

# Soundwell College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1999-00**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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## 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

## **Soundwell College**

### ***South West Region***

**Inspected March 2000**

#### **Summary**

Soundwell College is a medium-sized general further education college serving north-east Bristol and south Gloucestershire. The college offers courses in nine of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Provision in six programme areas was inspected, together with basic skills across the college. The self-assessment report submitted to the FEFC prior to the inspection was for the year 1997-98. The 1998-99 report was provided during the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found that some weaknesses, particularly those relating to governance and management, had been omitted or understated. Inspectors awarded lower grades than those in the self-assessment report to two curriculum areas and three aspects of cross-college provision.

The college was unable to provide reliable data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998. The college management information system is ineffective. Data for 1999 indicate that retention is unsatisfactory in several curriculum areas, but that achievement rates for students who complete their courses are generally good. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has improved. The college has strong links the local community and it has recruited students from groups that have not traditionally entered further education. Effective partnerships with business, particularly motor vehicle manufacturers and retailers, have contributed to the college's excellent resources in this curriculum area. Most tutorial and learning support is good, but managers do not monitor this provision effectively. Governance relies heavily on a small number of individuals and attendance at meetings has been poor.

Communication in the college is good but there is insufficient management co-ordination of some college services. Financial and student data returns have frequently been submitted late to the FEFC and the college was significantly below its funding targets in 1997-98 and 1998-99. In addition to these weaknesses, the college should address: the lack of compliance with some quality assurance procedures; delays in the self-assessment process; low student attendance in some curriculum areas; the unsatisfactory quality of some classrooms; the lack of co-ordination of basic skills across the college; and the unsatisfactory provision in art and design.

# Summary

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Support for students	3
Engineering	2	General resources	3
Business administration	2	Quality assurance	3
Health, social care and childcare	2	Governance	4
Art, design and media studies	4	Management	4
Humanities, English and social science	2		
Basic skills	3		

## The College and its Mission

1 Soundwell College is a general further education college serving north-east Bristol and south Gloucestershire. The main site is at St Stephen's Road in the Kingswood area of Bristol. Two of the three faculties and 75% of students are based there. Specialist motor vehicle facilities are located 7 miles away in Parkway. Three smaller sites are located close to the main site.

2 South Gloucestershire is one of the most rapidly developing industrial areas in the United Kingdom. The fastest growing sectors are distribution, transport and communication, media and finance. Manufacturing is declining. The aerospace industry is still important, but it is less dominant than in the past. The area has a substantial number of small and medium-sized employers; 43% of employment is in companies with less than 50 employees. The Ministry of Defence procurement centre is now located in south Gloucestershire.

3 The college offers programmes in nine of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. There are courses from pre-16 entry level to level 4, including a substantial number of general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The largest curriculum areas are humanities, health and social care, business, leisure and tourism, computing, motor vehicle, art and design, training and education studies and sports coaching. There are access to higher education courses in 10 subject areas. The college works with a range of community partners, local further education colleges and other agencies to support New Deal clients and non-FEFC funded programmes. The college has a managing agency offering modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. In 1998-99, the college earned 30% of its total income from commercial training contracts and other non-FEFC sources. At the time of the inspection, the college had

enrolled 6,260 students of whom 78% were aged 19 or over. It employs 168 full-time equivalent staff who teach or directly support learning, and 76 full-time equivalent administrative staff.

4 There are three general further education colleges and a sixth form college within a 12-mile radius of the college. In the local area there are nine secondary schools and a city technology college, all with sixth forms. There is a high staying-on rate in the south Gloucestershire area. In 1998-99, 48% of 16 year olds stayed on at school and 25% moved to the further education sector. The college recruits many of its full-time students from its immediate catchment area.

5 The college mission statement refers to Soundwell College's partnership with business and industry. It states that: the college will provide quality training, education programmes and services that are cost effective and customer focused; that it will support students in achieving their personal goals and in meeting future job, career and academic challenges; and that it will meet community needs, develop independent learning skills, promote technical excellence, use innovative and creative methods and maximise accessibility to education and training.

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in the week beginning 13 March 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report for 1997-98, and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. A draft self-assessment report for 1998-99 was provided during the inspection. Data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns for 1997 and 1998 proved to be unreliable. The college was also unable to provide reliable information for these years from registers and examining body records. As a result, the tables of students' achievements in

# Context

this report are incomplete. Inspectors based their judgements on students' achievements data relating to those completing in 1999. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999. This was checked by inspectors and was not entirely accurate. However, additional checks during the inspection provided inspectors with sufficiently reliable data to use as a basis for inspection judgements.

7 The inspection was carried out by a team of 12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 55 days. They held meetings with governors, managers, employers, parents, college staff and students. Inspectors observed 92 lessons and examined students' work and college documentation.

8 Five inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the inspection. The TSC inspectors focused on work-based training in

engineering and business administration. They spent 25 days based at the college. They observed instruction sessions and interviewed trainees, employers and college staff. 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 inspected, 67% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% less than satisfactory. This compares with the national average of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1998-99.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	5	1	1	0	10
GCSE	2	4	3	0	0	9
GNVQ	0	3	6	0	0	9
NVQ	1	8	7	0	0	16
Access	0	0	2	2	0	4
Other vocational	6	21	2	1	0	30
Other*	2	7	4	1	0	14
Total (No.)	14	48	25	5	0	92
Total (%)	15	52	28	5	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 skills



# 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 (%)
Soundwell College	7.8	74
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*

# Curriculum Areas

## Science, Mathematics and Computing

### Grade 3

**11 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. However, some weaknesses in students' achievements were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Twelve lessons were observed.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching
- high-quality handouts
- detailed marking of students' work
- some good achievement rates on level 3 computing and information technology (IT) courses
- good teaching rooms and resources for IT

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient checks on learning in some lessons
- poor retention and achievement rates on GCE A level mathematics and GCSE IT courses
- low attendance rates
- unsatisfactory specialist resources for science

12 There is a wide range of courses in computing and IT. The college offers GNVQ courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced level. Courses in programming languages such as Pascal are available at evening classes. General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) mathematics are available. Since September 1999, mathematics at pre-GCSE level has also been offered. Science courses are limited to GCSE and GCE A level human biology and GCSE science.

13 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that the curriculum area is well managed. The monitoring of students' progress is thorough. There are regular course team meetings at which action points are identified and followed through. The course files are well maintained and up to date. They contain appropriate schemes of work and other relevant course management information. There is a twice-weekly 'drop-in' mathematics workshop. Accurate records show the attendance, topics studied and progress of each individual. Students can also book one-to-one sessions in the workshop if further support is needed.

14 Most of the teaching observed by inspectors was good. The profile of observation grades awarded by inspectors closely matched that awarded by the college. In many lessons a variety of effective teaching methods is used. In one GCSE mathematics lesson, students were divided into groups and asked to analyse a sequence of numbers. Each group reported their findings to the whole class. In an IT lesson, a lively quiz was used to recap the previous session. In a minority of lessons, teachers make insufficient checks on students' learning. Many teachers produce good-quality handouts to complement their lessons. The effective use of handouts with gaps for students to fill in ensures that they maintain their concentration during lessons and that they have good materials for revision. Some practical lessons in science are unrealistic or too simplistic. These lessons give students a poor impression of the nature and potential of science studies. Staff give detailed feedback to students on their written work. Assignments are usually returned with an informative cover page listing areas where improvement is necessary.

15 In 1999, all students who completed the GNVQ advanced IT course and the access to computing course were successful. However, retention and examination pass rates for GCE A level mathematics and GCSE IT are poor; the pass rate for GCE A level mathematics was 39%

# Curriculum Areas

compared with the national average of 74% and of the 22 students who started the GCSE IT course, only one was successful. The access to computing course has a low retention rate of 57%. The national average is 73%. These unsatisfactory achievement rates are not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

16 Students are able to talk about their studies with confidence. Computing and science students are competent at obtaining information from the Internet. Most students' written work is well presented and shows a good understanding of the required tasks. Many computing assignments display good use of diagrams and clip art downloaded from CD-ROMs.

Mathematics students understand the need to show the working that leads to their answers. Average attendance at the lessons observed by inspectors was 65%. This unsatisfactory figure is well below the national average of 78% published in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*.

17 There are good facilities and up-to-date specialist resources for teaching computing. Some computer rooms are conveniently split into two areas, one containing computers, the other designed for theory work. Students use appropriate software. The library is well stocked with books and periodicals.

18 There are not enough science laboratories. Some practical science lessons are inappropriately carried out in classrooms rather than laboratories, for example a heart dissection. In some cases it is difficult or unsafe to transport the necessary equipment to the room where it is used. There is insufficient science equipment. Consequently some practical demonstrations are unchallenging. For example, in one lesson, water draining from a burette was used to simulate radioactive decay. There are insufficient modern science textbooks. Teachers have appropriate specialist and teaching qualifications. There is only one part-time science technician, which is inadequate.

# Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in science, mathematics and computing, 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	*	*	125
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	*	*	37
GCSE IT	2	Number of starters	*	*	22
		Retention (%)	*	*	50
		Achievement (%)	*	*	9
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	*	*	14
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	73
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	*	*	18
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCE A level human biology	3	Number of starters	*	*	14
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	*	*	67
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	*	*	24
		Retention (%)	*	*	38
		Achievement (%)	*	*	39
GCE A level computer studies	3	Number of starters	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
Access to computing	3	Number of starters	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	57
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 2

**19 Inspectors observed 16 lessons covering the range of full-time, part-time and block-release programmes in motor vehicle engineering. The self-assessment report failed to identify strengths or weaknesses relating to the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching
- good achievement rates on most courses
- outstanding motor vehicle accommodation and resources
- well-established employer links
- good course management

#### Weaknesses

- low retention rates on most courses
- poor assessment and reporting methods
- failure to check learning in some theory lessons

20 There is a wide range of craft, technician and higher technician courses in motor vehicle engineering. These cover light and heavy vehicles, paint and bodywork, and motor cycle engineering. Many block-release courses are designed for vehicle manufacturers and dealerships, and students are recruited nationally. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are well-established and effective employer links. There are also good links with local schools. The junior engineering technicians scheme allows students from local schools to study on one day a week at the college, covering three units of the GNVQ intermediate together with motor vehicle technology. A technology bus equipped with computers and a small workshop is regularly taken to primary schools to give pupils the

opportunity to learn about the applications of technology.

21 Most courses are well managed. Staff meetings are held regularly. Students' progress is analysed at review meetings. Most course files are comprehensive and contain teaching and assessment schedules. Lesson plans are detailed. Practical work is planned systematically. However, schemes of work are insufficiently detailed.

22 There is much good teaching. This was not mentioned in the self-assessment report. There is an appropriate balance between theory and practical work. In the better theory lessons, teachers carefully explain each concept and then relate it to a practical application. For example, in a mathematics lesson the teacher derived the equation to calculate the volume of a cylinder and then introduced a series of more complex questions requiring the students to calculate the swept volume, compression ratio and displacement of a car engine. In another lesson on transport legislation, the teacher asked students to role-play the innocent party in a traffic accident. Through an effective and entertaining question and answer session, students identified damages which could be sought by legal action as a result of the accident. In a few lessons a minority of students are allowed to dominate discussions. Sometimes teachers fail to take account of students' different abilities and fail to check that learning is taking place. The college did not identify these weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Numeracy and literacy support is effective and is set in a vocational context. Two weeks of work experience is arranged for all full-time students at the end of their course.

23 The self-assessment report did not mention that, in 1999, student achievement rates on most courses exceeded national averages. For example, the pass rate for technician courses at level 3 was 77% compared with the national average of 72%. However, retention rates were

# Curriculum Areas

lower than national averages. For example, retention on City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) level 1 craft courses was 75% compared with the national average of 79%. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that assessment and reporting methods are underdeveloped. Assignment briefs often give insufficient guidance to students. Some grading criteria are inappropriate and do not provide the more able students with sufficient challenge. The quality of written feedback on assignments is insufficiently detailed. Students are industrious, particularly during workshop lessons. Their practical work is of an appropriate standard. Few write up their assignments using a wordprocessor.

24 Facilities for motor vehicle engineering are outstanding. They are located at Parkway, 7 miles from the main site. Recent additions to the purpose-built facilities include a motorcycle

workshop and a second heavy vehicle workshop. The foyer is designed as a modern car showroom. Exhibits include new cars and motor cycles and three vintage vehicles. There are well-designed classrooms and laboratories for science and electronics. All workshops are light, spacious and well organised. Manufacturers and dealers have donated a large number of modern vehicles. The workshops contain a good range of service equipment and current diagnostic test equipment. The body shop contains a modern spray booth. The library at Parkway contains suitable specialist books and periodicals. A well-equipped specialist IT centre is housed in an adjacent building. The welding and fabrication workshop at the main college site contains adequate levels of equipment, but they are rather drab and cramped. Teachers have appropriate qualifications for the courses they teach. Many have recent industrial experience.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G craft	1	Number of starters	*	*	97
		Retention (%)	*	*	75
		Achievement (%)	*	*	75
C&G craft	2	Number of starters	*	*	92
		Retention (%)	*	*	67
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
NVQ	2	Number of starters	*	*	89
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	*	*	77
NVQ	3	Number of starters	*	*	195
		Retention (%)	*	*	82
		Achievement (%)	*	*	93
Advanced technician	3	Number of starters	*	*	71
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	*	*	77

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Administration

### *Grade 2*

**25 Inspectors observed 14 lessons in business administration. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. A few strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not identified.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective teaching on most courses
- good progression opportunities for part-time students
- spacious and well-equipped business centre
- good opportunities for assessment in the workplace and the business centre

#### **Weaknesses**

- some teaching which focuses too narrowly on the requirements of the examining bodies
- lack of commercial updating for staff
- lack of full-time provision at level 1

26 The wide range of part-time courses provides good progression routes for students. Potential students can sample the provision through 'taster' courses. Single skill subjects are available at levels 1, 2, and 3. These include IT skills and specialist options such as medical audio transcription and legal studies. Many adults progress to a 30-week office skills course as a preparation for their return to work. The college also caters for students from groups who are under-represented in further education. This year it established courses at several local community centres. Recently the number of full-time students has declined. There is a narrow range of full-time courses. Most provision is at level 2. There is no provision at level 1 and few students progress

to level 3. Some full-time students combine elements of various courses in order to follow an individual programme suited to their needs.

27 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that teaching is good. Lessons give students suitable opportunities to learn, practise and revise new skills. Teachers skilfully introduce new topics to the whole group. In one lesson, the teacher introduced desktop publishing by showing students the plain text and then the finished, designed article. She invited them to identify what they needed to learn to undertake the task. Each new element was demonstrated using a projected image of the computer screen. Students then worked on individual assignments to practise and develop their skills. Teachers use question and answer sessions effectively to check learning. Students respond well, using appropriate vocabulary. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that all students are given the opportunity to contribute and develop their ideas. In a good legal administration lesson, the teacher acted as a client of a law firm and asked students for advice about how to set up a company. On occasions teachers accept answers which are too brief. Some teaching focuses too closely on the needs of examination bodies and does not develop students' understanding of business through the use of case study materials.

28 Students speak positively about their courses and their teachers. They get good advice and support. Teachers monitor individuals' progress effectively. Other aspects of course management are less satisfactory. Schemes of work do not fully identify how skills such as portfolio management will be taught. Too little attention is given to the development of key skills. Employers are not involved in curriculum planning. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

# Curriculum Areas

29 The arrangements for assessment are good. All full-time students, including adults on the 30-week programme, have the opportunity to be assessed during work experience. Students attend for one week for familiarisation, followed by one day a week for 15 weeks. Teachers, students and employers jointly plan opportunities for assessment. Students can also practise and be assessed in the business centre. They run a stationery shop, which is located in the centre, and undertake secretarial and reception tasks.

30 Students' work is of an appropriate standard. It is presented in well-organised portfolios. Most written work meets the standards of the examining bodies. However, few assignments are set in a realistic and challenging work context. Teachers give good verbal feedback on the quality of students' work. Students achieve a wide range of skill certificates in addition to their main NVQ or diploma qualifications. These include qualifications in text and wordprocessing, audio transcription, mail merge, health and safety and IT. Although verified data in the required format was not available, achievement rates generally appear to be good. In 1999, 80% of those entered for the computer literacy and information technology award were successful. Wordprocessing examination pass rates were 90% at level 1, 87% at level 2 and 82% at level 3. In the majority of single skill subjects, over 80% of students who were entered for the examination were successful. The NVQ level 2 business administration achievement rate was 48% in 1999, significantly lower than in previous years.

31 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements about resources in the self-assessment report. Students have good access to computers, although some equipment has been unreliable. Students' use of electronic mail is not widespread. The courses in community centres make effective use of laptop computers. The business centre provides an attractive, flexible

and well-equipped learning environment. Teachers are well qualified and regularly undertake skills development. However, few have recent commercial experience or have undertaken any commercial updating.



# Curriculum Areas

## Health, Social Care and Childcare

### Grade 2

**32 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in health, social care, childcare and complementary therapy courses. They generally agreed with judgements in the self-assessment report, but found additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching
- productive community links
- effective work experience
- retention rates above national averages
- good pass rates on advanced level courses and the GNVQ intermediate course

#### Weaknesses

- low pass rate on the certificate in childcare and education course
- insufficient detail in schemes of work and missed opportunities to develop key skills
- inappropriate accommodation for complementary therapy courses

33 The college offers a broad range of courses in this curriculum area. Students may progress from foundation level to higher education, professional training and employment. Progression is facilitated by good links with local universities. Attendance patterns can be arranged to meet the needs of individuals, which enables students from groups who are under-represented in further education to study at the college.

34 Courses are generally well managed. Course teams meet regularly to review their courses and to monitor students' progress. They use performance indicators to monitor progress towards targets for attendance, retention and achievement. However, some course plans lack

detail and some schemes of work provide insufficient information about learning and assessment methods. References to the development of key skills are omitted from schemes of work and lesson plans. Opportunities to develop key skills in lessons are therefore missed. This weakness was not noted in the self-assessment report.

35 Effective community links enable students to develop and demonstrate skills with a variety of client groups. Complementary therapy students hold clinics for local clients. Suitable work experience is included in care courses. Well-prepared assignments link college and workplace learning. Students' learning in the workplace is well managed. They have individual action plans with short-term targets designed to improve their work skills. Workplace supervisors are appropriately involved in action-planning and monitoring learning in the workplace. The college identifies these strengths in the self-assessment report.

36 Most teaching is good and inspectors observed some outstanding lessons. Students speak highly of the support they receive from their teachers. Aims of lessons are clearly identified and explained to students. Well-qualified teachers use their vocational experience to relate theory to current workplace practices. Teachers also use students' work experiences to reinforce their understanding of theory. One group of national diploma students used examples from their work placements to identify best practice in managing children's meal times. This led to an exploration of the role of the carer in promoting healthy attitudes to eating. Handouts used to support learning are clear and provide useful summaries of key points. In a few lessons, students were not given sufficiently challenging tasks and responded by talking to each other about matters unconnected to the lesson. The college recognises strengths in teaching in the self-assessment report, but not the weaknesses.

# Curriculum Areas

37 In 1999, pass rates on advanced level courses in child, health, social care and complementary therapy courses were above national averages. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate health and social care course was also above the national average with 75% of the students achieving the award. However, the 53% pass rate on the certificate in childcare and education course was significantly below the national average. Retention rates on advanced courses and on the GNVQ intermediate course were close to or above national averages. The retention rate on the part-time diploma in reflexology was below the national average.

38 Most students demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge, understanding and practical skill. They are able to relate what they learn at college to the requirements of the workplace. One student explained how learning about equal opportunities in college applied to her work with children. Complementary therapy students could explain the advantages of particular massage techniques. Written work is carefully marked. Students receive constructive feedback that helps them to improve. Their progress is carefully monitored and recorded through the tutorial system.

39 Most care lessons take place in classrooms that are suitable for the size of the group. The college recognises that complementary therapy lessons are conducted in accommodation that does not reflect industry standards. Access courses are based in unattractive accommodation where little use is made of display materials to provide a stimulating environment. Students have access to a good range of learning resources and specialist equipment. The specialist resource centre for care students is well stocked with books and project materials. Students value the resources and the help they receive from the learning adviser based in the centre. Students have good access to IT equipment. The college

library is adequately stocked with child, health and social care books, although some are out of date. Textbooks and resources for complementary therapy students are less satisfactory.

# Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	*	*	15
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	75
CACHE certificate	2	Number of starters	*	*	22
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	53
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	*	16	8
		Retention (%)	*	56	88
		Achievement (%)	*	83	86
Access to health studies	3	Number of starters	*	*	30
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	96
Diploma in reflexology	3	Number of starters	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
Certificate in body massage	3	Number of starters	*	*	17
		Retention (%)	*	*	82
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Art, Design and Media Studies

### Grade 4

**40 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering full-time and part-time vocational courses. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but found additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective teaching on most courses
- detailed written feedback to students
- the high standard of students' work in music technology

#### Weaknesses

- inappropriate combining of groups for teaching
- poor achievement rates on national diploma media studies and GCE A level art courses
- low retention rates
- poor quality of students' work on GNVQ art and design course
- unsatisfactory accommodation and specialist equipment

41 The college is currently reviewing and reorganising art and design courses following a decline in recruitment in recent years. The GNVQ advanced art and design course failed to recruit in September 1998. Courses leading to British Display Society awards and the national diploma in media studies are to be discontinued, having attracted few students in the last three years. The access to communicating arts course, and the GNVQ foundation and intermediate art and design courses, ran with very few students. In several lessons with less than five students observed by inspectors, the low numbers seriously affected the quality of the students' experience. The national diploma in music technology, which was launched in 1999, has recruited viable numbers.

42 There are weaknesses in course management which were not recognised in the self-assessment report. Different courses and year groups have been combined in order to maintain viable student groups. This has had an adverse impact on the quality of provision. There is a lack of differentiation of tasks where students at different levels are taught together. The GNVQ intermediate art and design students are taught with first-year GNVQ advanced students. They work on assignments designed for advanced students. GCSE art and GCE A level art students are inappropriately taught together. National diploma media students are taught with access students and music technology students. To deal with their different needs, staff set separate assignments for each of these three groups.

43 Relationships between staff and students are good. Most teachers make effective use of question and answer sessions and reinforce learning through well-devised exercises. Assignments are well structured, and have clear tasks and assessment criteria. Staff are thorough in their assessment of students' work. On media studies and music technology courses the quality of written feedback to students is high, including detailed comments and suggestions for improvement. Students' progress is carefully monitored at regular tutorials.

44 The self-assessment report recognises that there has been unsatisfactory retention in the past. Retention on the national diploma in media studies was significantly below the national average in 1998 and 1999. There has been low retention on GCE A level and National Open College Network (NOCN) evening courses. Termly progress reviews indicate that retention on most courses is improving. In 1999, retention and achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate art and design course were above national averages. Poor achievement rates on some courses are recognised in the self-assessment report. The pass rate on the national diploma in media studies was well below the

# Curriculum Areas

national average in 1999. The 27% pass rate for GCE A level art is poor.

45 The quality of students' work in music technology is good. Students use computers to compose music tracks for selected film clips. These are inventive and atmospheric, demonstrating a high level of technical skill for first-year students. Media students' writing is of a high standard. The work of GNVQ art and design students is not based on thorough visual research. It is predictable and of poor quality. British Display Society students produce displays of a high standard and some students progress to jobs in the industry. Most mature students on NOCN courses produce good work.

46 There are good facilities for displaying students' work. There are new computers and music keyboards for the music technology students. The majority of the practical work in art and design is done in an old primary school building. This is in a poor state of repair and internal decoration. Much of the equipment is old, and provides only basic facilities for

ceramics, silk screen printmaking and general construction. The furniture is old and the area does not provide a good professional atmosphere for students. The self-assessment report recognises that the facilities for photography are poor. The poor facilities, low numbers and unsatisfactory arrangements for combining groups have led to low morale among students.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design and media studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NOCN art and design	1	Number of starters	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	84
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	*	13	10
		Retention (%)	*	77	80
		Achievement (%)	*	60	87
BTEC national diploma media	3	Number of starters	*	*	10
		Retention (%)	*	*	50
		Achievement (%)	*	*	80
GCE A level art	3	Number of starters	*	*	15
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	*	*	27

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Humanities, English and Social Science

### Grade 2

**47 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in English, psychology, sociology, law and counselling. They broadly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but found that some strengths were overstated or based on insecure evidence. Action had been taken to address some of the weaknesses by the time of inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- effective collaboration with local schools
- good teaching
- effective guidance at subject level
- good pass rates in most subjects

#### Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention in most subjects
- inadequate schemes of work
- insufficient up-to-date social science text books

48 The college's provision in humanities and social studies subjects at GCSE and GCE A level is responsive to the needs of the local community. Successful collaboration with neighbouring secondary schools helps to maintain a sufficient range of GCE A level subjects. To maintain viable groups, the college combines some full-time and part-time groups and some first-year and second-year groups. Teachers of these groups adopt appropriate strategies that enable them to meet the different needs of all the students. Counselling courses have recently been introduced which allow students to progress from introductory to certificate level within the college.

49 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality of most teaching and

learning is good. Lessons are well planned and well managed. Teachers provide appropriate handouts and organise suitable activities which sustain students' interest and promote learning. In a GCSE English language lesson, students used a handout to guide their recollection of their first day in a new job. After sharing experiences, the teacher read an extract which described the similar experience of a boy at the start of the twentieth century. Students' comprehension of the text was increased by reference to their own experience. Teachers of psychology use a variety of effective methods to check students' learning. Most students maintain good concentration in lessons. In a few lessons, teachers talked too much or used ineffective question and answer techniques. Some younger students were reluctant to answer or offered limited replies. Inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that schemes of work are a strength. They are narrow in scope, incomplete, or too brief. They pay little attention to the effective incorporation of key skills into classroom teaching.

50 With helpful guidance, students produce written work of an appropriate standard. In a GCE A level English literature class, pairs of students practised analysing poetry in preparation for a piece of assessed coursework. The teacher intervened constructively to extend their developing appreciation. Students felt confident about applying what they had learnt. A calendar of assignments is available in some subjects to help students plan their work. Students understand the tasks that are required of them and the criteria by which they will be assessed. Teachers provide detailed and constructive comments on written work. Both inspectors and the college see this as a strength. At termly intervals, students' progress is assessed in individual meetings with subject teachers and action plans are produced.

51 Examination results are mostly good for students who complete their courses. Although the college's ISR data were unreliable,

# Curriculum Areas

inspectors found sufficient evidence to conclude that in GCE A level psychology, English language and English literature, pass rates were above national averages in 1997 and 1998. A similar standard was maintained in 1999. GCE A level results in sociology were poor in 1997, but improved in the following year. By contrast, pass rates in GCE A level law have remained low. Achievement rates in GCSE English, psychology and sociology have consistently exceeded national averages for further education colleges. The college's self-assessment report recognised poor retention as a weakness, but failed to provide evidence of its extent. In 1999, GCE A level retention rates were low. GCSE retention rates were just above the national average. At the time of inspection, retention had fallen to a low level in a few GCSE and GCE A level subjects. However, on counselling courses attendance and retention were high.

52 Inspection findings confirmed the college's judgement about the benefits of regular staff meetings. Staff teams are well established. There is some sharing of good practice which improves the quality of teaching and tutoring. A range of actions is being taken with the aim of improving students' retention. Teachers hold relevant degrees. A few do not possess a teaching qualification. The overall standard of accommodation for humanities teaching is good. Rooms are comfortably furnished and conducive to study. However, there are few wall displays to stimulate students' interest in their subjects. In the library there are too few up-to-date textbooks in sociology and psychology. Internet and other resources suitable for humanities and social studies courses are being introduced, but library staff and teachers do not liaise closely enough to facilitate the wider use of IT.

# Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in humanities, English and social science, 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	*	*	87
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	66
GCSE sociology and psychology	2	Number of starters	*	*	56
		Retention (%)	*	*	68
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92
Certificate in counselling	2	Number of starters	+	+	36
		Retention (%)	+	+	92
		Achievement (%)	+	+	79
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	*	*	62
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	*	*	83
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	*	*	41
		Retention (%)	*	*	61
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	*	*	28
		Retention (%)	*	*	61
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCE A level law	3	Number of starters	*	*	25
		Retention (%)	*	*	56
		Achievement (%)	*	*	57
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	63
		Achievement (%)	*	*	80

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

\*data unreliable

+course not offered



# Curriculum Areas

## Basic Skills

### *Grade 3*

**53 The self-assessment report on basic skills resulted from consultation at course team level, but only in one department of the college. Cross-college aspects of basic skills were not considered. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the report. Some weaknesses were understated or not identified. Twelve lessons were observed.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of courses and clear progression routes
- well-motivated students
- effective use of learning advisers and qualified volunteers

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in completion of individual students' learning plans
- lack of co-ordination of basic skills across the college
- inconsistent practices for reviewing students' progress
- insufficient evidence of students' achievements

54 The college offers a growing range of courses, which effectively meet the needs of a diverse body of students. The basic skills provision includes discrete programmes in literacy and numeracy, learning support for full-time and part-time students, basic skills integrated with other aspects of pre-vocational courses, and part-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Provision is also made for young students who have been excluded from school. Some basic skills teaching is carried out in community venues, although most takes place on the main site. Last summer, a basic skills summer school was provided for

nearly 200 adults who might otherwise not have considered a college course. The self-assessment report acknowledges that provision lacks cohesion at a cross-college level. The college does not have a basic skills policy and different managers are responsible for discrete basic skills courses, learning support and key skills provision.

55 Most teaching is satisfactory or good. Lessons are well prepared, and take account of students' different levels of ability. Teachers provide a variety of tasks to stimulate and maintain students' interest. They relate their lessons to the students' own experiences. For example, in some well-taught lessons, teachers use materials related to individual's job roles or family responsibilities to reinforce learning. However, in some numeracy lessons, there is an over-reliance on textbook exercises, and students undertake tasks for which there is no obvious rationale. Some teachers make good use of IT to assist the development of literacy skills. Classroom management is generally good, although the effectiveness of some lessons was reduced because boisterous behaviour went unchecked.

56 All full-time students are assessed during induction to determine their basic skills needs. Initial testing is devised by each curriculum team. This ensures that assessments are relevant to the vocational area, but results in too wide a variation in practice across the college. Individual learning plans are agreed between students and teachers, and reviewed half-termly. However, insufficient rigour is applied to their preparation, and the definition of learning goals is too imprecise. Some poor learning plans contain only a few words, such as 'improve spelling' or 'work through mathematics book'. Many teachers do not link individuals' learning plans to their initial assessments.

57 Learning support is provided for students in all vocational areas. Motor vehicle students based at Parkway benefit from effective

# Curriculum Areas

integration of learning support with other aspects of the motor vehicle curriculum. However, in some curriculum areas, students' needs for learning support are identified, but there is no systematic follow-up of their progress. Systems designed to alert vocational tutors to students' non-attendance at scheduled learning support lessons are not applied rigorously or consistently. For example, the tutors of some students who had not attended learning support lessons between October 1999 and March 2000 had not been notified of their non-attendance.

58 There are clear progression routes for students. As indicated in the self-assessment report, many students gain sufficient confidence to progress to other college courses at higher levels. For example, four women who attended a return-to-learn course in January 1999 to improve their writing skills, progressed to access courses in September 1999. Students are well motivated; this is particularly evident among students on the pre-vocational programme which caters for young people who have had previous negative experiences of education.

59 In 1998-99, most students who were entered for external qualifications in numeracy and communications took those accredited by the NOCN. Of those entered, 53% were successful. This is a low percentage. Fifty-eight students were entered for C&G Wordpower stage 1 and 62% were successful. The college did not enter students for C&G Wordpower and Numberpower qualifications at entry level. There is insufficient evidence of students' achievements in basic skills across the full ability range. Consequently a students' achievements table has not been included in this report.

60 Teachers are enthusiastic and highly committed to their students. Many possess specialist basic skills teaching qualifications. These strengths were cited in the self-assessment

report. Teachers are supported effectively by learning advisers, whose role is to give additional help to individual students during lessons. They also assist with the production of learning materials which are customised for particular individuals. Qualified volunteers also provide valuable help in lessons. Teaching accommodation is good, providing a pleasant environment which is conducive to learning. Some classrooms are enlivened by displays of students' work. Others are devoid of any wall displays. Learning resources are good and easily accessible to students.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### *Grade 3*

**61 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but found that some weaknesses had been understated.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective pre-entry guidance
- good links with community organisations and the local authority's pupil referral unit
- good careers advice
- well-regarded welfare, counselling, accommodation and financial support services

#### **Weaknesses**

- inconsistent assessment for, and provision of, learning support
- weak links between learning support tutors and personal tutors
- some unsatisfactory individual action plans

62 There is no overall co-ordination of student support services in the college. Responsibility for different aspects of support is divided between three senior managers. Their responsibilities are clear and there is much good practice, but there are variations in the quality of support of which managers are not sufficiently aware.

63 Community development workers, employed by the college, have successfully widened participation by forging links with community organisations. As a result, 55 adults who might not otherwise have attended college, have taken courses based in community centres. The college works closely with the local authority's pupil referral unit. As a result, 34 young people who have been excluded from school attend the college. These students

receive good learning support and are progressing well.

64 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the college offers good pre-entry advice and guidance. Publicity materials are informative. The college works closely with the careers service to provide information for school-leavers. Open days and advice sessions are organised each year. Recently, Saturday 'taster' sessions were provided for families. When application forms are received, the college careers adviser identifies applicants who might require a guidance interview. About 50 guidance interviews were held last year. All applicants for full-time and substantive part-time courses are interviewed. Interviews are conducted by teachers, using a common information checklist. The process is co-ordinated centrally, but the quality of interviews is not monitored. Students are generally positive about the interview process.

65 Induction is generally effective. All students receive course information, a student handbook, the college charter and adequate information about the central support services. During induction, curriculum managers use vocationally relevant materials to assess students' learning support needs. There is no system to monitor whether these assessments are appropriate or effective. Inspectors found significant variations in the scope and quality of initial assessment. Some assessments do not effectively identify students who need support. In several curriculum areas, students' numeracy skills are not assessed.

66 Once they are on a course, students may be referred for learning support by their personal tutors. The majority of students who attend regularly speak highly of the value of the learning support. Non-attendance should be reported to personal tutors, but often this does not take place. There is no systematic reporting of students' progress by learning support tutors to personal tutors. Learning support is managed on each site by support co-ordinators. There is

# Cross-college Provision

variation in quality between sites and insufficient sharing of good practice between the co-ordinators. The team supporting motor vehicle students at Parkway has developed innovative ways of encouraging students to take up learning support. A well-named 'kick start' mathematics programme has increased the take-up of numeracy support. Members of this support team work closely with vocational lecturers to devise relevant initial assessments and appropriate resource materials.

67 The tutorial policy sets out the entitlement to tutorials for both full-time and part-time students. It emphasises the importance of students' management of their own learning through goal-setting, action-planning and review. Full-time students are timetabled for weekly tutorials. Tutors make use of a comprehensive tutorial handbook. Tutorial schemes of work identify group and individual sessions. Inspectors observed some good tutorials. However, many students' action plans do not set out clearly the targets and actions required to maintain or improve performance. The college did not identify this weakness in its self-assessment report. Lecturers incorporate tutoring of part-time students within their teaching schemes. The quality of tutorial support for part-time students is inconsistent. The college does not have sufficiently rigorous monitoring procedures to identify the inconsistencies in tutorial support.

68 Students are given appropriate guidance about higher education and employment. They meet careers officers at induction. Group sessions on careers education are provided by the careers service for most full-time students. In 1998-99, careers advisers also held over 500 individual interviews. They also work with tutors and students to help them to complete their university applications. During August, the college careers adviser helps students to deal with the university clearing system and to review their choice of other options for the coming year.

69 The student services centre is prominently located next to the main entrance. It provides good information and sound advice on a wide range of practical matters such as financial support, childcare, benefits, transport and accommodation. The college nursery offers high-quality provision at subsidised rates for students. The accommodation service provides very useful support for motor vehicle students on block-release courses. A qualified counsellor is readily available. All the services are well advertised and staff and students speak highly of them. There is a well-structured system of student representation. Course groups elect members to the student council which is chaired by a student and attended by the director of curriculum. Representatives from each faculty are elected from the council to a student liaison committee chaired by the principal. Governors have recently established a student affairs committee. Students feel that their concerns are heard and acted upon.

# Cross-college Provision

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

**70 The self-assessment report contained judgements relating to general and specialist resources and staffing. It did not address all aspects of general resources. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses set out in the report.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good access for students and staff to modern computers
- high-quality general accommodation and resources at Parkway
- outstanding reception area at Parkway
- good-quality nursery provision

#### **Weaknesses**

- some unsatisfactory teaching accommodation
- inadequate library bookstock
- cramped staff rooms
- inadequate social and recreational areas for students at some sites

71 The college has made some improvements to its accommodation since the last inspection. Last year, areas of the main college campus in St Stephens Road were adapted to provide additional, good-quality classrooms. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the main site still has a number of unsatisfactory huts. The reception area at St Stephens Road is well located and welcoming. The student services centre is conveniently located close to reception. The student services area is satisfactory, but there are too few small rooms suitable for private interviews.

72 The buildings on the Downend site provide suitable accommodation for business studies courses, but their external fabric is in poor condition. The Kingswood site is a former

factory. It has been appropriately converted to provide teaching rooms and IT resources for vocational community education and adult basic education. The Parkway site is an attractive, modern, purpose-built facility for motor vehicle engineering. The common areas at Parkway, and in particular the excellent reception area, provide a good environment for staff, students and visitors. A good accommodation strategy provides a clear vision for future improvements. The current phase of developments at St Stephens Road has recently been approved by the FEFC and the college corporation. Some initial work has been completed.

73 The overall quality of the general classroom accommodation is satisfactory. Some classrooms are enlivened by good displays of students' work. Others are drab and do not provide stimulating learning environments. Classrooms are generally well equipped with whiteboards, projection screens, window blinds and overhead projectors. The furniture and fittings in some classrooms are poor. Many public areas and corridors have pictures, sculptures and attractive displays. The college is clean and well maintained.

74 The self-assessment report recognises that access for wheelchair users could be improved. Few areas are inaccessible to students with physical disabilities and no one is denied the opportunity to take the course of their choice. However, some heavy doors and other internal features can prove difficult for staff and students with physical disabilities.

75 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that students and staff have good access to modern computers on all sites. They make use of a wide range of software and have access to the Internet. A range of curriculum materials is also available on the college intranet. There has been regular investment in computers. The approximate ratio is one computer for every five full-time equivalent students. The IT centre on the main campus

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contains over 100 machines. It is zoned to provide dedicated spaces for 'drop-in' use and for timetabled teaching and has good demonstration facilities for group teaching. Some curriculum areas also operate their own learning centres, equipped with modern computers, books and other resources. There is adequate technical support for the computer networks. Technicians provide advice and a maintenance service. The college computer system links the separate campuses and enables electronic communication with a consortium of local colleges to facilitate the sharing of information.

76 The library adjoins the IT centre. It is small for the number of students, but has an adequate number of study spaces. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are inadequate numbers of books in several curriculum areas. Many books are out of date and inappropriate for students as they progress to higher levels. The library and learning resources team includes four learning advisers who liaise with teachers. They provide valuable help with the teaching of key skills and assist students to retrieve library information. The librarian is responsible for general learning resources at Parkway and Downend. The Downend library meets the needs of the students based at that site, but the library at Parkway is too small for the number of students based there.

77 Catering and recreational facilities are adequate. There are facilities for indoor sports at the main campus and there is an agreement with the neighbouring Kingswood leisure centre allowing students to use its facilities free of charge. Many students take advantage of this opportunity. Most sites have social areas for use by students, but inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the social and recreational facilities are inadequate on some sites. They also agreed that many staff workrooms are cramped and do not provide a suitable working environment. There is a good-

quality nursery and an 'out-of-school' club at the main site.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**78 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective action to improve the quality of teaching
- realistic assessment by the college of the quality of teaching
- good arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development

#### **Weaknesses**

- lack of compliance with quality assurance procedures
- unsatisfactory management of the self-assessment process
- little use of information derived from student surveys
- lack of arrangements to monitor the college charter

79 Since the last inspection the college has significantly improved the quality of teaching. In 1996, inspectors judged 51% of lessons to be good or outstanding. In the current inspection the proportion had risen to 67%. In 1998-99, the college carried out an extensive programme of lesson observations. College staff observed 129 lessons and 136 lessons were observed by external consultants. Of these 265 lessons, 65% were judged to be good or outstanding. Lesson observations inform self-assessment and staff development but not staff appraisal. It is not possible for either the college or inspectors to judge achievement trends since the last

# Cross-college Provision

inspection, because the college's achievement data are very unreliable.

80 The college has not yet developed a sufficiently robust and systematic approach to quality assurance. The groups that are involved in the monitoring and development of quality assurance have not been fully effective in ensuring compliance with quality assurance procedures. The academic board subcommittee for quality assurance monitors the implementation of recommendations made in external verification reports, develops strategies for improving retention and encourages the establishment of standards in service areas. However, it has failed to ensure compliance with deadlines for the submission of progress reports, quality audit reports, and revised quality standards. The quality steering group oversees the quality assurance system. It is scheduled to meet monthly. It did not meet between July and December 1999.

81 Some aspects of the self-assessment process are good. Self-assessment involves all staff. Course teams produce self-assessment reports for all courses over 120 hours. Curriculum managers aggregate these into curriculum area reports. Some of these reports are detailed and evaluative. Others do not go into sufficient depth and make insufficient judgements about teaching, learning and students' achievements. Most curriculum area reports contain appropriate action plans. Termly progress reports are produced. These are monitored by the senior management team. The overall college self-assessment process has been poorly managed and hampered by unreliable data. The college aims to produce its self-assessment report for the year by the end of the autumn term. The 1997-98 report was not ready until May 1999. The 1998-99 report was not ready by the time of the inspection in March 2000. An incomplete draft was provided to inspectors during the inspection week.

82 Inspectors judged staff appraisal and staff development arrangements to be good. These strengths were identified by the college in the general resources section of its self-assessment report. The appraisal system is well established and comprehensive. All full-time permanent members of staff are appraised annually by their line manager. Each member of staff identifies personal objectives that are closely linked to team and faculty objectives. Individuals' training and development needs are identified effectively through the appraisal process. The personnel department uses information from appraisals to produce the staff development programme for the following year. Three budgets are set up: one for cross-college training; one for team development; and one for individual learning accounts. The overall expenditure on staff development is approximately 1% of payroll costs. The use of individual learning accounts is innovative. All staff are allocated the same amount of money. They can use their individual allocation in any approved way that meets their personal training needs, for example the purchase of books or attendance at conferences. Some teams have pooled their money for team training.

83 The college does not make effective use of the data gathered through surveys of students' views. Surveys are completed at the beginning and end of the year. Curriculum managers do not find that the analysis of the data produces useful information. Some curriculum and service areas carry out their own surveys, but the results are not widely disseminated. The college updates its student charter each year and distributes it to all students. The charter contains much clear and relevant information, but it does not clearly set out the college's commitments to its students. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the charter needs more specific commitments about teaching and learning. There are no satisfactory arrangements for monitoring the college charter.

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84 Management responsibility for quality assurance is clear. The deputy principal has responsibility for strategic developments and the quality assurance manager deals with operational matters. The college is beginning to use targets at course level. Curriculum teams take past performance and FEFC benchmarking data into account when setting targets for retention, achievement and attendance. Progress against targets is reported in termly progress reports. The college has developed quality standards for most support areas. In some areas they are well established. In other areas they have only recently been developed. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the quality assurance of support services is underdeveloped.

## Governance

### Grade 4

**85 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weakness identified by the college in its self-assessment, but the importance of some weaknesses was understated.**

#### Key strengths

- the wide range of governors' skills and experience
- efficient administration of corporation business by the clerk

#### Weaknesses

- poor attendance at meetings
- failure to secure accurate and timely management information on which to base corporation decisions
- insufficient scrutiny of important issues
- failure to ensure prompt financial and student data returns to the FEFC
- unsystematic approach to the training of governors

86 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of governance. It does not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. For example, significant delays in the submission of financial statements and student data returns to the FEFC, as required by the financial memorandum, constitute non-compliance with the corporation's responsibility under the instrument of governance.

87 There is over-reliance on a small number of active and committed governors. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings has been low. Only eight members attended the corporation meeting in October 1999. The December meeting was inquorate. Two recent committee meetings were also inquorate; consequently, decisions were delayed. Other meetings have taken place with the minimum allowable number of members. For example the finance committee is often attended only by the chair of the corporation and two other governors, one of whom is the principal.

88 The corporation has a membership of 17 comprising six business members, three co-opted, two local authority, two community, two college staff, a student, and the principal. At the time of the inspection there were four vacancies. Governors have a good range of relevant skills and experience in areas such as law, public relations, finance, business, engineering, IT and education. However, the corporation has not acted effectively to fill long-standing vacancies. The search committee has met only once since it was established in August 1999.

89 Governors have failed to secure accurate and timely management information on which to base their decisions. As a result, they have not realised the seriousness of the college's problems with its ISR data. Due to poor-quality



# Cross-college Provision

management information, the corporation was slow to realise that there would be a substantial repayment of funds to the FEFC for both 1997-98 and 1998-99. However, prompt action was taken when the governors became aware of the situation. Governors, including the new chair of the corporation, are determined to deal with these issues and action has now been taken. For example the finance committee now requires a diary of financial deadlines so that it can check that returns are submitted by the due dates. It also requires financial reports to include comparative figures for previous years.

90 The clerk to the corporation is also the college's marketing manager. Separate job descriptions apply to each role. Corporation business is administered efficiently. Agendas and minutes are timely, although they do not always clearly indicate whether an item is for decision, discussion or information. There are standing orders and a code of conduct. Corporation minutes and papers are available in the college library.

91 New governors are prepared for their role with the help of a comprehensive induction pack, a tour of the college and meetings with senior staff. Other training consists mainly of briefings from college managers. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there is no systematic training and development programme for governors. It also identifies the need for governors to improve their links with staff and students. Governors have taken steps to address this weakness by formally linking each governor with an area of college activity. A student affairs committee has recently been established.

92 Governors are timetabled for an annual planning and development day to review the college's mission and discuss strategic objectives for the coming year. The last event, in August 1999, was poorly attended. Only eight governors participated. Regular reports by the principal and other senior managers are intended to

enable governors to monitor progress against strategic objectives and college targets. These reports often do not contain reliable or comprehensive information. The accompanying commentaries sometimes fail to highlight achievements and issues, and they provide insufficient information to enable governors to assess yearly trends. Inspectors did not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the corporation has effective procedures to ensure the quality of provision. A curriculum and quality committee has recently been established to address this weakness.

## Management

### Grade 4

**93 Inspectors judged that the self-assessment report overstated some strengths and omitted others. Inspectors identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- clear management structure
- good communication
- productive links with external partners

#### Weaknesses

- ineffective management information system
- failure to provide accurate data on students' achievements
- failure to submit timely and accurate financial and student data returns to the FEFC
- underachievement of funding targets in 1997-98 and 1998-99
- insufficient management co-ordination of some key college processes and services

94 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the management information system is ineffective. Data on students' achievements

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generated from ISR returns for 1996-97 and 1997-98 contained fundamental errors and were too unreliable to use as a basis for inspectors' judgements. Despite early identification of these problems, the college was unable to produce reliable data from registers and examining body records. The management response to this serious issue was inadequate. Weaknesses in the organisation of course registers and poor completion of registers by teachers exacerbated the problem. The original 1998-99 achievement data submitted to inspectors were also unreliable, although most was corrected in time for the inspection.

95 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college has frequently submitted late financial and student data returns to the FEFC. The unreliable information produced by the student information system and some over-optimistic forecasts by college managers contributed to underachievement of funding targets in both 1997-98 and 1998-99. As a result, approximately £1.6 million has to be repaid to the FEFC. At the time of inspection, the 1998-99 accounts remained unsigned. A programme of cost reductions has resulted in savings in the current year. Further savings are planned, but it is too early to assess whether they will be fully effective. Financial reporting to governors and managers has incorporated good practice recommendations by auditors and is becoming more effective. Budgets are effectively monitored and there is appropriate reporting to budget holders. The college has recently updated its financial regulations and procedures. The internal auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in internal controls.

96 Comprehensive arrangements for strategic planning involve staff at all levels. The planning cycle includes drafting strategic and operational objectives for all faculties and support services at an early stage. Once finalised, the plan is used to determine the key personal objectives of

staff through the appraisal process. However, inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that monitoring of strategic and operational objectives is inconsistent. The executive seeks to delegate as much responsibility and authority as is practicable to managers at all levels. However, they have not established effective monitoring and control procedures. Practice throughout the college, for example in relation to tutorial support, learning support and quality assurance, varies in quality and in some cases is unsatisfactory. The self-assessment reports for 1997-98 and 1998-99 both failed to meet their deadlines. Senior managers do not have sufficient awareness of those areas where performance is unsatisfactory and do not always take prompt action when weaknesses are identified.

97 The college management structure is clear. Lines of responsibility are fully understood by staff. The executive team of five, comprising the principal, deputy principal and directors of finance, curriculum and marketing meets weekly to review strategic, personnel and financial issues. The senior management team comprises the executive plus the three directors of faculty. It meets fortnightly to focus on operational issues. Course provision in each faculty is managed by curriculum managers. Communication in the college is good. Faculty and cross-college committees include at least one member of the senior management team. They meet regularly and meetings are generally well minuted. The minutes of the senior management team and other key committees are widely available to staff. A monthly newsletter is produced and meetings of all staff are held when there is a need to communicate and discuss important issues.

98 In response to one of its strategic objectives, the college has developed a wide range of productive links with business, the local community and other education providers in the region. The college, together with Filton College, has achieved a Beacon Award for their

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collaborative work providing training for managers and retail staff at a large new shopping centre. In partnership with seven local schools, the college has widened the choice of GCSE and GCE A levels available to local school pupils and college students. The college is also successful in securing major contracts with local and national companies to deliver training for the retail motor industry.

99 A marketing policy and strategy has been established during the past 18 months. The strategy includes a wide range of promotional activities. However, it requires further development to identify responsibilities and measurable outcomes. A comprehensive market-needs analysis has not been undertaken, although a detailed study into widening participation in the local area has begun. The college has recently revised its equal opportunities policy and re-established a committee to monitor the policy. Within a short period of time it has made progress in encouraging good practice.

## Conclusions

100 The self-assessment report submitted prior to the inspection related to the 1997-98 academic year. It was too old to provide a useful basis for carrying out the inspection. Several sections were updated prior to the inspection. Some curriculum and cross-college grades were amended. Draft sections of the 1998-99 report were sent to inspectors to enable them to prepare for the inspection. These draft sections were collated for the inspection team during the inspection week. The collated draft lacked contextual information and had not been approved by the corporation.

101 The curriculum area self-assessment reports presented strengths, weaknesses and actions in a standard format, but some of the supporting evidence was missing. The report on basic skills judged provision in one department rather than the whole college. The cross-college

sections were not presented in a consistent format and there were variations in the level of detail. The section on support for students focused mainly on learning support. The report made sound judgements of strengths and weaknesses in some areas, but significant weaknesses were omitted or not given sufficient emphasis, particularly in relation to governance and management. Inspectors agreed with five of the college's seven curriculum grades and two of the five cross-college grades. In each case where they disagreed with the college grade, they judged that the college had been overgenerous.

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

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (November 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	20
19-24 years	14
25+ years	64
Not known	1
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	25
Level 2 (intermediate)	27
Level 3 (advanced)	34
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Non-schedule 2	9
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	138	1,348	24
Construction	4	41	1
Engineering	224	887	18
Business	99	1,105	19
Hotel and catering	57	63	2
Health and community care	237	336	9
Art and design	70	251	5
Humanities	83	1,013	17
Basic education	34	270	5
Total	946	5,314	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 10% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	123	10	0	133
Supporting direct learning contact	34	1	0	35
Other support	74	2	0	76
Total	231	13	0	244

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial Data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£6,998,000	£7,114,000	£7,702,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£14.80	£13.78	£16.20
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	74%	67%
Achievement of funding target	130%	*	83%
Diversity of income	27%	32%	30%
Operating surplus	£171,000	-£417,000	£171,000

Sources: Income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Achievement of funding target - Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

\*agreed data not available

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