence in the planning of learning. All full-time students take an initial assessment and part-time students are assessed if they, or their course tutor, request it. Links between the outcomes of initial assessments and planned learning programmes are weak. Individual learning plans are insufficiently detailed to inform effective lesson planning or to measure students' achievements. There is little relationship between the plan and the work students do in lessons. Regular reviews take place, but many of these do not relate to the aims of the original learning plan. Records of work do not reflect the students' assessments or the aims of the learning plan. Many students are not aware of their learning plan. The college acknowledges some of these weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

47 Complete achievement data are not available as students taking additional learning support measure achievement by their primary vocational qualification. However, in 1999-2000, 60% of those students receiving additional learning support achieved at least one additional qualification. Additional learning support has

# Curriculum Areas

contributed positively to the improvement of students' retention rates. Some students in discrete basic skills classes do not take any accreditation and alternative measures of performance are not set. There is no method by which the college measures individual or overall achievement for basic skills. A table of students' achievements has been omitted from this section of the report as the data available do not give a true representation of achievements.

48 Systems for course review and target-setting are undeveloped. Apart from recruitment targets for community provision, few targets are set for recruitment, retention, achievement or progression in basic skills. There is little evaluation of the provision and action plans contain few performance indicators which could be used to assess progress.

49 Teachers of basic skills are well qualified. Most have a higher level basic skills certificate. They are also committed and enthusiastic. For instance, to help recruitment for work-based basic skills among refuse collectors, their teacher went on the round with them to identify specific needs. Additional learning support is provided in a well-equipped study centre. Learning resources for basic skills are satisfactory. Some are vocationally related, but many are not. Community and work-based classes have good access to computers. Though there is a good collection of books, worksheets and reference material, there are few games, visual or tactile materials for teaching basic skills.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**50 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment, but considered that some weaknesses were understated.**

#### Key strengths

- efficient admissions system and effective induction
- well-regarded support from personal tutors and learning support
- effective tutorials for full-time students
- comprehensive guidance on progression to higher education
- responsive welfare services

#### Weaknesses

- failure to ensure learning support for all needing it
- inadequate support for students based away from the main campus

51 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that student services are well organised. The student support team is well co-ordinated using agreed policies and procedures. It works closely with teachers to link academic and pastoral support. Standards for most aspects of the work are set and monitored regularly. The college has improved its practice and procedures in response to feedback from students and teachers and is reviewing these further to meet the emerging needs of curriculum 2000. However, the same level of support is not available for students who study away from the main campus.

52 Most aspects of the recruitment and induction process are effective. Courses and facilities at the college are well publicised and there is good liaison with partner schools. The college has an active adult student guidance service which carries out many interviews in the

college and surrounding community. All prospective students can visit the college to improve their understanding of the opportunities available and those who are undecided about their future may have a careers interview. A few students feel that the quality of pre-course guidance did not enable them to make the right choice. Admission procedures are efficient. All students receive an effective induction to the college and to their course.

53 All students are entitled to learning support. All full-time 16 to 18 year old students are assessed at enrolment using various tests and, where appropriate, a vocational assessment. In 2000, less than 1% of part-time and adult students chose to be assessed for additional support needs. Initial assessment is not effectively prioritised and the college has not determined whether the methods it uses are always appropriate. For example, all GCE A level students are assessed for support needs but part-time students on level 1 and 2 vocational courses are not. Learning support is offered through workshops, in-class support and group teaching of study skills. Often the quality of individual learning plans following assessment are insufficiently detailed for effective monitoring of progress to take place. Most of those who receive additional support value the help they get from learning support staff. Support for students with specific learning difficulties is particularly good. In 2000, 74% of those students who received support achieved their primary learning goal compared with 29% who were identified as needing support but did not participate. Course tutors receive detailed information on the assessment outcomes for their students, but information on students' progress or on appropriate teaching methods to help them plan their teaching is not consistently offered to all teachers. This year support teachers have been linked with departments and there is an increase in learning support in some lessons. However, the college does not yet identify consistently the courses which have students who may need support to improve

# Cross-college Provision

retention and achievement, and ensure that support is available.

54 Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that the tutorial support for full-time students is good. All tutors receive comprehensive guidelines and can adapt these to meet the academic requirements of the course and the needs of their students. Inspectors observed tutorials across a range of the college's provision and found much good practice. Individual tutorials are carefully recorded and parents and employers are kept well informed on students' progress. Most students spoke highly of the informal support given by tutors, but some students, mainly on part-time courses, did not feel there was sufficient time for individual reviews. Many part-time students benefit from some tutorial support, but there is no minimum entitlement. The college carefully monitors the quality of tutorials for full-time students.

55 The college offers a well-developed programme of guidance and support for students wishing to progress to higher education or within further education. Links with the local careers service are well established. Well-planned careers education is offered as part of the tutorial programme for full-time students. Some students who wish to progress to employment do not receive consistently good support to meet their needs.

56 Inspectors agreed that there is a good range of welfare services available to students. A team of counsellors provides a responsive service and has developed good links with outside support agencies. For example, Monmouthshire Mediation trains students and staff in mediation to support the college's anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies. Financial support and advice is well publicised. There is pre-school provision for children over 18 months on the main campus. Although welfare services are advertised on other sites, there is a lack of planned provision to meet identified need. The students' union plays an active part in college life.

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

**57 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified further strengths and weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed by the time of inspection.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good provision of networked IT resources
- good resources for work-based training
- effective maintenance of accommodation
- high-quality sports and leisure facilities at the Five Acres campus
- extensive access for people with restricted mobility

#### **Weaknesses**

- lack of an up-to-date accommodation strategy
- some poor accommodation still awaiting refurbishment and improvement
- some unsuitably small classrooms and social areas
- poorly located reception area

58 Since the last inspection the college has made progress in upgrading its accommodation and general resources. Inspectors identified the management and maintenance of these resources as efficient and effective and a key strength. The health and safety policy is clear and well managed. There is a good standard of cleaning throughout the college and teaching and public areas are kept tidy. Inspectors agreed that the college has done much to improve access to all key areas for wheelchair users. There is now good access to almost the entire main campus. All students with restricted mobility are interviewed to assess their needs and if it is not possible for them to

# Cross-college Provision

enter a timetabled classroom easily the venue is changed to accommodate them.

59 The self-assessment report identified good provision of networked IT facilities and inspectors agreed. Students and staff have good access to modern computers at the Five Acres campus and at the Enterprise Centre in Cinderford. An open access computer centre for students has been established on the Five Acres campus. This facility is well used and becomes crowded at peak times. There is a clear information and learning technology strategy and good practice is shared through the information and learning technology committee. The learndirect University for Industry (Ufi) centre based at a large manufacturing plant at Mitcheldean has good facilities for work-based IT and basic skills training. A recent successful bid for information and learning technology funding will further develop this resource and promote a partnership in training and teaching between the college, the company and the community.

60 The college library and learning centre on the Five Acres campus is well used by students and staff. The centre houses the library and computing area on the ground floor with a study support centre at mezzanine level. Learning services and study support staff readily offer information, guidance and support. The centre houses a collection of 16,000 books and 250 video cassettes are available for loan. There are sufficient up-to-date books and appropriate periodicals for students to use in their studies in most subjects. Inspectors agreed that the library is too small and, due to its design and location, noise levels become distracting. The learning centre at Cinderford is small with an inadequate range of books and is only open for two days a week. The college is developing the centre but currently it is a less than satisfactory resource for the increasing number of part-time students who study at this campus.

61 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that parts of the

estate require refurbishment and improvement. There is no up-to date accommodation strategy but there are plans to update certain areas. Mobile classrooms account for 25% of the total accommodation at the Five Acres campus. These classrooms are ageing rapidly, but they are mostly weatherproof and well furnished. A capital project will address many of the most pressing accommodation needs, including the reduction of mobile classrooms to 10%. Many classrooms are enlivened by wall displays and most are well equipped, but some classrooms and social areas are too small for the numbers of students using them. Staff workrooms, across all sites, are located conveniently close to teaching areas. Some are too small with insufficient furniture and equipment. The control of heating is difficult in some rooms and they are either too hot or too cold. The main reception area at Five Acres, though welcoming, is small and poorly located. This is recognised in the self-assessment report and a new reception area is planned.

62 The large bar area with vending machines in the leisure centre is used as a student common room. The area is supervised when it is used by students. The staff common room at Five Acres is both small and dark and requires refurbishment. The refectory area also needs redecoration. The contracted catering service is successful but the refectory area is small and this leads to overcrowding at times. At Cinderford the catering arrangements for students and staff have recently worsened. There is a small range of food and the service of hot dishes has been discontinued.

63 Inspectors agreed that there is a range of good facilities for sport and leisure activities on the Five Acres campus. The indoor centre contains sports hall, gymnasium and fitness centre, swimming pool and squash courts. There is shared use of extensive sports grounds. There are several rugby, soccer and hockey pitches, tennis and basketball courts and an athletics area.



# Cross-college Provision

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**64 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and judged that, although action had been taken to address weaknesses prior to inspection, this had yet to be fully effective.**

#### Key strengths

- improved quality assurance arrangements
- good students' achievements
- improving retention
- good lesson observation programme
- well-managed methods of dealing with complaints

#### Weaknesses

- the poor quality of some course reviews
- little radical planning to improve provision and meet targets
- too little staff development on improving teaching methods

65 Governors and staff are committed to improving the quality of the college's work. The college has revised and improved its quality assurance arrangements over the past three years, with several developments taking place in the 12 months before inspection. The college is now more self-critical than previously. Arrangements for quality assurance are generally more rigorous and consistent. This has contributed to improvements in students' achievements, improving retention on many courses, and good attendance. More accurate judgements are made about the quality of the college's work. Inspectors agreed with the college that some developments now require consolidation and consistent application.

66 Overall responsibility for monitoring quality assurance arrangements, and retention and

achievement data rests with the standards committee, formed in March 2000 as a subcommittee of the governing body. Separate effective arrangements are in place for the quality assurance of the college's academic performance and for its support services. The quality review group maintains a good overview of the academic quality assurance policy. It reports both to the academic board and to the standards committee. The main work of the group is to analyse the outcomes of the lesson observation programme carried out by the academic quality assurance team. The charter review group, formed in 2000, monitors service standards in the support areas. The creation of this group, and the inclusion of all areas of the college in quality assurance, have raised the status of the non-teaching areas of the college as the quality of their work is now measured and demonstrated. Both groups include a member of the governing body. The internal validation committee has developed a thorough system for the scrutiny of new course proposals. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that these developments have improved the college's quality assurance procedures.

67 The academic quality assurance team is becoming increasingly rigorous in its judgements. The strengths, weaknesses and grades arising from its work are used to inform judgements about the quality of teaching and learning, and as a basis for improving quality. The team has just completed its first three-year cycle, during which all curriculum areas of the college were observed. Two teams will carry out the next cycle over two years. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the work of the academic quality assurance team is a strength of the quality assurance arrangements. Staff are observed teaching once every two years as part of the college's well-administered appraisal system.

68 The self-assessment report produced for the inspection went through a careful validation process before approval by the standards

# Cross-college Provision

committee. The curriculum area reports were drafted by the curriculum co-ordinators and presented to a panel comprising the vice-principal, their own head of faculty and another head of faculty. After discussion the reports were rewritten and represented for final validation. The governance report was written by a working party led by the clerk. Members of senior and middle management wrote other cross-college area reports. The college management group validated all cross-college reports and grades. Inspectors judged the self-assessment report to be broadly accurate, but not comprehensive. They agreed with most of the statements of strengths and weaknesses, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

69 A revised course review system called qualification aim review was introduced this year to enable staff to review their courses more effectively and set targets for improvement. This replaces the long-standing course review system. Course teams did not meet the requirements of the new system, and the quality of some reviews and subsequent monitoring of action plans was inadequate. Some, such as English and modern foreign languages and health and care, were rigorous; others such as engineering, mathematics and IT lacked detail. The reviews contained few radical plans to improve provision or to meet the identified targets. Staff development is well co-ordinated and based on a combination of individuals' needs and the strategic requirements of the college. However, links between course reviews and staff development are not systematic and there is insufficient emphasis on ways of improving teaching and learning. Although the overall profile of lessons observed by inspectors graded good or outstanding has improved since the previous inspection, the number of outstanding lessons observed has dropped from 23% to 13%, lower than the sector average.

70 Students' views are sought through a range of comprehensive surveys. Complaints are dealt with promptly and efficiently. Most complaints

are dealt with informally through tutors, who are usually able to deal with students' concerns. Students who have had any reason to make a complaint, either formally or informally, were pleased with the process and the outcomes.

## Governance

### *Grade 2*

**71 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- close monitoring of the financial position and student enrolment
- close attention to educational issues
- effective clerking and good administration of corporation business
- active involvement in self-assessment

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of progress towards strategic objectives
- underdeveloped arrangements for evaluating the performance of the corporation

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

73 The corporation has a membership of 16, including five business members. Five governors have been appointed since 1999. There is one vacancy for a business member. The corporation makes good use of its members' expertise and experience, particularly

# Cross-college Provision

to support its links with the community. A skills audit, however, has identified the current lack of legal, property and marketing expertise. Newly appointed governors receive an appropriate induction. A recent new governor was allocated a mentor, but a governors' handbook is not yet available. In-house training topics have included funding, but there is no formal annual assessment of governors' individual training needs.

74 The independent clerk has wide experience of education. This has been used well by governors to improve governance since the last inspection. Clerking arrangements are effective. The clerk provides appropriate advice to the corporation. Agendas and papers are sent to governors in good time and corporation business is conducted efficiently. The corporation has a set of standing orders and a code of conduct. The register of interests, which is complete and updated annually, covers governors and staff with significant financial responsibilities together with their spouses and partners. Average attendance at corporation and committee meetings has met the attendance target of 75%. The register of interests and corporation papers are available for public inspection in the college's library, but their availability is not widely advertised.

75 The self-assessment report noted that the corporation effectively oversees the college's progress in meeting its objectives. Inspectors judged that, although it has focused on individual aspects such as improvements to the college's accommodation and financial position, it does not sufficiently monitor progress made towards achieving all aspects of the strategic plan. There is insufficient use of measurable targets. The corporation has not recently reviewed or updated the mission of the college. However, the strategic planning committee has recently agreed a new format for reviewing progress. The corporation now receives reports on the achievement of senior managers against objectives linked to the college's strategic plan,

but these do not fully identify the continuing development needs of senior staff.

76 The corporation meets six times a year. Following a review of its committee structure in 2000 the corporation has five committees: strategic planning; audit; remuneration; standards; and search. Each committee has appropriate terms of reference, recently reviewed and approved by the corporation. Reporting arrangements to the corporation are good. The strategic planning committee met six times last year. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that it closely monitors the college's financial performance and student enrolments at each meeting. The management accounts are distributed monthly to each member of the corporation. The corporation recognises that the audit committee, rather than the strategic planning committee, reviewed the end-of-year financial statements before they were approved by the corporation. The audit committee includes an external co-optee with appropriate expertise. The committee receives a progress report on outstanding audit recommendations at each of its meetings.

77 As noted in the self-assessment report, governors take a keen interest in educational issues and students' achievements. They established a standards committee in March 2000. The committee requires managers to produce clearly presented accurate information, including comparisons with national benchmarking data published by the FEFC and value-added data. Recently it requested further information about recruitment from local schools. Governors are members of the college's quality review and charter review committees. They obtain the views of students through the student governor's contribution to meetings, the findings of surveys of student satisfaction, and their attendance at student council meetings. However, there are few formal links between governors and curriculum areas. The annual reporting cycle does not yet include reports on franchised provision, students' complaints,

# Cross-college Provision

charter performance or detailed monitoring reports on the college's implementation of the equal opportunities policy.

78 The corporation is actively involved in the self-assessment process and approved the report before its submission to the FEFC. It monitors the implementation of action plans in the report. Self-assessment of governance was informed by the completion of a governors' questionnaire. The corporation has recently adopted a wide range of performance indicators for governance but, as identified in the self-assessment report, it has yet to use them to form an accurate view of its performance and that of individual governors.

## Management

### *Grade 3*

**79 Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, weaknesses in the monitoring of strategic objectives were omitted.**

#### **Key strengths**

- strong and productive community links
- clear line management structure
- effective promotion of equal opportunities
- good monitoring of students' attendance

#### **Weaknesses**

- weak operational planning
- inadequate monitoring of plans
- inadequate use of targets and performance indicators
- some less than effective communication

80 Since the last inspection, students' retention and achievements have steadily improved and on most courses are above the national averages for the sector. The college has

maintained its strong links with local schools, increasing enrolments from its four partner schools by 12%. Improved links with community groups and local businesses have, for example, led to an innovative project on the premises of the area's largest employer that has enabled many of the employees to achieve basic skills and IT qualifications. This led to a Beacon award for the college. Community participation in education has been widened by a new enterprise centre in Cinderford and basic skills teaching to families in local schools.

81 The college's pursuit of planned objectives is not sufficiently systematic. The strategic plan contains appropriate main objectives focusing on improving students' achievements, increasing participation in education and maintaining a high level of support for students. But the brief operating statement supporting the strategic plan is inadequate. The three faculties do not have operating plans linked to strategic objectives. They rely on actions identified through self-assessment. In many curriculum areas these action plans are insufficient. Arrangements to monitor the strategic plan are inadequate. The self-assessment report identifies a weakness in the harmonisation of the planning cycles, but it does not recognise that some objectives are not being effectively pursued.

82 The use of performance indicators and targets is not uniform or effective across the college. In 1999-2000, although the college achieved its overall funding target, it fell short of its target for 16 to 18 year olds. This contributed to an operating deficit which was not forecast at the start of the year. The college has a good range of promotional materials and marketing activities, but an overall strategy to maintain full-time student enrolments has not been clearly established. As noted in the self-assessment report, market research does not sufficiently inform strategic planning and new course developments.

# Cross-college Provision

83 Teaching is managed by three faculties, which are divided into 22 curriculum areas, each led by a curriculum co-ordinator. Management of most courses is effective. The percentage of good and outstanding lessons observed by inspectors has risen since the last inspection and is above the national average. Retention and achievement targets are set, although the use of targets to improve performance is not well developed in some areas. The setting of performance indicators and targets for improvement, and action plans to achieve targets in curriculum areas are underdeveloped. Cross-college curriculum developments are well managed. For example co-ordinators for key skills and inclusive learning have worked effectively with managers and teachers to introduce curriculum 2000.

84 There are clear line management arrangements for both teaching and support staff which are easily understood by staff. Teachers have adequate opportunities for meetings with line managers and other teaching staff. However, some staff regard senior managers as remote, some curriculum co-ordinators feel that their contribution is undervalued and some support staff do not feel that parity exists between themselves and teachers. These weaknesses were not included in the self-assessment report.

85 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The director of finance is a qualified accountant and a member of the executive team. The college has historically suffered financial difficulties, although the financial forecast for 2000-01 to 2002-03 indicates that improvements are expected. The executive team closely monitors the financial position. Management accounts include an income and expenditure account, a balance sheet, cashflow forecast and some reporting on financial performance indicators. The cashflow forecast is not a 12-month rolling forecast and it does not show the detailed

income and expenditure headings. A course-costing model has been developed and is used to review the viability of new courses. It is not yet fully operational for reviewing existing courses. The strategic plan and financial forecast set out financial objectives for the college. Reporting against these indicators is not fully developed.

86 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that equal opportunities are effectively promoted. A comprehensive policy is supported by an appropriate code of professional conduct. The college follows good practice in its recruitment of staff. Training on aspects of equal opportunities has taken place. However, the equal opportunities policy is not systematically monitored. The brief annual action plan does not address some policy commitments.

87 The college management information system is reliable. The inspection team was provided with accurate data on students' achievements. Attendance data are scanned on to the system each day and useful reports on group and individual attendance are readily available. A suitable range of reports is available to managers, although they cannot access this information from computers in their offices.

## Conclusions

88 The college produced its third self-assessment report for the inspection. The self-assessment report provided sufficient information to form a useful basis from which to plan the inspection. Progress in addressing weaknesses identified in the previous report is clearly shown. Strengths and weaknesses were listed and the sources of evidence clearly stated. Action plans were detailed. Before the inspection, the college provided inspectors with information on the progress achieved since the report was written. Inspectors judged the report to be generally accurate but not comprehensive. They agreed with many of the

# Cross-college Provision

judgements in the report. However, they also identified further strengths and weaknesses in all curriculum and cross-college areas and placed greater significance on some of the weaknesses than the college had in the report. Inspectors agreed with five of the grades for the curriculum areas. They awarded one curriculum area a lower grade, than that given by the college itself. They agreed with three of the college's grades for the five areas of cross-college provision but awarded the remaining two areas a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

89 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (July 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	12
19-24 years	7
25+ years	76
Not known	4
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	9
Level 2 (intermediate)	12
Level 3 (advanced)	15
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Level not specified	0
Non-schedule 2	63
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	132	934	15
Agriculture	4	17	0
Construction	11	11	0
Engineering	108	505	8
Business	103	616	10
Hotel and catering	77	456	7
Health and community care	170	806	13
Art and design	103	378	7
Humanities	247	2,235	34
Basic education	41	432	6
Total	996	6,390	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 1% 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 (July 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	87	19	0	106
Supporting direct learning contact	26	0	0	26
Other support	52	0	0	52
Total	165	19	0	184

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£5,205,000	£5,120,000	£5,170,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.86*	£17.31	£17.33
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	68%	71%
Achievement of funding target	98%	100%	103%
Diversity of income	26%	27%	27%
Operating surplus	-£118,000	£2,000	-£252,000

*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 1998-99 (1998 and 1999) college (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*



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