Sandwell College

REPORT FROM THE INSPECTORATE

1999-00

Contents

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	%	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**
Curriculum areas	*10*	*53*	*30*	*7*	*–*
Cross-college provision	*14*	*54*	*23*	*7*	*2*

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report
Sample size: 104 college inspections

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 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 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

Sandwell College

West Midlands Region

Inspected February 2000

Sandwell College is a large general further education college in the Sandwell Borough of the West Midlands. It recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. The college's self-assessment process involved all staff and governors. External consultants assisted with production and moderation of the self-assessment report, the third produced by the college. The report, which included informative position papers and appropriate evidence, provided a useful basis for inspection. Inspectors agreed with some of the report's judgements but considered that insufficient weight was given to some significant weaknesses. By the inspection, the college had implemented some aspects of the action plan based on the self-assessment report.

The college offers a wide range of courses in all 10 FEFC-funded programme areas. Provision in eight of these was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Almost all teaching is satisfactory and some is good. Teacher education is outstanding. Provision in computing and IT, and construction is unsatisfactory. Students' achievements are often below sector national averages. There have been recent improvements in student retention and achievement rates, in some areas. Students have access to a wide range of student services and arrangements for students with disabilities are comprehensive. There are good learning centres, well-planned building maintenance and good access for students with restricted mobility. Students' progress is impeded by deficiencies in IT equipment. Accommodation is underused. Quality assurance arrangements are well developed but the comprehensive procedures do not yet secure continuous improvement. Governors are committed to the college and well informed. The board's clerking arrangements are effective and its procedures are open. Management has developed sound planning procedures, linked to the self-assessment process. Effective partnerships with external organisations are based on a strong commitment to the local community. Policy and practice on equal opportunities are impressive. There is an underdeveloped system for computerised management information and inefficiency in the deployment of resources. Governors are not sufficiently involved in monitoring the quality of provision. The college should improve: provision in computing and IT; provision in construction; student retention and achievement rates; the low take-up of support opportunities for improving literacy and numeracy skills; student attendance rates; the quality of computerised management information; the deployment of resources; IT equipment; the self-assessment process; accuracy in the grading of teaching; monitoring students' progress; and some poor accommodation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Computing and information technology	4
Construction	4
Engineering	3
Business administration	3
Hospitality and catering	3
Health and social care	3
English	3
Teacher education	1
Basic skills	3

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	3
General resources	3
Quality assurance	3
Governance	2
Management	3

The College and its Mission

1   Sandwell College is a large general further education college that offers courses in all 10 of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). It serves the borough of Sandwell in the West Midlands. The college has four campuses at Smethwick, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Oldbury. In addition, it uses 37 venues across the whole area to encourage local residents to take up opportunities in further education. The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas.

2   Of employment opportunities in Sandwell, 35% are in manufacturing industry, and mainly provided in small companies. Local employment provision during the next five years is forecast to expand by 1.5% compared with 10% nationwide. The local unemployment rate is over 11% compared with 7.8% nationally. Unemployment levels amongst people from ethnic minorities are high, especially in Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups where the rate for both groups is 38%. Long-term unemployment is also high: 28% of unemployed people have been out of work for over one year and 45% have been unemployed for over two years.

3   There are 10 other further education colleges and a sixth form college within a 10-mile radius of the West Bromwich campus. Seven schools in Sandwell have sixth forms. Many students' educational achievements are modest at entry. In 1998, 29% of 16 year old pupils in Sandwell gained five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or above, compared with a national average of 45%. The Sandwell staying-on rate is currently 26%. In July 1999, the college enrolled 19,796 students, of whom 82% were aged 19 and over. Of the college's students, 26% were studying at foundation level, 36% at intermediate level, 14% at advanced level, 2% were following higher education level programmes, and 22% were on non-vocational

courses. Many students come from areas of high economic deprivation.

4   The curriculum at the college is wide and covers vocational and non-vocational areas at many levels. In addition to the further provision offered at local venues in the area, training is also available at employers' premises. The college has a Saturday and Sunday college, and provides a summer school; both these initiatives recruit well. Programmes range from pre-vocational to postgraduate level and include the national vocational qualification (NVQ), general national vocational qualification (GNVQ), higher national certificate/higher national diploma, GCSE, general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and a large range of professional qualifications. The college is in partnership with the Universities of Central England, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and Salford.

5   The college employs 659 full-time equivalent staff of whom 346 are full-time equivalent teaching staff and 313 are full-time equivalent support staff. The college's management structure was revised in August 1999. Three teaching directorates replaced 12 curriculum schools, and directorates were established for information and learning technology, quality and performance, marketing and development, and resources.

6   The college belongs to local partnerships that include the Sandwell Civic Partnership and the Sandwell Lifelong Learning Partnership. It is involved in various regional economic and social development initiatives. The college contributes to national curriculum development initiatives. Links abroad include student and staff exchange programmes with colleges in Europe and North America.

7   The college's mission is: 'to raise the aspirations and attainments of the people of Sandwell; to contribute to the economic regeneration of the West Midlands; and to be recognised as a robust, innovative and reliable provider of further and higher education'.

Context

The Inspection

8   The college was inspected during February 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The information included data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998, which were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college supplied achievement and retention data for 1999. Inspectors checked these data against class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Fifteen inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 70 days carried out the FEFC inspection. Inspectors observed 107 lessons, including tutorials, and examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, college managers, staff and students. A team of 10 inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college inspection. The TSC inspectors: concentrated on work-based training in construction, engineering, health, care, business, retail, leisure and hairdressing; interviewed 129 trainees; visited 70 work placements; and observed 15 training sessions, 13 trainee review sessions and five work-based assessments. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

9   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 53% were judged to be good or outstanding and 7% were less than satisfactory. This profile compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	1	1	3	0	5
GCSE	1	0	2	0	0	3
GNVQ	4	10	12	3	0	29
NVQ	7	10	9	0	0	26
Access to higher education	1	2	4	0	0	7
Other vocational	5	11	5	2	0	23
Other*	1	3	10	0	0	14
Total (No)	19	37	43	8	0	107
Total (%)	18	35	40	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report
*includes basic education and higher education

Context

10   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Sandwell College	8.3	65
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 4

11   Inspectors observed 12 lessons in computing and information technology (IT). Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified an additional strength and several additional weaknesses.

Key strengths
- students' technical skills
- the work placement of GNVQ advanced students
- good course documentation

Weaknesses
- the failure of some students to work positively
- deficiencies in IT facilities
- poor attendance rates
- poor accommodation and furniture
- low retention and achievement rates on several courses

12   A broad range of full-time and part-time courses offers progression in computing and IT from level 1 to 4. This provision is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Courses run on two of the main sites with some provision based in the community. The courses include: awards from the Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G); GCE A level in computing and IT; and GNVQ advanced level in IT. There is underdeveloped provision for specialist and full-cost courses. The range of courses is not always appropriate to the needs of students. Most courses have appropriate schemes of work and detailed assignment documentation which include timetables for completion. Course reviews are effective and systematically recorded. The recording of students' achievements is thorough and course documentation is good. Teachers written comments on students' assignments help students to improve the quality of their work. The poor quality of assignments was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, but teachers have recently introduced improvements. The monitoring of students' progress has become more rigorous in an attempt to improve poor retention and achievements.

13   The quality of teaching and learning was often satisfactory. In the better lessons teachers made good use of questioning to gain attention and response from students who were using applications software effectively and developing appropriate technical skills. In other lessons, poor punctuality, poor attendance, and students' lack of concentration in class hindered effective learning. Inadequate IT facilities in several lessons impeded learning. For example, a student working on spreadsheets was disrupted when the application failed on two occasions. Students in two rooms were unable to print their work. Specialist software had not been installed on all of the machines in one room which resulted in students and teachers wasting time looking for the application. The computer mouse was missing on several machines and students were unable to obtain replacements. Teachers and students, especially at level 3, make insufficient use of IT. For example students do not use the Internet as part of their studies. There is a productive six-week work placement that incorporates assignment work for all students on the GNVQ advanced IT course. This was recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

14   There is a good and extensive bookstock in the library for computing courses. Initiatives to provide learning materials electronically and a computing section Intranet are at an early stage of development. No use is made of electronic mail as a learning and assessment method. Students have to save their work to floppy disks,

which restricts the range of available software applications and the scale of assignments that they can undertake. A significant proportion of the teaching accommodation and furniture is of a poor standard. There is insufficient workspace for students in some practical areas. Some overhead projection facilities and whiteboards are inadequate. There is little use of display material in classrooms. Several of these weaknesses, including the problems with IT, had been identified as areas for development during course reviews and team meetings.

15   Overall achievement and retention rates are recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Retention rates for most qualifications and a significant minority of pass or achievement rates are below the national benchmarks. Achievements on most level 3 qualifications have been below the national average for the sector for three years. Students' achievements on level 1 qualifications are at or about the national average. The OCR computer literacy and information technology course has registered students' achievements comparable with the national average for the last three years; the standard of students' work during their course is generally good.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing and information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	**1998**	**1999**
OCR computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	1,172 86 52	1,035 85 56	1,008 82 58
C&G 7261	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	29 100 76	15 67 0	* * *
Certificate in IT (modules)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	21 81 31	240 86 21	264 69 32
C&G 7261	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	37 92 68	29 45 83
Diploma in IT (modules)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	71 99 19	27 63 44
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	11 64 60	27 67 67	* * *
GCE A level IT	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	28 64 69
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	10 100 30	9 78 0	26 98 63

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 4

16   Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They found that the self-assessment report overstated some strengths and failed to identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths
- a wide range of craft and technician provision
- the high standards of practical work
- well-equipped and well-decorated specialist accommodation
- strong links with local schools
- a well-resourced learning centre

Weaknesses
- consistently low achievement rates on most courses
- poor retention rates
- low student attendance rates
- unsatisfactory achievement on key skills

17   Inspectors agreed that the college offers a wide range of full-time, part-time and short course provision. The range of courses includes: basic skills; NVQ levels 2 and 3 in most craft areas; a national certificate in housing studies; and GNVQs at intermediate and advanced levels in construction and the built environment. These courses offer good opportunities for progression and meet the learning needs of students, employers and the community. Extensive links with local schools provide opportunities for pupils to attend 'taster' courses in building crafts. Courses are generally well managed. Course team meetings are formally minuted and seek to give priority to issues of retention, achievement, attendance and punctuality. Copies of the minutes and recommended action are sent to managers.

18   All lessons have a combined scheme of work and lesson plan. The standard of most teaching is satisfactory and is appropriate to the students' needs. In the best teaching there was strong interaction between the teacher and all the students. Teachers used an appropriate variety of methods to retain students' attention. Teachers gave effective practical demonstrations and emphasised the need to observe good industrial practice. In the less successful lessons, the teaching was dreary and undemanding. Some teachers failed to give clear explanations. Others did not adapt their materials and approaches to cater for the full range of ability in the class, even in lessons where classes studying at different levels had been combined. The average level of attendance of the lessons observed was low at 46% and the average class size was 7.75, which, when compared with the national average for construction, is low. Absent students are not routinely contacted to explain their absence. Teachers written comments on students' work are helpful to students. The records of students' achievements are effective and are prominently displayed in the workshop. Staff and students observe health and safety requirements including the wearing of appropriate footwear. Health and safety notices are prominently displayed in all workshops.

19   The self-assessment report only identified poor achievement in NVQ programmes but inspectors found poor achievement across most qualification levels over the last three years. Students' achievements on all construction courses in 1998-99 were significantly below the national averages for the sector. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Examples for 1998-99 include: 12% below the national average for courses at level 1; 10% below average at level 2 craft courses; 26% below average on short courses; 61% below average at level 3 craft; and 19% below average at level 3 technician. Most student retention rates have been low and many have been significantly below the national

average rates for the sector in the past three years. Portfolio development by craft students is improving but requires considerable support from teachers to ensure that the standard matches the requirements of the awarding bodies. Students' use of evidence from the workplace is in the early stages of development. Project work at national certificate level is generally of high quality and is well presented. GNVQ students produce good technical drawings and assignment work. The quality of workmanship demonstrated by some bricklaying students was excellent. Overall, attendance rates are low. Students' achievements in basic qualifications for basic numeracy and literacy skills are poor.

20   Inspectors agreed that teachers are experienced and well qualified and have a good knowledge of their subjects. Many have up-to-date industrial experience. There is a high standard of accommodation in all construction rooms. Each room is well decorated, appropriately furnished and has examples of students' work displayed on noticeboards. The department has a 'wet' laboratory equipped with the full range of testing machines. It also has an appropriate range of surveying equipment. The number and maintenance of hand tools are adequate. Construction has its own well-used resource centre, which is appropriately equipped with multimedia computers connected to the Internet. A scanner and printer are also available. This centre has a wide range of journals, videos and specialist periodicals which are available for students to use.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in construction, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Foundation vocational (craft and general operations)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	135 58 47	93 53 73	143 72 46
Intermediate vocational crafts	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	118 70 77	195 47 75	179 69 52
Gas and electrical (short courses)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	98 100 77	37 68 96	21 100 72
Advanced vocational crafts	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	54 76 56	37 59 100	26 92 11
Advanced vocational technician	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	34 65 65	21 76 43	29 59 53

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Engineering

Grade 3

21   The inspection concentrated on automotive and electronic engineering and general engineering courses. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. Inspectors from the TSC and the FEFC agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment reports and identified some additional weaknesses in students' achievements and in retention rates.

Key strengths

- the improvement in retention rates on technician programmes
- high achievement rates on advanced technician and C&G level 3 courses
- outstanding facilities and equipment
- effective management of the motor vehicle curriculum

Weaknesses

- poor retention levels on NVQ programmes
- low achievement rates on NVQ and C&G level 2 courses
- the inadequate GNVQ tutorial programme
- poor attendance rates in GNVQ lessons on key skills

22   The curriculum area of automotive engineering and associated electronics offers provision in GNVQ at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, together with NVQs and C&G courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. General engineering covers a wide range of engineering disciplines. Provision offered includes: a range of full-time and part-time C&G programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3; GNVQ at intermediate and advanced levels; and national certificate and diploma programmes. The motor vehicle curriculum is well managed. Course files are comprehensive and include full tutorial and integrated key skills programmes. Course team meetings produce action plans which clearly indicate responsibility for each action as well as the target dates for completion. Students are not represented on course teams. Students take literacy and numeracy tests to assess their need for learning support, which is available to students both individually and in groups. In general engineering GNVQ intermediate programmes, tutorials are used only for academic work and do not focus on personal development. There are low rates of attendance by students on GNVQ key skills programmes.

23   Some good teaching was observed, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. Teachers used appropriate question and answer techniques to develop students' knowledge, to involve students in discussion and to check their understanding of the work. Computer-aided learning packages motivate students and help them to succeed in their studies. Wall charts enable students to assess their own progress against that of their peers. The development of key skills is successfully integrated with vocational teaching. For example, in a foundation level tutorial on key skills the teacher successfully related the study of fractions to automotive terminology in terms of spanner and drill sizes. In a practical lesson, students correctly identified a range of different design characteristics of engines together with likely damage to components. Examples of good practice included the effective use of a whiteboard during a lesson to build up students' understanding of a theory stage by stage. Mathematical techniques were explained slowly and carefully. The students were able to check their understanding by trying to solve similar mathematical problems. Some less effective teaching was observed. Teachers spent too long talking without checking that students understood what was being said. In these situations students passively copied notes and did not respond to the teaching. Teachers follow appropriate schemes of work. Some lesson

plans were of a high standard; others were elementary and lacked clear learning objectives. Students speak highly of their courses and the college. Attendance is closely monitored. Safe working practices are observed at all times in workshops.

24   The standard of teaching accommodation is high. There are workshops of an exceptionally high standard containing up-to-date equipment, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. The principal motor vehicle workshops are clean and reflect current commercial standards. Specialist equipment for testing engines records car performance and exhaust emissions. Three new cars are purchased each year; major manufacturers donate others. Three body shops contain state-of-the-art equipment for vehicle body repairs. A curriculum specialist study area is used effectively by students for both work on their portfolios and as a 'drop-in' centre. Facilities in the general engineering area include a computer-aided training laboratory, which has a wide range of computer learning packages, and a computer-aided design area which contains the latest software. The moulding and casting workshop is one of the few still operating in the further education sector. All staff are technically qualified and most are qualified teachers and have degrees.

25   Student retention and achievement rates vary considerably across the curriculum. In 1997 retention rates on both intermediate and advanced technician courses were below the national average for the sector. Retention rates have steadily improved on these programmes and are at present above the national average. Retention rates on the majority of NVQ programmes are below the national average. There are high achievement rates on the advanced technician and C&G level 3 courses and the achievements on C&G level 3 courses are between 20% and 35% above the national average for the sector. There are low achievement rates on NVQ and C&G level 2

courses. The self-assessment report acknowledged areas of both good and poor retention and achievement, but failed to identify clearly the overall trends in performance.

Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement
rates in engineering, 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year 1997	1998	1999
NVQ engineering	2	Number of starters	50	85	57
		Retention (%)	38	68	56
		Achievement (%)	62	38	52
C&G engineering	2	Number of starters	130	139	87
		Retention (%)	77	83	89
		Achievement (%)	37	36	58
Intermediate technician	2	Number of starters	92	55	49
		Retention (%)	73	80	80
		Achievement (%)	70	48	84
NVQ engineering	3	Number of starters	77	68	40
		Retention (%)	69	88	83
		Achievement (%)	68	55	88
C&G engineering	3	Number of starters	123	70	83
		Retention (%)	86	86	76
		Achievement (%)	73	83	87
Advanced technician	3	Number of starters	83	102	113
		Retention (%)	67	79	81
		Achievement (%)	67	72	85

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Business Administration

Grade 3

26   Inspectors observed 16 lessons covering GNVQ business at all levels, GCE A level business studies, business administration and office technology provision. The TSC inspectors also observed two lessons. Inspectors found that the self-assessment report gave insufficient attention to the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- some good achievement rates
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- effective teaching of classes of students with different levels of ability
- flexible arrangements for study in the community
- a wide and appropriate range of courses

Weaknesses

- poor attendance rates
- falling retention rates on full-time business courses at level 3
- underdeveloped specialist resources
- some dull teaching environments

27   The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses at three large campuses. In addition, the college increases opportunities for study by offering some part-time courses at other locations in the community. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the range of programmes are increasingly offered at times to suit the variety of students' individual needs, and plans for further study. However, the numbers recruited to full-time courses are declining. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the recent changes in the management of the business curriculum. There is a head of curriculum at each of the three campuses but no overall curriculum leader. Inspectors found that the quality of the student experience differed from campus to campus. For example, at Smethwick, the GNVQ students benefit from a work experience placement but their counterparts at Wednesbury do not. The challenge of finding suitable placements has been partly met by using an actual business that is located in the college. At West Bromwich the legal secretaries undertake work placements in law offices, where they may subsequently obtain relevant employment unless they choose to progress to a higher level course.

28   The quality of teaching varies significantly. In the better lessons the teachers carefully monitor and accurately record each student's progress, and agree demanding individual achievement targets. Teachers skilfully manage groups which contain students working towards a variety of qualifications at differing rates of progress. In less successful lessons, teachers fail to engage students' interest and do not make use of up-to-date, relevant materials. In some lessons there were inappropriate seating arrangements which impeded learning. Working relationships between staff and students are good and many teachers are sensitive to the difficulties that many students face in continuing their education. However, attendance rates are poor in some courses.

29   There is a consistent pattern of improvement in students' achievements on GNVQ courses at intermediate and advanced levels. Over a three-year period the achievement rates have risen by nearly 20% from below to well above the national averages for the sector. However, there has been no corresponding improvement in retention rates; in the advanced course the rate has declined further. In 1999, the GCE A level in business studies retention and achievement rates both declined compared with 1998. Many of the numerous qualifications in business administration and office technology have achievement rates which are at or near the national averages. Achievement rates on the office and business technology level 2 course have risen by nearly 20% over a three-year period and are well above the national averages.

The self-assessment report did not give sufficient weight to either the strengths or the weaknesses in students' achievements.

30 Staff are well qualified and part-time teachers make good use of their current knowledge of the industry to enliven courses such as the medical secretaries certificate. There has been insufficient recent investment in resources for business administration at West Bromwich. There is over-reliance on electronic typewriters rather than modern office technology and the absence of a realistic business working environment is a weakness not referred to in the self-assessment report.

The teaching rooms at Smethwick and Wednesbury provide a dull environment for studies. Empty noticeboards and the lack of relevant or interesting wall displays do not indicate that these areas are intended to prepare and motivate people for a career in business. The resource centres serve business studies courses well. There is a good stock of books and journals. Co-operation between teachers and library staff is effective. Out-of-date material is removed systematically from stock and there is increasing use by students of relevant Internet sites.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business administration, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
RSA text processing part 1 (one-year course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	369 82 55	206 81 74	243 74 77
RSA audio transcription part 2 (one-year course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	102 70 52	80 70 57	79 74 43
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	80 64 55	35 63 70	42 64 78
RSA text processing part 1 (short)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	101 81 54	75 97 73	51 92 74
RSA wordprocessing part 2 (one-year course)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	137 94 71	91 91 76	127 86 71
Intergrated business technology (one-year course)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	93 87 60	160 77 73	161 83 79
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	84 68 58	102 75 66	69 46 78
GCE A level business (two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	36 67 52	27 85 80	27 66 56

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 3

31   Inspectors observed 11 lessons in hospitality and catering. They agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, some strengths were overstated and insufficient weight was applied to some weaknesses.

Key strengths
- a comprehensive induction process
- well-developed teaching programmes
- a high standard of assessment
- good progression within programmes

Weaknesses
- poor retention and achievement rates on some programmes
- an inadequate range of current learning materials
- insufficient provision of some small equipment

32   The hospitality and catering section forms part of the services to people curriculum area and is located at the West Bromwich campus. Full-time, part-time and short programmes are offered and courses are also held at weekends. There is an appropriately varied programme leading to NVQ levels 1 to 3 as well as specialist courses in sugar flowers, cake decoration, food hygiene, and safety and the licensed trade. Programmes are well established. There are good progression routes for students from pre-foundation to advanced level. This strength in provision is recognised in the self-assessment report. Initial assessment of students' abilities and the opportunity to attend a summer school prior to entry improved the transition into college for students. A well-developed induction programme helps to ensure that students are on the right course and at the appropriate level of study. Schemes of work are well constructed and most lessons are well planned. Students' views are regularly sought and incorporated into course reviews. Students are represented at course meetings. These meetings are well documented and produce appropriate action plans. Internal verification is carried out but does not follow a standard format.

33   The quality of teaching is good. Teaching methods are adjusted to accommodate individual needs. Good examples of industrial practice are used in teaching to develop students' understanding of their work. Full-time students undertake a period of industrial placement at each level of their programmes as is recognised in the self-assessment report. The college's realistic working environments provide good opportunities for assessment. Students studying at different levels work together effectively within these areas. Level 1 students often achieve their qualification within 18 weeks of joining the course. Individual learning plans identify expected learning outcomes. Reviews of progress are carried out on a regular basis and lead to effective action plans. Written work is marked well and includes appropriate comments by staff. Students who have identified additional learning needs are helped by teachers within the area and by learning support staff. Work on key skills is integrated with NVQ programmes. The assessment of reception students is carried out within the industry. Targets for student recruitment, retention and achievement are set, understood and monitored by staff.

34   Retention rates on the NVQ level 1 programmes in both food preparation and cooking and serving food and drink for 1997 and 1998 were below the national average for the sector although they improved in 1999. Achievement rates on NVQ level 1 food preparation and cooking in 1998 and 1999 were below the national average. However, retention and achievement rates on the NVQ level 1 serving food and drink were both high in 1999.

The self-assessment report recognises that both achievement and retention rates on level 2 food preparation and service programmes are below the national average. The quality of students' coursework reflects the required industrial standards as determined by the awarding body. The opportunity to gain additional qualifications improves students' employment prospects within the industry. Students' progress is closely monitored and is leading to some improvements in rates of retention and achievement. Precise records are maintained of students' achievements. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for and to negotiate the assessment process with their tutors. The standard of students' work is high.

35   Teachers are appropriately qualified and make good use of their industrial experience during their teaching. However, staff have insufficient opportunities to update their vocational skills within industry. The self-assessment report recognises that the college has good realistic working environments in the refectory and public restaurant. Two practice kitchens support these facilities. Stocks of some small equipment are low and do not support current trends in food presentation. Teaching accommodation is generally well maintained and there are good displays of students' work. A resource room for hospitality students contains both books and videos as well as two computers for students' use. Further IT equipment is located in the resource centre alongside the book and periodical stock. Some books are outdated and there is little new stock relevant to current trends within the industry.

Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement
rates in hospitality and catering, 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation hospitality and catering (one-year course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	11 36 25	6 67 50
NVQ catering and hospitality, food preparation and cooking (one-year course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	32 47 80	44 43 53	29 76 56
NVQ catering and hospitality, serving food and drink (one-year course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	20 65 85	44 52 78	47 85 77
NVQ catering and hospitality, food preparation and cooking (two-year course)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	12 83 67	45 67 81	31 68 57
NVQ catering and hospitality, serving food and drink (two-year course)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	7 100 86	13 54 83	6 67 57
GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering (two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	7 100 49	4 75 67	* * *
Advanced food hygiene certificate	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	27 89 88	38 89 76	25 96 79

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*courses did not run

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

36   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. The TSC inspectors observed two lessons. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- high retention and achievement rates on NVQ direct care courses
- good opportunities for progression
- effective arrangements for placing students on the appropriate course
- regular, rigorous review and action-planning for students
- well-motivated students

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate course
- low achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses
- unsatisfactory attendance rates
- insufficient use of the strong links with health and care providers
- inadequate written feedback from some teachers on students' work

37   The college offers a range of full-time and part-time programmes from foundation to advanced level which provide effective opportunities for students to progress inside and outside the college. Inspectors from the TSC and the FEFC agreed that close links have been developed with a social services department, a national health trust and local residential care providers. One result is the provision of NVQ training for staff. Further links are planned with the private sector. Insufficient use is made of these contacts to enrich the curriculum for full-time students. Students have a block work placement twice each year. There is no employers' forum for the health and social care section.

38   Effective diagnostic assessment forms part of the interview process for college-based students and includes identification of an individual's preferred way of studying. The results determine the level of study and range of activities offered to the student. Additional support is made available through tutorial sessions and the college's central service for study support. Regular and well-documented reviews of students' progress together with action plans enable teachers to monitor and assess individual needs. Students work enthusiastically at their studies and speak highly of their courses. Inspectors agreed that the section is well managed by a cohesive and motivated team. Their meetings produce clear action plans. All staff contribute to: a review of strategies for monitoring students' progress; the production of position papers; the self-assessment report; and bids for the section budget. Tutors are appropriately qualified and make good use of the 15 days allocated by the college for professional studies to update their knowledge and skills. Comprehensive course files include appropriately detailed course handbooks and a separate handbook for induction. Systematic and rigorous internal verification is evident across the provision.

39   Overall the teaching is satisfactory. Lessons are well planned and teachers use an appropriate range of activities to help students learn. In the majority of lessons, aims and objectives were shared with the students at the start. In most lessons well-designed handouts supported learning. In a few lessons, overhead transparencies that lacked important details inhibited learning. In the better lessons teachers made regular checks to ensure that students were understanding the work. They summarised the learning objectives to draw the lesson to an effective conclusion. In some lessons, opportunities were lost to make

effective links with the workplace and other units of study. The pace of learning was too slow in a small number of lessons.

40   The quality of written feedback from teachers varied considerably. Many failed to offer clear guidance that would help students to improve. The correction of punctuation and spelling was not always evident. Assignments are vocationally relevant and are set at an appropriate level for the course.

41   The self-assessment report did not identify that retention and achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate course were well below the national average for the sector in 1999. Retention and achievement rates have been erratic on the GNVQ advanced course; in 1999 retention rates more than doubled and were well above the national average yet achievement rates fell by 25%. Achievement rates on the NVQ direct care course are well above the national average. Attendance rates were low in most lessons. Standard documentation from awarding bodies is used to record achievement of units and the development of key skills. As the self-assessment report identifies, there was little use of IT in many assignments. NVQ portfolios are well presented and reach an appropriate standard. The better work from students demonstrated a wide reading programme and a critical evaluation of findings. Students on the access to nursing course make good use of the Internet to aid their research.

42   All groups are timetabled into a specialist resource room for specialist support with their learning. The resource centre has an adequate range of current texts and periodicals but insufficient copies. All courses have a base room where students' work is displayed on the walls. A specialist room provides equipment for practical caring skills.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and social care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	Number of starters	20	17	23
		Retention (%)	65	76	63
		Achievement (%)	85	100	100
NVQ direct care	2	Number of starters	8	73	212
		Retention (%)	100	93	85
		Achievement (%)	100	100	83
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	44	28	28
		Retention (%)	79	82	64
		Achievement (%)	94	100	50
Access to nursing	3	Number of starters	61	81	48
		Retention (%)	70	58	63
		Achievement (%)	100	100	90
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	16	21	12
		Retention (%)	62	43	92
		Achievement (%)	80	89	64

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

English

Grade 3

43   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with many of the findings in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses in teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- some well-managed teaching
- good opportunities to study GCSE English
- high standards of students' written work

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates in GCE A level English
- insufficiently rigorous review process
- some insufficiently demanding teaching

44   English provision at the college consists of GCE A level English and GCSE English language. In addition, English staff teach communications programmes to students on vocational courses. All full-time and part-time students are entitled to receive tuition in GCSE English and communication key skills. Within the access programmes there are modules in communication and literature. GCE A level courses are offered over two years full time on one campus and part time on two campuses. As the self-assessment report states, the college offers a range of flexible opportunities to study GCSE English across the three campuses through a team of staff who use common induction materials and assignments. The GCE A level section and GCSE teams meet to review provision and students' progress. As part of the self-assessment process, teams produced position papers; some of these are insufficiently rigorous. Accurate data and national benchmarking figures are not used to review students' achievements. The position papers fail to address poor attendance, punctuality and students' achievements. Two of these weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

45   Most teaching is satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers demonstrated their enthusiasm through lively and interesting activities. For example, in a GCSE lesson students prepared for their oral assessment by grading other students using a video and the examination board criteria. The discussion that followed was well managed, focused and practical. In another carefully planned lesson, a vocational tutor and a communications specialist worked well together to produce a lively and effective lesson introducing report writing to a group of GNVQ engineering students. Some teaching was dull and undemanding and failed to sustain students' interest and attention. In some lessons, there was an over reliance on tutor-led discussion and too few opportunities for students to contribute. Some teachers accepted inadequate answers to questions. The self-assessment report did not identify that there was little use of audiovisual aids or IT in the classroom. Attendance rates were low and students frequently arrived late for lessons.

46   In the context of the development of key skills, students' communication needs are assessed by diagnostic screening on entry to the college. Marking of the diagnostic tests is not always prompt. The tests provide a detailed analysis of needs, which are then met through workshops and by study link tutors and key skills teachers and co-ordinators. There is no formal system for monitoring students' progress and no established means of communication between staff teaching key skills communications and staff teaching GCSE English.

47   Students' examination achievements in GCE A level English are below national averages for the sector. Pass rates in the two-year

full-time GCE A level and GCSE English declined between 1998 and 1999. Results in the one-year GCE A level have remained static over the same period. The self-assessment report recognises the low achievement rate in GCSE but fails to identify fully the severity of weaknesses in the GCE A level results. Students' written work was satisfactory; there were some examples of work of a high standard. For example, a GCSE assignment on personal non-fiction writing produced some vivid and well-written narrative and description.

48   Classrooms are generally of an appropriate standard, although many of them are overcrowded. There are some displays of specialist materials in rooms. Video equipment is available on all campuses. Key skills workshops are well stocked with specialist materials of a high quality. IT equipment in the workshops is subject to frequent breakdowns; there is a lack of technical support for remedying the faults.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	**1998**	**1999**
GCSE English language (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	234	233	162
		Retention (%)	74	76	81
		Achievement (%)	60	67	51
GCSE English language (two-year course)	2	Number of starters	26	24	14
		Retention (%)	65	63	93
		Achievement (%)	59	60	54
GCE A level English language (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	51	47	30
		Retention (%)	94	81	87
		Achievement (%)	81	53	54
GCE A level English language (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	6	24	34
		Retention (%)	100	67	70
		Achievement (%)	67	75	58

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

Teacher Education

Grade 1

49 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with the main judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- high achievement rates
- outstanding teaching
- clear and comprehensive course documentation
- good support for students

Weaknesses

- low retention rates

50 The college offers part-time teacher training courses leading to C&G 7307 qualification at stage 1 and 2 and the C&G 9281 qualification for teaching basic skills. All courses have detailed schemes of work. Clear lesson plans identify learning outcomes and are written to a common format. A modular programme gives students opportunities to change the day and time when they attend to suit their individual needs. Appropriately detailed handouts and course guides provide an effective resource for future reference. Feedback from students indicates high levels of satisfaction with most aspects of the teacher training course. When students identified the need for improvements in the induction process this was reviewed. Clearer guidelines about the course and its assessment requirements are now given to students during their first lessons.

51 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report that teaching and learning strategies meet the needs of individual students. Much teaching is outstanding and imaginative. Students are well motivated to take responsibility for the planning and organisation of their own learning. An appropriate variety of teaching methods is used, including demonstrations, group work and discussions that involve the whole class. In most lessons there is lively discussion and group interaction as students learnt new concepts and methods. Teachers are themselves models of excellent teaching practice for their students. They encourage the students to reflect on how they are being taught. In some lessons students were required to evaluate the effectiveness of the resources that they plan to use to meet the needs of the wide range of learners which they will encounter. Equal opportunities issues are an integral component in most lessons. Students record their active participation in the lessons in their learning journals, which are of a high standard.

52 As identified in the self-assessment report, substantial support is given to students as an integral part of their course. All students are offered a tutorial after each marked assignment to discuss ways of improving future work. Students are highly appreciative of this support and the feedback they receive from teachers. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the self-assessment report that some students need more time to develop appropriate key skills. Further curriculum development is required to integrate key skills fully with the coursework.

53 The quality of students' written work on the C&G 7307 courses is of a high quality and is of a satisfactory standard on the C&G 9281 courses. Students maintain well-organised course files and assignment portfolios. As students complete various units on the C&G 9281 courses, these are assessed and signed off and new units are planned with target dates for completion. Students' written work is carefully marked and clear guidance is given on how they consider further improvement. Students are encouraged to assess their own performance as well as that of their peers during teaching practice. They are firmly encouraged to reflect on their practice and to plan for improvements. Achievement rates on both the C&G 7307 and

9281 courses are high, and exceed national averages for the sector by over 15%. Retention rates are slightly below the national average. This weakness was understated in the self-assessment report. Attendance rates for all lessons are satisfactory.

54   There are good learning materials available both in the resource centre and the two dedicated teaching rooms. The teaching rooms are attractive and adequately furnished. Examples of students' work that demonstrates good practice are displayed on the walls to offer encouragement to other students. In each of the teaching rooms, there is a useful selection of learning materials for students. The library stock is kept up to date and offers a good range of relevant and current materials. Students are encouraged to use the Internet and one student group on the C&G 7307 stage 2 course has recently set up its own webpage for the class. All teachers have appropriate assessor qualifications, are well qualified and continue to update their knowledge and skills.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in teacher education, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 9281	3	Number of starters	58	37	38
		Retention (%)	77	75	84
		Achievement (%)	68	85	93
C&G 7307	3	Number of starters	72	142	90
		Retention (%)	97	89	91
		Achievement (%)	77	97	90

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Basic Skills

Grade 3

55   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the college's findings in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the extensive range of provision
- inclusive approaches to teaching and learning
- significant increases in student numbers
- effective strategies for communicating with staff
- a good range of paper-based resources

Weaknesses

- low attendance rates on many courses
- inadequate systems for recording students' achievements
- no use of statistical data for planning and target-setting
- insufficient specialist staff
- shortcomings in the use of and support for IT

56   Inspectors agreed that a wide variety of routes to improving students' literacy and numeracy skills are available. Provision at each campus includes: discrete courses; basic skills integrated with vocational provision; basic skills as a contribution to key skills work at level 1; and additional support in basic skills. Discrete courses offer four hours of study each week, but many students do not take advantage of this opportunity and only attend for two hours. Effective learning and interaction with peers is lost because class numbers are small.

57   Students may attend small group, large group or individual lessons or one of a large number of courses based in community venues. The recent reduction in the number of off-site

locations has caused a drop in the number of students attending discrete courses in the community. The reduction is more than balanced by substantial growth in the number of students attending courses at main campuses. There are currently approximately 1,000 students on the programme, which provides a wide range of progression opportunities. Data on progression from below level 1 are not available. The college has not used statistical data in planning and setting targets for rates of retention and achievement. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There is an effective system for carrying out assessments by vocational staff during induction. This has helped to raise levels of staff awareness of basic skills needs and has substantially increased the number of referrals.

58   The standard of teaching is satisfactory. On discrete courses teachers draw up individual learning plans with students based on their interests and devise programmes to develop their skills. A mixture of group and individual activities is offered on all courses. Students with disabilities are in every lesson, and receive appropriate additional help from staff. Many lessons use volunteers; the best are well trained and work sensitively in groups. As identified in the self-assessment report attendance rates on many discrete courses are low, which results in slow progress by many students. The average attendance in lessons observed was 58% and the average class size was 5.5. Some courses run by vocational teachers are particularly successful in motivating students.

59   Many students expressed satisfaction with their teachers and were pleased with the growth in their self-confidence. The college has no systems for recording the value-added to students' achievements or for collating assessment data. Students' work on discrete courses is marked positively. Teachers seek to encourage the students. The absence of clear assessment criteria made some students unsure about what standard they were aiming to reach. They consult and support each other

spontaneously. Students who work towards national accreditation have only partial success. Achievement rates were below the national average on some courses. Retention rates were similar to national averages.

60 Inspectors agree that there is a good range of paper-based learning and teaching resources, particularly in the workshops. Off-site locations at venues in the community are less well provided for. Staff are experienced and hold specialist qualifications but there is a shortage of specialist staff in some workshops. Students

who attend 'drop-in' sessions in some workshops are unable to receive support from teachers who are fully occupied with timetabled lessons. There is insufficient technical support to deal with the breakdown of IT equipment or to install and maintain hardware that would enable good and existing software packages to be used for all students. Several staff need additional training in order to become confident in the use of teaching strategies involving learning technology.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in basic skills, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Basic skills summer school	Entry	Number of starters	*	8	28
		Retention (%)	*	*	98
		Achievement (%)	*	*	53
NOCN numeracy (discrete provision)	Entry	Number of starters	*	*	46
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
C&G 3793 Wordpower (discrete provision)	1	Number of starters	293	254	20
		Retention (%)	70	74	79
		Achievement (%)	8	14	55
C&G 3793 Wordpower (integrated)	1	Number of starters	*	*	158
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50
NOCN literacy (discrete provision)	1	Number of starters	*	*	160
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	44
OCR numeracy (integrated)	1	Number of starters	75	49	53
		Retention (%)	77	86	81
		Achievement (%)	58	43	32
C&G 3750 numeracy stages 1 to 4 (integrated)	1	Number of starters	20	97	60
		Retention (%)	65	56	77
		Achievement (%)	84	14	54

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*data not available

Support for Students

Grade 3

61   Inspectors agreed with a number of strengths in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated. They identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths
- impartial pre-course advice and guidance
- a wide range of student services
- comprehensive arrangements for students with additional learning requirements

Weaknesses
- low take-up by students of opportunities for literacy and numeracy training
- the poor quality of many students' action plans
- ineffective recording of most students' progress

62   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college provides prospective students with impartial guidance. This was also noted as a strength at the last inspection. Students who are undecided about which courses to study are referred for a general guidance interview which can be provided in a number of minority community languages. Those students who are clear about their choices receive more detailed information about the course and further guidance from curriculum specialists. The college uses an appropriate variety of recruitment methods which includes: visits to local schools; newspaper advertising; targeted newsletters; a website; and open and 'taster' events. The attractive prospectuses and course leaflets are informative. Staff are provided with guides and checklists on enrolment and induction. Most

students found that enrolment and induction was effective and helped them settle into their work at college. The student handbook, diary and information booklet together provide a range of helpful information about the college's facilities and services and inform students of their rights and responsibilities.

63   The quality of tutorials observed was found to be satisfactory, sometimes good. Students find tutors helpful and supportive. Tutorials include both group and individual sessions. There is a useful guide for personal tutoring but teachers' job descriptions lack sufficient detail about tutorial responsibilities. There is no training for tutoring in some curriculum areas. The number of tutees for each tutor varies considerably between different parts of the college. The tutorial policy is in draft. There is an established system to monitor students' progress. In many instances it is not sufficiently thorough although there are examples of effective recording of students' progress. Some students' records, however, do not identify clearly what their strengths are and the areas where they need to improve. There is some use of action plans to improve students' performance but most lack clarity and target dates. It is unclear which staff are responsible for overseeing and monitoring the plans. Some individual learning plans are in use. Tutorial weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

64   As the self-assessment indicates there is a comprehensive range of services to support students who have additional learning requirements. These include help with communication and numeracy skills. Adapted materials, appropriate equipment, and IT and specialist support services all help to meet students' individual learning requirements. Services are also provided by external agencies. Students can obtain support as part of their programme of study by making individual appointments or by calling at the study centres. Students on full-time and part-time programmes

receive a diagnostic assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, tutors can refer students and students can refer themselves for support. The take-up of additional support for literacy and numeracy is adequate on one campus but low on the other campuses.

65 The college provides a satisfactory range of careers services and facilities to help students applying to higher education or moving to employment. At each campus, there is a careers area which is adequately resourced and contains up-to-date information that includes software packages, books and university prospectuses, and details on job vacancies. Further facilities are available in college libraries. Full-time and a number of part-time students receive careers education as part of their programme of study. Other part-time students have the opportunity of careers guidance through appointments with the college guidance officers. However, as the self-assessment report recognises, part-time evening students do not have good access to careers guidance. The college has a partnership agreement with the local careers service. Advisers provide individual guidance interviews and career talks. They also support students who have been identified as at risk of leaving their course early.

66 Inspectors from the FEFC and the TSC agreed with the college that it offers a wide range of services for students. These include: guidance and assistance on student finance; benefits; welfare; housing; homelessness; and occupational health and care. The services are available through the college advice shops at the main campuses although the shops have restricted opening hours in the evening. The college provides a diagnostic service, which refers students to other agencies, if appropriate, for personal counselling and guidance. The college provides a range of childcare arrangements. These include facilities for children aged between six months and five years old and help through its access fund for students who need to employ childminders. The college

has an enthusiastic student liaison team that promotes a programme of sporting and social activities, and of visits both locally and abroad.

General Resources

Grade 3

67 **The self-assessment report included many judgements not relevant to general resources. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found a few additional weaknesses.**

Key strengths
- good access for students with restricted mobility
- a well-planned building maintenance programme
- well-equipped learning centres

Weaknesses
- some poor accommodation
- significant underuse of accommodation
- deficiencies in the provision of IT equipment

68 There are four main campuses. Most of the further education provision is on the teaching campuses at Smethwick, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. These centres are some distance apart and each has general facilities for students including resource areas, common rooms and refectories. Two years ago the campus at Oldbury was converted to a training centre for industry after a period out of use. Most of the accommodation has been constructed in the last 40 years but there are Victorian buildings at Smethwick and West Bromwich.

69 Since the last inspection the poor entrances and foyers have been improved and most have a welcoming atmosphere. Many areas have been refurbished over the last few years and most

general areas are well decorated. However, these improvements have not been completed and there are some areas on all of the teaching campuses where the appearance is drab. Most teaching rooms are adequate and have basic furnishing and teaching aids. There is some poor accommodation, for example the temporary classrooms at Wednesbury, and some of the rooms in the Victorian buildings at West Bromwich. Much of the accommodation on the Oldbury campus has been refurbished to a high standard. Student common rooms are generally adequate and some are good. At Smethwick, an area conveniently located in the main building has recently been refurbished to a high standard linking together a common room, refectory and other facilities. As the self-assessment report noted, there are effective arrangements to improve the access to study for students with restricted mobility. There is an annual survey of access and good liaison between the teachers and staff responsible for the accommodation. Students in wheelchairs can get to the learning centres and other student facilities, and most teaching rooms. They cannot reach many of the teaching rooms in the Victorian buildings at West Bromwich.

70   A comprehensive survey of the condition of the college's buildings was carried out three years ago and is used effectively to plan maintenance over a 10-year period. The survey identified a considerable number of items requiring attention and a need for substantial investment. The college has clear priorities for improvement and much of the work has concentrated on meeting health and safety requirements. It has invested heavily to meet these requirements but there is still a considerable backlog of maintenance. The college has effective arrangements for dealing with short-term problems but reducing the backlog incurs a significant annual cost. The self-assessment report identifies accurately that the accommodation is significantly underused. The arrangements for room allocation are not fully effective and do not provide enough information on room use to support planning. The college recognises the urgent need to update the accommodation strategy. However, there are a number of key local community decisions pending and these together with a lack of accurate information on room use, are delaying the more effective planning and use of the accommodation.

71   The campus learning centres effectively integrate within one area, resources and space for students to work on their own. The centres provide attractive working environments and a comprehensive range of resources including library material, IT and audiovisual equipment. Insufficient attention is given to monitoring their use. Staffing is adequate and there is good support for students using the open access computers. The bookstock is low at Smethwick. Most of the library provision is adequate but there are shortages in a few specialist areas. There are insufficient study spaces at the Smethwick and West Bromwich centres. Some curriculum areas have their own resource bases and, in most cases, these effectively supplement the campus centres.

72   Most of the computers are of a high specification and are complemented by an adequate range of software for general use. In some lessons, students' progress is impeded by deficiencies in IT equipment. Most computers are connected to a curriculum network linking the campuses. Use of the network is being developed. The Internet is now available on the network but the range of other facilities is inadequate. Students are not able to store their work using the network. Most staff have reasonable access to computers linked to the corporate network. The overall number of computers is low and the ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is well above the college target of 5:1. The deficiency is greatest at the Wednesbury campus. The self-assessment report did not identify shortcomings in the provision of computers for students wanting to work on their own.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

73   Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found further strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough staff development
- comprehensive procedures for assuring quality
- the monitoring of standards by the academic board
- the use of position papers

Weaknesses

- insufficient use and analysis of college surveys
- overgenerous grading of teaching and learning
- the uneven quality of the self-assessment report
- insufficient evidence of continuous improvement

74   The quality assurance team supported by the 'quality unit', gives effective leadership on policy. Quality assurance arrangements, which include the ISO 9002 system to promote consistency in cross-college and curriculum areas, are comprehensive. Well-organised manuals set out clear procedures to secure consistency. For example, there is guidance to ensure that issues affecting enrolment, attendance, retention and achievement are considered systematically during the year. College and British Standard Institution auditors regularly audit the systems. Rapid action is taken to rectify any failure to follow the procedures. The clear reference system ensures that all staff know which procedures are current. Inspectors agreed with college staff, as they had in the previous inspection report, that

the system promoted consistency, ensured accountability and helped staff to improve standards. A dedicated team supports improvements in the quality of internal verification procedures and helps curriculum areas to respond effectively to external verifiers' criticisms.

75   Position papers, which review the success of previous action plans and propose staff development priorities and action plans for the coming year, provide a useful starting point to promote improvements in standards. Papers for curriculum areas include a review of teaching and targets for retention and achievement. The academic board regularly reviews and evaluates position papers and provides a written feedback to their authors. Curriculum position papers pay insufficient attention to curriculum organisation and management and specialist staffing and resources. Course reviews are not always consistent. Not all consider student feedback in a formal way and some do not have action plans. Responsibility for taking action is not always made clear.

76   The academic board's role has expanded significantly since the last inspection. It reviews students' performance annually. This review includes an assessment both of trends in rates of retention and achievements and of the extent to which targets have been met. Comparative data, including FEFC benchmarking data, are analysed. The review also covers a sample of curriculum areas and indicates strengths and weaknesses. The forwarding of these issues to senior management and the corporation has recently been strengthened by the appointment of a governor as an observer at academic board meetings. The college is seeking to improve student retention, achievement and attendance rates but has had little success.

77   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that staff development is a strength. The staff development plan links individual, curriculum and cross-college area needs to priorities in the strategic plan. The staff development budget is

satisfactory. Staff development activities are evaluated and regular reports are sent to the governors' resources committee. A mentoring system for new teaching staff has been introduced. Staff stated that the college's support for staff development was whole-hearted. Inspectors agreed that the college's system supported the staff's personal and organisational goals well. The college has received reconfirmation of Investor in People status. Staff receive annual appraisal but some managers appraise large numbers of staff.

78 The college has made inadequate progress in canvassing students' views throughout the college. Relatively few whole-college surveys are carried out. However, at course level there is a variety of means of obtaining students' views on the effectiveness of their courses. These include surveys, presentations by students on behalf of their fellow students and focus groups. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that these sources of information are not used to obtain comprehensive information about customers' concerns.

79 The quality assurance provision offered to franchise partners is well developed. Regular visits are made to partners and observation of teaching and learning is carried out. Judgements are also made about the effectiveness of specialist resources and staffing. Regular reports on the quality of franchise partners' work are sent to both the senior management team and the franchise board.

80 Arrangements for the production of the self-assessment report involved all staff. Curriculum area self-assessments were built up from position papers while cross-college working groups represented all staff. The self-assessment report had some significant weaknesses. Curriculum area reports lacked the thorough attention to teaching and learning and to students' rates of retention and achievements that were found in some contributing position papers. A widespread programme of teaching observation took place for the first time in 1999,

using a standard format across the college. Observers received some training. The overall profile of grades was markedly higher than those awarded during the inspection. Little use was made of the expertise of the college's teacher education area in developing the observation programme.

81 The college has charters for students, employers and the community and these contain some measurable targets. These are regularly reviewed. A report of how far charter commitments have been met is widely available and is publicly displayed. Careful attention is paid to complaints and there is clear evidence of how they have been addressed. A report is made to governors twice each year. Six monthly reports to governors show the nature of complaints and the action taken.

Governance

Grade 2

82 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They found that some strengths were overstated. Additional strengths and weaknesses were found.

Key strengths
- committed and well-informed governors
- effective clerking arrangements
- broad scope of the search and nominations committee
- comprehensive procedures for openness

Weaknesses
- lack of systematic monitoring of progress against strategic plans
- insufficiently frequent monitoring of standards of performance

83 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the

governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

84 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors are committed to the college. Attendance at both corporation and committee meetings is good. Attendance targets have been set and governor performance is reported to the search committee annually. Governors have established a working group to consider specific governance issues in detail such as self-assessment, committee structures and the appropriate relationship between governance and management. Members have a broad range of skills and experience. A skills audit of governors has been conducted to compare available skills with those needed by the corporation. Governors have a good understanding of further education matters and of issues that are of importance to the local community. They recognise that there is scope to improve the ethnic balance of the corporation so that it more fully reflects the student population.

85 The search committee has actively sought nominations for governor appointments from local community groups and public bodies. Public advertising has also been used to recruit governors. Job descriptions and person specifications have not been developed for prospective governors. The committee has scrupulously considered measures to be used by the corporation for evaluating its own effectiveness. Other areas considered by the search committee include: induction procedures for governors; skills audits; and a review of the register of interests for members. The corporation has taken appropriate steps to implement the recent amendments to the instrument and articles of government. The membership of the corporation has been

increased to 16 and includes two staff governors and a student governor. The corporation has an appropriate committee structure. Terms of reference, which include membership, quoracy, clerking and reporting arrangements, have been approved for each committee.

86 Clerking arrangements are good, as identified in the self-assessment report. The knowledge and independence of the clerk are highly valued by governors. The clerk has an appropriate job description and regularly attends relevant training events. There are appropriate administrative procedures. Corporation agendas contain a useful summary of the corporation's principal and supplementary statutory powers. The clerk advises governors on action required to ensure compliance with the instrument and articles of government.

87 Governors attend an annual weekend forum which considers strategic issues. College position papers and business plans form the basis for updates to the strategic plan which are approved by the corporation. The updates include corporate objectives but performance indicators are not clearly identified. Monitoring by the corporation of performance against corporate objectives is not frequent enough to enable governors to monitor sufficiently the delivery of the strategic plan. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report.

88 Governors monitor the financial position of the college through the resources committee and in full corporation meetings. The minutes of the resources committee and corporation meetings demonstrate the detailed consideration by governors of the finances of the college. A range of accounting ratios are included in the reports but they are not compared with a target performance. At the time of the inspection, governors had yet to receive formal confirmation of the year-end position for 1998-99.

89 As the self-assessment reports states, there has been no direct, formal link between the

board and process that seeks continuous improvement in the college. Although the board has discussed reports, for example, on students' retention and achievements, this has been infrequent. To address this issue, the board has recently established a quality and standards committee. This committee has a wide brief to monitor the college's academic performance and related areas but it is too early to assess its effectiveness. It has recently discussed in some detail the college's report on retention and achievement for 1998-99.

90   The college has a four-stage induction process for new governors covering statutory powers, resources, strategy, marketing and student services. Existing governors are also invited to attend the induction for refresher training. The clerk maintains a register of training undertaken by each governor. A training policy has been developed but has not yet been formally approved by the board. There is no process for canvassing the training needs of individual governors. Although governors have not developed formal links with curriculum areas one governor has developed links with a specific campus and another chairs the student union management group.

91   The college has comprehensive procedures for openness. The register of interests requires disclosures in line with best practice and is updated at least annually. A separate register of interests is maintained for senior staff. Governors make annual declarations of their eligibility. The corporation has a complaints procedure and has approved policies for confidentiality and 'whistleblowing'. The code of conduct requires updating and is currently being reviewed. The minutes of corporation and committee meetings are publicly available at all student campuses and supporting papers can be viewed on application to the clerk at the Wednesbury campus. The college staff newsletter includes a summary of corporation meeting business and has included profiles of governors.

Management

Grade 3

92   Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but found that some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths
- well-structured planning procedures
- effective partnerships with external organisations
- good attention to equal opportunities
- effective maintenance of the good financial health of the college

Weaknesses
- some ineffective strategies for students' attendance and performance
- inefficiencies in the deployment of resources
- underdeveloped use of computerised management information
- consistently late returns to the FEFC

93   The college adopted a new management structure in August 1999. The new structure aims to create a stronger campus identity, in support of the college's strategy to deliver individual learning needs to all students. A new senior management team includes directors of teaching and learning who lead the three campus management teams. The corporation approved the terms of reference of the senior management team. The fortnightly meetings of the team have clear agendas, minutes and action points. The team has begun to develop systems to sustain the monitoring of key corporate objectives and targets. The campus management teams include new posts of heads of curriculum and campus registrars. Most staff understand the new management structure and their role within it. Section leaders have

benefited from the opportunity to attend campus meetings. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements. A clear relationship between campus-based and college-wide procedures is still being developed. Some important college-wide policies, for example on attendance and personal tutoring, as well as new job descriptions for section leaders, exist only in draft.

94   Internal communications vary in their effectiveness. There is a regular newsletter to staff and increasing use of electronic mail. The principal holds staff meetings at each campus. Communication between staff within teams is good and at campus level it is improving. However, cross-college communication is uneven in quality.

95   As the self-assessment report states, the college has well-developed procedures for planning. The college's strategic plans are informed by local market intelligence provided by Sandwell Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the government office, together with information obtained from a survey of employers and research commissioned from the responsive college unit. A central marketing unit was established in September 1999 but the co-ordination of its activities with those undertaken by curriculum areas is not yet fully effective. Staff understand the college's mission. They contribute to the 'position papers' that underpin the development of curriculum area and cross-college business plans and the college's strategic plan. Business plans reflect the college's corporate objectives and include targets for meeting them.

96   The college has been successful in meeting some of its targets. Students' retention rates have improved and achievements in some areas have been maintained or improved. However, its strategies have not yet been sufficiently effective. There are a number of areas of poor retention and achievement. Overall attendance is poor. The current procedure for following up poor attendance is not consistently applied.

97   The use of computerised information to support management is underdeveloped. An overall strategy for developing IT in the college has yet to be finalised. In recognition of the difficulties being experienced with its previous computerised management information system, the college has recently purchased a new system. It has received help from the FEFC's standards fund to implement the system. There has been good progress in improving student records and in training staff but some staff have not yet received training. There are a number of areas that rely on manual records, including examinations, attendance monitoring and classroom allocation. The college plans to develop the system further in the coming year.

98   The self-assessment report acknowledges weaknesses in the deployment of staff and accommodation. The college has improved its staff utilisation rates but they remain well below the college target. Cancelled lessons are not systematically monitored at campus level. The college's space and staff utilisation rates, despite improvements, remain low.

99   As the self-assessment report identifies, the college has many effective external links. There is strong commitment to working with the local community. The college is an active member of organisations developing strategies for regeneration and lifelong learning. There is close contact with the TEC. Good collaborative links with higher education, with other further education colleges and with schools help to extend opportunities for students. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that its firm commitment to equal opportunities is supported by a comprehensive range of policies and effective procedures. A subcommittee of the academic board monitors the implementation of the college's equal opportunities plan. The student diary and handbook clearly emphasise equal opportunities. Students have their own equal opportunities committee.

Cross-college Provision

100 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has a good record of achieving surpluses and maintaining solvency. The director of finance is a qualified accountant and is supported by an appropriately qualified finance team. Budget holders receive good support from the finance team. The financial reports are monitored regularly by the senior management team and monthly by either the resources committee or the corporation. Financial reports have insufficient variance analysis and do not include comments on the funding unit position or targets as comparators for accounting ratios. Reporting arrangements for monitoring the use of access funds have not yet been introduced. Regular reports are made to governors on investment income but there has not been regular assessment of investment performance against alternative investment opportunities. The college has consistently missed FEFC deadlines for submission of ISR returns and financial statements.

Conclusions

101 The inspection team found the self-assessment report to be a useful document for the inspection although some of the contributing material on which it was based was more helpful. The report was the outcome of a wide-ranging and complex process, which involved all staff and corporation members. Strengths in teaching and learning were overstated. The college's grading of lessons was much higher than that of inspectors. This factor, together with the lack of sufficient weight attached to the significance of data on students' rates of retention and achievements, led to the overestimation of grades by the college. Six grades awarded by inspectors in curriculum areas were lower than those proposed by the college. There was significantly less disparity for the grading of cross-college areas.

102 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 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	16
19-24 years	17
25+ years	65
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	26
Level 2 (intermediate)	36
Level 3 (advanced)	14
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	22
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	119	1,706	9
Agriculture	22	17	0
Construction	64	474	3
Engineering	215	815	5
Business	435	2,494	15
Hotel and catering	124	3,834	20
Health and community care	471	4,053	23
Art and design	301	902	6
Humanities	166	2,017	11
Basic education	343	1,224	8
Total	2,260	17,536	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 61% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	307	39	0	346
Supporting direct learning contact	107	5	0	112
Other support	193	8	0	201
Total	607	52	0	659

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£23,471,000	£22,775,000	£22,565,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£22.15*	£20.86*	£19.31*
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	61%	65%
Achievement of funding target	101%	99%	96%
Diversity of income	21%	23%	26%
Operating surplus	£162,000	£1,323,000	£301,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)
ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)
Payroll – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
Diversity of income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)
Operating surplus – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)
*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	878	992	2,247	2,571	3,244	4,476
	Retention (%)	81	67	86	78	78	80
	Achievement (%)	46	65	27	46	50	39
2	Number of starters	1,234	1,488	1,551	1,774	3,231	3,443
	Retention (%)	80	65	74	86	73	81
	Achievement (%)	50	59	56	58	62	68
3	Number of starters	1,017	949	955	1,783	1,637	1,694
	Retention (%)	83	73	76	85	79	79
	Achievement (%)	51	65	56	53	53	55
4 or 5	Number of starters	13	20	24	547	589	551
	Retention (%)	85	80	83	83	77	78
	Achievement (%)	86	77	47	40	38	39
Short courses	Number of starters	416	425	812	4,017	5,165	5,965
	Retention (%)	96	87	96	97	93	96
	Achievement (%)	49	69	83	57	62	80
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	676	802	1,594	2,625	2,420	2,928
	Retention (%)	87	71	77	88	83	86
	Achievement (%)	33	53	23	47	58	52

Source: ISR

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