

**South  
Birmingham  
College**

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1997-98**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.  
Sample size: 122 college inspections

## Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students which completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

# Summary

## South Birmingham College

### *West Midlands Region*

#### **Inspected September 1997**

South Birmingham College is a large general further education college which provides courses over a wide area of south Birmingham. The college produced a thorough and generally accurate self-assessment report. Some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were overlooked. The report was carefully produced and benefited from the wide involvement of staff in its development. It was built up from many contributing self-assessment reports from curriculum and support areas.

The college offers a wide range of courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in six areas was inspected, including two in each of the science and basic education programme areas, together with the college's cross-college provision. The college meets local needs particularly well. It is particularly effective in its attempts to widen participation in further education. The carefully planned curriculum enables students to progress from foundation level to higher education. The wide availability of courses in the community enables people to enter education in ways and at locations which suit their personal circumstances. There are close relations with local schools and with those

concerned with the provision of support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Links with employers and local community organisations are extensive and fruitful. The standards of teaching are generally satisfactory and sometimes good. The quality of provision in childcare is outstanding. Quality assurance and support for students are generally good. Governors bring a wide range of experience to their work. The management of this large and highly complex college is particularly effective. The college should: improve teaching methods in some areas of work; develop more thorough information on students' achievements to assist staff in improving the quality of the provision they manage; complete its staff appraisal programme; and continue to improve its resources and accommodation.

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

<b>Curriculum areas inspected</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science	3	Support for students	2
Computing	3	General resources	3
Construction	3	Quality assurance	2
Engineering	3	Governance	2
Childcare	1	Management	2
English	3		
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		
ESOL, literacy and numeracy	2		

## The College and its Mission

1 South Birmingham College is a large general further education college with eight major centres located in the south and centre of the city at Hall Green, Sparkhill, Sparkbrook, Digbeth and Edgbaston. It also operates in over 100 smaller centres, mostly in the south of Birmingham. Since its last Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspection it has merged with St Philip's College, a Roman Catholic sixth form college. The college has a strong community emphasis which fits well with its mission to provide high-quality education and training 'to be delivered in a location, at a time and in a form which enables our students to achieve their full potential'. This closely matches current national priorities to widen participation in education. The area which the college serves is socially, economically and culturally diverse. There are many minority ethnic communities, predominantly of Pakistani and Northern Indian origin and other significant minorities include those of African-Caribbean, Yemeni and Irish origin. Many of the inner-city wards from which the college recruits its students experience major social deprivation.

2 The unemployment rate in local inner wards is about 34.2 per cent compared with 15.6 per cent for Birmingham as a whole: the rate for minority ethnic groups is especially high. Much employment in this area is small scale and includes clothing and textiles, jewellery making, retailing, wholesaling and the restaurant trade. There is also substantial employment in public administration and the social services. Many of the jobs in the inner city are filled by those who live outside the area.

3 The college curriculum is comprehensive, covering vocational and non-vocational areas at many levels. It offers courses in all the programme areas of the FEFC. The substantial community programme offers courses in outreach centres at many levels in most curriculum areas. This includes training on

employers' premises and courses offered at weekends and other non-traditional times. Courses ranging from prevocational to postgraduate level include general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), national vocational qualification (NVQ), general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) and many offered by professional bodies. The college's links with the University of Central England in Birmingham enable local people to enter higher education in ways suited to their personal circumstances.

4 The educational achievements of many students at entry to the college are modest. In 1996, the percentage of 16-year-old pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A to C in Birmingham was 32.4 per cent, well below the West Midlands average of 40.2 per cent. However, the inclusion of vocational qualifications such as GNVQ intermediate courses, increases the proportion of 16 year olds achieving level 2 or equivalent to 40 per cent. The proportion of students staying on in education after the age of 16 is 66.7 per cent, below the national average. There is a wide range of secondary education in the city including comprehensive schools, single-sex grammar schools and independent schools. Birmingham has eight further education colleges and three sixth form colleges and there are more within travelling distance outside the city boundaries.

5 In 1996-97, the college had over 20,000 enrolments of which over 80 per cent were aged 19 and over. Approximately 64 per cent of the students were studying at foundation level, 17 per cent at intermediate level, and 13 per cent at advanced level; 6 per cent were enrolled on higher education courses. During the last three years, the college has substantially increased its enrolments. The college employs 510 full-time equivalent staff. At the time of the inspection, the college was divided into 16 teaching departments. Eight of these departments were inspected.

# Context

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 29 September 1997, under the arrangements outlined in Council Circulars 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* and 97/22, *Joint Working: Audit and inspection*. The inspection took place in the second teaching week of the college's autumn term. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college. The college was unable to submit complete data on students' achievements for the three years 1994 to 1997. There were some significant discrepancies; in particular, incomplete information about enrolments of students and some under-reporting of achievements. Self-assessment reports for curriculum areas were based upon the college's departmental structure. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors, working for 47 days, and one auditor working for five days.

They observed 104 lessons, scrutinised samples of students' work and a wide variety of college documents. Inspectors met local employers and representatives of the Birmingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), schools and community groups with which the college works. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 42 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 12 per cent were considered less than satisfactory. This compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 80 per cent in comparison with the average for the sector of 77 per cent, according to the same report. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE AS/A level	2	7	10	1	0	20
GCSE	0	1	5	2	0	8
GNVQ	0	4	1	1	0	6
NVQ	2	2	9	0	0	13
Basic education	3	11	8	6	0	28
Other vocational	3	9	15	2	0	29
Total	10	34	48	12	0	104

# Curriculum Areas

## Science

### Grade 3

**8 Courses inspected were GCSE, GCE A level, GNVQ advanced science and access to higher education. Twelve science classes were observed. The self-assessment report for the science programme area covers most of the key issues but it overestimated the strength of teaching and learning and of students' achievements. There was some good practice in teaching and learning but it was not consistent. Some sessions lacked rigour. Students' achievements have been close to the national averages for the sector with some signs of improvement in 1997.**

#### Key strengths

- the good range of science subjects and levels of study available on two sites
- the quality of much of the teaching and learning
- the well-qualified science staff
- well-designed laboratories
- students' attention to safety in carrying out practical work

#### Weaknesses

- inconsistent information on students' achievements
- the unsuitable use of laboratories for the teaching of many theory sessions
- students' frequent lack of punctuality in attending classes
- limited progression of students from year one to year two of the new GNVQ advanced science course
- the department's inability to use the data on student qualifications at entry to measure the value added

9 Full-time students can take courses in physics, chemistry and biology at GCSE, GCE

A level, GNVQ advanced science and access courses. There are part-time courses in science and science is also taught on the access to health studies course. Most of the science curriculum is taught at the St Philip's sixth form centre and at Hall Green. All full-time science teachers are well qualified; three have doctorates. The technicians provide effective but unobtrusive support. There are large and mostly well-equipped specialist laboratories for the three sciences on both the Hall Green site and at the St Philip's sixth form centre.

10 The majority of teaching observed by inspectors was effective. In the best lessons, audiovisual aids and practical demonstrations were used to good effect. There were also some well-planned work schemes. Skilled questioning developed students' understanding of theory. A minority of the lessons were dull and consisted of long periods when teachers talked to students. In the poorer lessons, opportunities were missed for involving the students in stimulating practical or problem-solving exercises. Students carried out practical work safely but some had little understanding of the purpose of practical work. The use of laboratories for the teaching of theory was not appropriate. Although calculators were used, no applications of the use of information technology in science were observed. In almost half the lessons some students were up to 15 minutes late and attendance was low in some GCSE classes.

11 Inspectors were unable to make an accurate assessment of students' achievements because the information supplied by the college was incomplete. Achievements in most areas are apparently around the national average for further education colleges with some evidence of recent improvements, for example, in GCE A level biology. As noted in the self-assessment report, weekly schemes of work and lesson plans were used in most lessons although they were not in a consistent form. Some science staff have made an attempt to compare the previous grades achieved by students with their



# Curriculum Areas

success on courses at the college. However, there is no college policy on their presentation and the absence of precise information about students' qualification on entry makes it difficult for the college to evaluate its own contribution to students' achievements.

## Examples of students' achievements in science, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE	Retention (%)	40	73	†
	Pass rate (%)	32	38	†
GCE A level one year	Retention (%)	100	61	†
	Pass rate (%)	87	68	†
GCE A level two year	Retention (%)	100	100	†
	Pass rate (%)	84	61	†

Source: college data

†full achievements information not available at the time of the inspection

# Curriculum Areas

## Computing

### Grade 3

**12 The inspection covered courses within the computing department and some aspects of information technology which are offered by the extra mural studies department. All the main courses in computing were inspected. Twelve lessons were observed on two of the college's main sites and at two outreach centres. The inspection team was in broad agreement with the judgements presented in the college's self-assessment report. However, they did not always identify the same strengths and weaknesses or allocate the same weighting to them. In particular, it was difficult to obtain consistent data on students' achievements to validate statements in the assessment report. It is unclear how the department can have full confidence in the judgements it has made.**

#### Key strengths

- some good teaching
- well-motivated students
- especially good relations between staff and students on the adult return-to-learn courses
- good rates of progression from introductory to mainstream courses
- a good range of programmes and short courses which include termly and half-yearly points of entry

#### Weaknesses

- some poorly organised lessons
- significant weaknesses in achievement at GCSE and GCE A level in computing and information technology
- inconsistencies in the marking of assignments
- the impact of unsuitable accommodation on a significant number of sessions

- too few specialist computing facilities for students on the advanced and higher courses
- lack of accurate information on students' achievements

13 The college has made significant changes in both the management and resources of the department since the completion of the self-assessment report. The new leadership of the department has already recognised many of the identified weaknesses and prepared action plans for immediate implementation. The more general parts of the self-assessment report are well cross-referenced and supported by other documentation held within the department. Teachers within the department observe each others' lessons.

14 The department offers a wide variety of computing courses to full-time and part-time students on several sites and in outreach centres. The levels range from introductory information technology, through GCSE, GCE A level, GNVQ and BTEC national diploma to higher national certificate and diploma courses. In addition, short courses are offered which reflect the rapidly changing aspects of information technology. Some of these courses are offered at convenient times for adults with family commitments and others have entry points through the year. Courses are generally well planned and well managed. Better communication between staff on the main sites and those who work mainly off site could improve the standardisation of courses. The collation and analysis of information on students and courses at departmental level is not sufficiently thorough.

15 Some lessons were of high quality and there were good relations between staff and students. Other lessons were poorly organised. Some were disrupted by noise from adjacent areas. There are some high pass rates on

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courses for single years, but there are also poor pass rates. Course teams do not make good use of the data on students' achievements, course documentation lacks information on quality and there are some inconsistencies in the moderation of students' work. Students' work was not always of an appropriate quality and there were some examples of work produced by students which were not appropriate for the level at which they were studying. There were no procedures for standardising marking across the two sites and an outreach centre.

## Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced	Retention (%)	*	86	†
	Pass rate (%)	95	88	†
Intermediate	Retention (%)	90	88	†
	Pass rate (%)	66	100	†
GCSE	Retention (%)	29	*	†
	Pass rate (%)	50	37	†
GCE A level	Retention (%)	100	100	†
	Pass rate (%)	75	54	†

Source: college data

\*college unable to provide data

†full achievements information not available at the time of the inspection

# Curriculum Areas

## Construction

### Grade 3

**16 Inspectors observed 16 lessons covering courses in construction. Generally, the team's judgements were in line with those expressed in the college's self-assessment report. In a few instances, the college understated its weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- some good teaching
- regular checking of what students have learned
- clear assessment procedures
- well-motivated students
- generally fair and consistent marking
- generally good work from students; there are three national prize winners in finishing trades
- good practical demonstrations by craft teachers

#### Weaknesses

- the narrow range of teaching methods in some lessons
- students' lack of awareness of risk and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health assessment
- some poorly presented students' work
- teachers' failure to make effective use of question and answer in lessons
- inappropriate and careless use of hand tools on the part of students
- teachers' difficulty in checking the learning of all the students in large groups
- the long periods students spend copying from overhead transparencies
- lack of explicit criteria for marking students' work
- some inadequate written feedback from teachers

17 The college is a major provider of construction courses, including NVQ craft courses in the community, as recognised in the self-assessment report. These cover the main construction trades and range from foundation studies to professional membership courses. A number of higher level technician courses are franchised from the University of Central England. Links with several schools are useful in providing 'taster' courses and increasing the enrolment of students. The department has worked with the local TEC to provide courses for groups under represented in further education and for the unemployed. Approximately 8 per cent of students are female and students from minority ethnic groups are well represented in the department. This is a somewhat better profile than is commonly found in construction and was recognised in the self-assessment report. Courses meet students' and employers' needs and access to them is flexible.

18 Students entering college in September receive a good induction programme but induction for those students starting their courses at other times during the year is less effective. Most new students are required to undertake a Basic Skills Agency (BSA) assessment of their skills in literacy and numeracy. The quality of teaching is satisfactory but the range of teaching methods is narrow. Students' work is generally good and much of it matches industrial standards. Some craft students train on worthwhile projects which develop their site skills and teamwork. Some drawing and some written work was poor. Students, particularly those in the mature women's group, are well motivated. Most teachers regularly check students' learning. Students' action planning is effective. The marking of students' work is fair and consistent but teachers' written feedback and information on marking criteria are not sufficiently explicit to provide guidance to students on how to improve their work.

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19 Pass rates on NVQ construction programmes are at the national average. In some crafts, the NVQ level 2 results are poor. In the last two years, the pass rates on advanced courses were in line with national averages. In 1996, results for the intermediate GNVQ in construction and the built environment were well above the national average and, although student numbers were low, the results for the advanced GNVQ were outstanding. Intermediate course results in 1995 were above the national average although, again, there were few students. Three craft students have won national awards in recent years. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that retention rates on some courses are low, though overall retention rates are above average for the sector.

20 Curriculum management is good. Course documents are comprehensive and generally well produced. Course teams concentrate effectively on issues related to students and learning. Students' progress and achievements are monitored effectively and documented

accurately. Absenteeism is checked regularly. The department systematically analyses key performance indicators, such as retention rates, and generally takes appropriate action. The deployment of staff is effective and efficient.

21 Teachers' recent industrial experience is very limited. In other respects, staff development meets the professional needs of teachers. Emphasis is given to curriculum and management issues. Accommodation is good or satisfactory: classrooms are adequate in size and well decorated. The workshops in plumbing are shabby and in carpentry and joinery the workshop area is insufficient for the number of students in classes. Some health and safety notices were not displayed in the carpentry and joinery workshop. Equipment, including consumables and hand tools, is adequate in quality and quantity except for plumbing. Libraries and learning centres are well stocked with up-to-date learning materials and books. Most construction students have limited access to information technology.

## Examples of students' achievements in construction, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced	Retention (%)	89	87	†
	Pass rate (%)	72	78	†
Intermediate	Retention (%)	81	93	†
	Pass rate (%)	67	87	†
NVQ	Retention (%)	80	84	†
	Pass rate (%)	71	53	†

Source: college data

† full achievements information not available at the time of the inspection

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 3

**22 The findings of the inspection were similar to those in the college's self-assessment report, except in the area of students' achievements.**

#### Key strengths

- generally sound teaching
- the wide variety of learning activities
- much improved retention rates
- the recruitment of students from a wide variety of backgrounds
- considerable investment in the new motor industry training centre and the engineering workshops

#### Weaknesses

- teachers did not always ensure that all students are engaged in relevant activities
- the narrow range of courses
- differing levels of achievement from course to course
- students' late arrival at a number of lessons
- the lack of uniform administrative procedures within the engineering/motor vehicle department

23 The engineering and motor vehicle studies sections provide City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and BTEC courses for motor vehicle and mechanical and electronic engineering students at craft and technician levels. The section is not an approved Engineering and Marine Training Authority centre for the delivery of practical craft training. Courses meet the needs of a wide range of students including full-time, part-time employed, evening and mature access students, school-link pupils, foundation students, and students with

learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This wide range of students was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. A significant proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds but there are few female students. There are gaps in provision. For example, there is no mechanical engineering craft training course and there are no NVQs.

24 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. Much of the teaching is sound. Activities in the classroom and workshops are varied. However, in a number of lessons students are not well motivated and some take little part in activities. This problem was identified in the self-assessment report. An issue not identified in the report is teachers' failure on occasions to cater effectively for the wide range of abilities in classes. The practical work observed was carried out safely and competently. Students' work on craft courses was well planned, covering basic knowledge and practical activities. Some students' work is wordprocessed.

25 Retention rates have improved. The overall retention rate on motor vehicle/engineering courses has improved from 75 per cent in 1995-96 to 85 per cent in 1996-97. Students' examination achievements vary from good to poor. The self-assessment report concluded that there were good examination results overall. Inspectors considered that this judgement was overgenerous. Students' lack of punctuality is a problem in a number of classes. This was identified in the self-assessment report.

26 A considerable investment has been made in the new motor industry training centre and the engineering workshops. The new facilities provide bright modern workshops. New tools and vehicles have been purchased for the motor vehicle area. Associated classroom facilities are also being developed. There is a technology learning development centre which houses a library of engineering and construction texts and five computers. Students can use the computers

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for accessing the Internet or for general information technology; support staff are available at designated periods. The engineering/motor vehicle department lacks uniform administrative procedures. Students do not have course handbooks and the teaching and assessment materials given to students are poorly presented. Only a limited number of staff have a training and development lead body assessor award and no one in motor vehicle engineering has such an award.

## Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
One-year intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	94	87	†
	Pass rate (%)	36	32	†
Two-year advanced vocational	Retention (%)	*	*	†
	Pass rate (%)	73	19	†

Source: college data

†full achievements information not available at the time of the inspection

\*college unable to provide data

# Curriculum Areas

## Childcare

### Grade 1

**27 Ten lessons in childcare were observed on four different sites. Inspectors' judgements were in agreement with those expressed in two self-assessment reports relevant to this area, provided by college staff. The reports included a review of 1996-97 and an action plan. The coverage was reasonably comprehensive and evaluative and there was supporting evidence for the judgements made.**

#### Key strengths

- comprehensive course documentation which supports the management of the curriculum
- levels of achievement and retention rates which are significantly above the national average
- assessment practices which are fully documented and fair
- teaching and learning which are of a consistent quality across a number of dispersed sites
- effective and flexible responses to the needs of individuals and groups
- departmental resource centres

#### Weaknesses

- the variable quality of accommodation, equipment and facilities across the different sites
- student groups which are composed overwhelmingly of female students and which include few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

28 In many lessons, learning objectives were shared with students and there was an effective evaluation at the end of some lessons in which teachers and students identified what had been learned. The college's self-assessment did not

identify these practices as strengths. The inspection confirmed that there were good relations between staff and students, a strength identified by the college. Students received strong support from course tutors in relation to curriculum and personal matters. The specialist careers advice from vocational tutors has been influential in assisting students with their careers choices.

29 The childcare courses effectively meet the needs of individuals and groups. Courses are offered at a number of locations, including schools, where there are classes for parents, nurseries and community centres. Students can also study in ways which meet their circumstances, for example, by open learning and other flexible arrangements for study. The college recognises in its self-assessment the difficulties such flexibility poses in ensuring a consistent experience for students on all sites. One response has been the development of learning packs for tutors to use wherever they are teaching. Despite efforts to attract male students, classes are mainly composed of female students. This limits perspectives in such modules as equal opportunities, a weakness the college did not identify.

30 The assessment of most courses is governed by national awarding bodies and overseen by external verifiers. They report that: standards of assessment are high; assignments are set at appropriate levels; assessments are fair; procedures are fully documented; and the criteria for assessment are shared with students. The information given to students is readable and comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that levels of achievement and retention rates in childcare are significantly above the national average. The departments have made major efforts to improve retention and most courses now have retention rates above 85 per cent. From the evidence provided by the departments, pass rates are good on the advanced diploma in childcare and education, the Open College Network introduction to



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childcare, BTEC national diploma in childhood studies (nursery nursing) and the diploma in nursery nursing. A significant proportion of students achieved a distinction. The percentage of students achieving NVQ awards rose from 59 per cent in 1995-96 to 80 per cent in 1996-97. Of 457 students enrolled in September 1996, and due to complete in June 1997, 366 had gained their awards.

## Examples of students' achievements in childcare, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	85	90	†
	Pass rate (%)	89	85	†
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	71	91	†
	Pass rate (%)	93	89	†

Source: college data

†full achievements information not available at the time of the inspection

# Curriculum Areas

## English

### Grade 3

**31 Inspectors generally agree with the college's self-assessment of English, but the report overemphasises the strength of the teaching and underestimates some weaknesses in students' achievements. It also omits some strengths, notably the positive attitude of most students. The self-assessment report does not address the issues involved in bringing together the teaching of English on the Hall Green and St Philip's sites.**

#### Key strengths

- some effective introduction to courses for new students
- some lively and varied teaching
- effective support for students to enable them to achieve the levels required
- good examination results in GCSE English literature
- effective assessment of work
- helpful feedback from teachers related to consistent assessment criteria
- attractive accommodation on both sites, including some newly established subject rooms
- an appropriate range of learning resources

#### Weaknesses

- some weak teaching
- inadequate responses to high levels of unpunctuality
- teachers' ignorance of the reasons for students' absence
- examination results in GCE A level English literature
- poor retention on GCSE English language

- some marking which provides inadequate guidance to students on how to improve the accuracy of their writing
- a number of tasks which lack the rigour appropriate to the stage of the course which students had reached
- the inadequate breadth of the bookstock for English in the library at St Philip's
- the slow development of links between teachers on the two sites in developing and evaluating policy and practice

**32** Fifteen GCSE and GCE A level English language and literature lessons were inspected. Some of the teaching is lively and offers varied opportunities for students to contribute effectively in class. There are some thoughtful and successful introductions to courses. Teachers made good use of video, audio tape and handouts, which supports the claim made in the self-assessment report. In some lessons, teachers talk for too long a period and fail to provide students with enough opportunity to respond. In a few lessons, poor management of time and resources results in unsatisfactory learning. Some of the handouts used are unattractively designed or poorly produced. The self-assessment report identifies the assessment of students' work as a strength. Many of the tasks are set at the right level but some are not demanding enough. Marking of work is generally thorough. Teachers provide full comments on students' writing and give a clear indication of the standards reached. In some cases, the guidance is inadequate or teachers fail to deal with inaccuracies of expression in students' writing. Students' initial assessment on entry to the college determines the level of learning support they require. Many receive effective individual support within lessons: others are referred to learning support centres. Much of students' written work is effectively organised and presented. Little of it was wordprocessed. In several lessons, significant numbers of students arrived late and

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were not asked to explain this. Lateness deprived them of learning and disrupted the learning of others. General class registers indicated that some students had ceased to attend. Teachers were unsure who should be present.

33 The self-assessment of English describes some examination results as good. This is true of GCSE English literature. Results for GCE A level English language have been below the national average, but there have been some indications of improvement. The self-assessment describes the results of the much larger numbers who have taken GCSE English language and GCE A level English literature as 'moderate'. Those for GCE A level English literature have sometimes been at levels well below the national average while retention rates on GCSE English language, with well over 200 students, have been poor. The self-assessment contains no action plan for addressing poor examination results.

34 Managers responsible for the English courses across the two sites meet regularly and have made some progress in developing a common approach within the humanities department. They have worked together to improve accommodation, including that at the St Philip's centre. Most classes on both sites now take place in designated English rooms, some of which contain a developing use of display material. The library at St Philip's is short of resources for GCE A level English language and for literary criticism but students have access to books within the department and at other libraries. Little progress has been made in securing effective co-operation over course review and teaching on the two sites. The self-assessment report does not address this issue. The courses on each site are planned efficiently.

## Examples of students' achievements in English, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level English language	Retention (%)	*	*	†
	Pass rate (%)	62	60	†
GCE A level English literature	Retention (%)	*	*	†
	Pass rate (%)	75	50	†
GCSE English language	Retention (%)	34	50	†
	Pass rate (%)	71	56	†
GCSE English literature	Retention (%)	35	100	†
	Pass rate (%)	91	86	†

Source: college data

\*college unable to provide data

†full achievements information not available at the time of the inspection

# Curriculum Areas

## Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

### Grade 3

**35 Courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities inspected included four two-year full-time programmes, 10 link courses and some part-time provision.**

**Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment report overestimated its strengths, particularly in relation to teaching, the initial assessment of students' learning difficulties, the development of individual learning plans and the quality of some accommodation and specialist resources.**

#### Key strengths

- the range of accreditation and access to vocational areas
- the well-managed work experience and travel training programme
- good relationships with schools, which help students to make a successful transition to further education
- some students' progression to general further education programmes
- the department's contribution to the college's mission to widen participation
- extra-curricular activities for students
- well-qualified specialist staff who have a broad experience of work with students with learning difficulties

#### Weaknesses

- lack of rigour in the assessment of students' skills at entry
- individual learning plans which are underdeveloped
- some teaching which fails to sustain students' interest, extend their skills or develop their knowledge

- the inappropriate teaching methods used in some sessions
- insufficient use of audiovisual and practical aids by some teachers
- teachers' failure to explain to students the aims and objectives of some lessons
- inappropriate use of some specialist resources
- the shortage of good teaching resources

36 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the provision for students with learning difficulties is an important strength in the college's mission to widen participation. The large link course programme for school pupils helps them to make an effective transition to further education. A good relationship has been built up with partner schools in the area.

37 Well-managed work experience and travel training are key strengths which make a valuable contribution to students' learning. Teachers are keen to encourage students to participate in extra-curricular activities and learning outside timetabled hours. For two years a small group of students and staff have travelled to Normandy to work alongside French students with similar learning difficulties. Students' learning is enhanced by the support staff's work with students in the canteen over lunch and break times.

38 Fifteen lessons were observed. Although the teaching is generally satisfactory, lessons did not always sustain students' interest or extend their skills or knowledge. In several lessons, students waited lengthy periods for attention and, in others, little learning went on as students copied work or undertook tasks which were too easy. Some teachers did not use visual or other practical aids to help reinforce learning. Learning was not sufficiently checked. There was not enough use of small steps in learning to help students to move easily from the practical

# Curriculum Areas

to the more abstract. In several lessons, the aims and objectives of the lesson were not made clear to students and it was occasionally evident that the teacher had not shared the lesson plan with the support assistant. Where the teaching was good, students were evidently learning and teachers were using various methods to check on the progress they were making.

39 Inspectors were unable to support the college's claim that assessment was a key strength in this area of work. Some teachers were not aware of the precise nature of the learning difficulties of students; initial assessment was often confined to a basic literacy and numeracy test. Individual learning plans, claimed as a key strength, were at a very early stage of development. Some students were being placed on supported learning courses because they had been identified by teachers as having a 'moderate' or 'severe' learning difficulty rather than as the result of careful assessment. Students make good individual progress and achieve qualifications to add to their portfolios. Students did not always understand which qualifications they were seeking to achieve. Each year, some students progress to general vocational programmes.

40 Specialist teachers are appropriately qualified and have a broad experience of working with students with learning difficulties. There are high levels of specialist support staff. Some specialist accommodation is used in ways which hinder students' learning, for example, the use of the multi-skills workshop by three groups at the same time. There is a shortage of good teaching resources and a system under which staff can share such resources.

# Curriculum Areas

## ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy

### Grade 2

**41 Inspectors observed 14 lessons in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), literacy and numeracy. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment. A few strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were not identified by the college in its self-assessment report. Little relevant documentary evidence on students' achievements or on the planning, organising and monitoring of the course was made available to inspectors.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching in most lessons
- high attendance and retention rates
- the skills and increased confidence in speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy which most students develop
- the different levels at which courses are offered and clear progression routes for students
- students' achievements
- students' record of progress to higher level or other further education courses or to employment
- well-managed off-site provision

#### Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory teaching
- a few teachers' lack of expertise in subjects they teach
- weak or inconsistent arrangements for assessing and recording students' progress in some areas
- lack of formal recognition for students' broader achievements

42 The college offers full-time and part-time ESOL courses at many levels and in a wide

range of community-based settings. Most literacy and numeracy courses are designed to help parents to support their children's development of reading and number skills. There is little literacy and numeracy provision for other adults. Courses offer a suitable range of accreditation. Full-time ESOL students' learning needs are carefully assessed before enrolment. Students on some numeracy courses complete a thorough initial assessment which is used to develop an individual learning programme which meets their needs. There is less rigorous initial assessment for students in part-time ESOL and family literacy and numeracy courses. The college has well-established and successful partnerships with a wide range of community organisations. Its provision for ESOL, literacy and numeracy, including off-site provision, is well managed.

43 Most teaching is well planned and effective. Most teachers set clear learning objectives for lessons which relate well to the aims of the overall programme. They do not always explain the aims of lessons to students. In the more effective lessons, teachers achieve an appropriate balance between exercises in speaking, listening, reading and writing and, in numeracy, between theory and the practical application of number. Students' development of skills and increased confidence have helped them to become involved in local community initiatives. The college does not yet have a system for recognising these kinds of broader achievement. On family literacy courses, the quality of some students' assignments, including the range of practical learning materials devised for teaching children, is outstanding. Several teachers from minority ethnic groups use their cultural knowledge and linguistic skills well to support students' learning. Most teachers are suitably qualified and experienced but a few lack appropriate subject expertise. In a few unsatisfactory lessons, teachers did not take into account students' different abilities and levels of English and activities were poorly managed. Not all teachers reviewed and recorded

# Curriculum Areas

students' progress systematically and teachers did not operate consistent criteria for marking students' work.

44 Most students on ESOL, literacy or numeracy courses achieve externally accredited awards. However, figures supplied by the college relating to attendance, retention, achievement and student progression are not fully reliable and include some inconsistencies. Inspectors estimate that in 1996-97, 70 per cent of ESOL students who completed their course gained an award. College data showed that in 1995-96, 98 per cent of students who completed courses offering C&G wordpower qualifications gained the certificate, a significantly improved pass rate compared with the previous year. In 1996-97, 76 per cent of students entered for awards accredited by the Open College Network in ESOL, literacy or numeracy gained credits. Many students progress to higher level or other further education courses, or to employment. In 1996-97, 36 per cent of ESOL students progressed to other further education courses or to employment and 64 per cent continued to study ESOL at a more advanced level. Attendance and retention rates for ESOL, literacy and numeracy courses are high.

45 The standard of accommodation is satisfactory, and is equally good in college and at community-based sites. Few classrooms have stimulating displays relating to learning English or improving numeracy skills. Most teachers use a good range of printed learning materials which enable students to learn in different ways.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**46 Inspectors concluded that the college's self-assessment accurately identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses of this area. Some important aspects, for example, learning support for students, were not mentioned in the report but were covered by the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- the high priority placed on valuing individual students
- effective procedures for entry to courses and course transfer
- the range of support for individual learning needs
- the system of tutorial support for full-time students
- the readily accessible and generally good professional careers advice and guidance
- the support for students on personal matters

#### Weaknesses

- absence of a co-ordinated college-wide strategy for student support
- some lack of consistency in tutorial support and guidance
- the limited tutorial provision for adult part-time students
- the varying quality and availability of advice on careers and entry to higher education
- the lack of systematic monitoring of learning support

47 Five senior managers have responsibility for aspects of support for students. The student services team manages the tutorial system, careers guidance, personal counselling and

welfare. It is led by a senior manager who took over this responsibility in September 1997. Other aspects of support, including learning support, are separately managed. Much of the provision is good but the college has recognised, in its self-assessment report, that the separate line management of elements of the provision has led to a number of weaknesses. There is no co-ordinated strategy for student support.

48 There are clear, well-documented procedures for enrolling students. The college has a policy of open access. Every effort is made to ensure that students receive the necessary information and guidance to enable them to choose an appropriate course. College publicity material is attractive, informative and welcoming. College representatives attend school open days and careers conventions. Many events, including open days and evenings and 'taster' days are held for schools. The college information centre handles all applications for places at the college. All prospective full-time and many part-time students receive an interview. Students receive careers counselling where necessary. The college has identified in its self-assessment the problems encountered in dealing with the volume of enquiries at peak times. It has taken steps to resolve them.

49 All full-time and some part-time students have a personal tutor. Tutorial support includes a well-organised induction programme for students. Tutors work to standard college-wide guidelines. All students receive a copy of the student handbook which explains the college's services and lists students' rights and responsibilities. Students commented that they had found the induction useful and the information given clear and accurate. Students who wish to change their course receive helpful support and guidance. Inspectors agreed with the strength of the tutorial system, recognised in the self-assessment report. Some inconsistency in practice was noted, as recognised in the self-assessment report. A new college-wide



# Cross-college Provision

tutorial programme has been established this year. The college has recognised in its self-assessment and action plan that tutorial support for part-time students is not well developed. A particular strength of the college is the high level of support for individual students which includes a substantial investment in providing equipment and support staff for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

50 The college has established learning development centres on its six main sites. These centres, staffed by teachers from a range of curriculum areas, provide additional support for students who require help with literacy, numeracy or study skills. Other support has been provided by departments, some of which have their own centres for this purpose. The identification of additional needs is undertaken through use of the BSA screening tests. Students needing additional help book an appointment with learning support staff and there is then a further assessment of their needs. The programme of agreed support is recorded and updated subsequently to show what students have done. Students can also attend these centres on a 'drop-in' basis, to work on their own or to receive help from a tutor. There has been no overall monitoring of the use of these facilities but the college has now set in place a system to do this.

51 Other support for students includes careers advice, counselling and childcare. Careers advice and guidance, including advice on applications for higher education, is of variable quality. Students have good access to professional careers guidance. There is a clear and effective system of support and guidance for applications to higher education at the sixth form centre. Weaknesses which the college did not identify in its self-assessment include: the poor record of placement of students in higher education other than at the sixth form centre, an issue which the college is now addressing; the cramped careers resource areas at the Hall

Green and St Philip's sites; and the limited access to careers advice and guidance for students in community outreach centres. A comprehensive and well-used network of support helps students on a range of personal matters. There is a high-quality childcare service, a professionally staffed personal counselling service and financial support, for which the budget has been substantially increased recently. These services are in heavy demand. Students based at centres away from the main sites cannot access them so easily, a fact recognised by the college in its self-assessment report.

## General Resources

### Grade 3

**52 The inspection covered a substantial sample of the college's general resources. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements, as expressed in its self-assessment report. In a few instances, inspectors felt that the college understated its weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- the libraries and learning resource centres provided at most main college sites
- substantial investment in a new learning resource centre at Hall Green and in information technology equipment at St Philip's sixth form centre, the 524 centre and outreach centres
- classrooms which are appropriate in number and size
- well-maintained classrooms
- effective planned maintenance

# Cross-college Provision

## Weaknesses

- library resources, study places and staffing which are inadequate for student numbers
- the shortage of information technology resources for students
- limited access for students with restricted mobility
- insufficient public, social and recreational amenities

53 The college has recently expanded its provision of libraries and learning centres. There are libraries at all but one of the main sites, linked by a newly installed computer system which enables students to borrow easily from the library most convenient for them. The bookstock is small for the number of students, with particular shortages in childcare and business studies. In some areas, for example construction and engineering, it is good. Study places are limited. Noise is a problem in the Hall Green library and there are no facilities for group work in the library at the St Philip's sixth form centre. There are no library facilities for students at community outreach centres. The college has invested substantially in well-equipped learning resource centres at the six main sites. However, the overall ratio of computers to full-time students, at 1:15, is not as good as that found in many colleges and there are few CD-ROM databases. Students have free access to the Internet.

54 The college's accommodation ranges from a listed Victorian school building to buildings erected at various periods during this century. The buildings are well maintained as stated in the self-assessment report: the college has successfully completed more maintenance than was planned this year. There are enough classrooms of an appropriate size. They are well grouped to support curriculum areas. The college is generally clean and tidy. The reception area at Hall Green is welcoming. Poor temperature controls in the main building at

Hall Green can result in conditions which can cause discomfort to students and staff. Most canteens and the staff common room at Hall Green are well furnished. Students' work is attractively displayed in the main corridors at most sites. Access to recreational and sports facilities is only available at two college centres. Some toilet accommodation is poor. The playgroup facilities at the 524 centre and the nurseries at the Hall Green and Digbeth centres are good.

55 Rooms for administrative and support staff vary in size and quality. Some are cramped. There is insufficient storage for learning materials. The conference centre is well furnished to a high standard. A computerised system to help the college make better use of its learning space is being developed. Overall, space utilisation in the college is below that recommended for the sector. On most sites, access is limited for those with restricted mobility, as stated in the college's self-assessment report. Markings to the edge of steps would help the partially sighted. More signs are required in many areas of the college. Car parking is restricted at most centres.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**56 The college has steadily developed its quality assurance arrangements over the last three years and has achieved the Investor in People award. It achieved BS EN ISO 9002 in 1994. This system works well and plays a pivotal part in its effort to manage quality. However, monitoring, recording and reporting of a number of aspects of quality are less well developed and have not been securely and consistently carried out. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report. However, they found that some of the weaknesses were understated, for example the use of performance indicators.**

# Cross-college Provision

## Key strengths

- the college's strong commitment to continuous quality improvement
- quality assurance arrangements which are understood and supported by staff
- a well-developed quality system, founded on comprehensive procedures
- thorough reviews of college procedures by internal and external quality auditors
- well-planned and well-funded staff development which is strongly linked to college and departmental objectives
- staff involvement in self-assessment
- effective teamwork in constructing self-assessment reports

## Weaknesses

- a significant proportion of staff who have not been appraised in each of the last two years
- the inconsistent and sometimes ineffective use of performance indicators to enable course teams, departments, and units to judge how well they are doing
- the variable quality of information available to support course reviews and self-evaluation

57 The college's policy statement contains a firm commitment to maintaining and improving quality. The continuation of its BS EN ISO 9002 certification, its subsequent extension to include the St Philip's sixth form centre, the preservation of its Investor in People registration, and the development of its own self-assessment procedures are the framework and the means for doing this. The college policy states clearly who has overall responsibility for quality assurance and it requires the principal and senior management team to review the operation of the system annually. These reviews have not yet achieved their full potential as a means of further improving the system. A

regular quality newsletter keeps staff informed about the latest developments in areas such as the setting of standards, complaints and students' perceptions of the college. Staff understand and support the approach that the college takes to assuring and improving quality.

58 There are carefully documented and clearly written procedures to guide staff on how to improve quality in their areas of responsibility. Procedures are sufficiently flexible to meet the requirements of particular parts of the college. They are updated regularly. The inspection confirmed the strengths that the college claimed for its thorough auditing arrangements, which have involved over 60 members of staff. In addition, there are external audits by the British Standards Institute.

59 The process of self-assessment was thoroughly planned. The development of the college's self-assessment report, built up from contributing reports, involved a high degree of staff participation and effective teamwork. However, in its self-assessment the college recognised that there had been limited development and inconsistent use of performance indicators in curriculum and service areas. In June 1997, better performance indicators were devised and a well-considered set of service standards for cross-college areas has been recently agreed. The college overestimated the strength it could claim from setting standards without having monitored them.

60 Some of the college's quality assurance reports do not present information in a sufficiently systematic way. In some curriculum areas, good data are available in course files, but in other areas this is not the case. A common framework was developed for self-assessment but the supporting information was not always adequate. In these instances, it is difficult to be sure precisely how well the areas are performing. Judgements on the strengths and weaknesses in students'

# Cross-college Provision

achievements and other key areas are often not sufficiently well related to relevant benchmarks and trends over time. Reports to the academic board and the corporation on students' achievements lack sufficient depth.

61 Inspectors could not agree with the strength that is claimed for the college-wide reports on students' satisfaction. While the analysis of the responses to the 1996 survey was especially thorough, the benefit of this analysis was undermined by the low level of response to the questionnaires. Monitoring of the action taken on issues arising from the report was limited. The response rate to the college-wide survey for 1997 was higher but still did not support the strengths that the college claimed. The college is considering ways to make its college-wide surveys of students' satisfaction more effective.

62 Staff development activities in the college are closely linked to strategic objectives. The college devotes a high level of resources to its well-planned staff development. Departmental priorities for 1997-98 have been published in the staff development plan which details training priorities, anticipated outcomes, estimated costs and the strategic objectives to which training is linked. Training needs are also derived from staff appraisal and training is evaluated thoroughly. In the self-assessment report, staff appraisal was claimed as a strength and also recognised as a weakness. Inspectors considered that since approximately a third of staff were not appraised this weakness was significantly underestimated.

## Governance

### Grade 2

**63 The college's self-assessment report concludes that the college is well governed. Inspectors confirmed this to be true, but did not agree with the self-assessment report in one important respect, the effectiveness of monitoring: for example, the effectiveness**

**with which the strategic plan, financial aspects and the quality of provision are monitored.**

#### Key strengths

- excellent levels of attendance at corporation and committee meetings
- well-written reports to the corporation
- appropriate involvement of governors in the development of strategic plans
- the effective use of the broad range of skills within existing corporation membership
- effective working relationships between governors and senior management
- appropriate clerking arrangements
- the establishment of the student services committee
- establishment of a business advisory committee and database of contacts with industry

#### Weaknesses

- the strategic plan does not include a summary, specifying short-term targets, timescales and responsibilities
- the process for informing governors of progress in implementing the strategic plans is not sufficiently precise
- the lack of regular training and development for governors
- the corporation's lack of oversight of the quality of provision
- the corporation's failure to receive periodic and cumulative budgetary comparisons and cash-flow forecasts
- the failure to establish a comprehensive register of interests

64 The FEFC's audit service concluded that, within the scope of its review, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government.

# Cross-college Provision

It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

65 Membership of the corporation comprises the principal, two staff governors, one student governor, two co-opted governors, one community representative and 14 business governors, including a TEC nominee. A search committee, with clearly defined terms of reference, has been established to consider proposals for new members. New governors are provided with induction, and some training is provided: there is no regular development and training for governors. Governors conduct their business efficiently, take an active interest in the college, and clearly understand the distinction between governance and management. Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds, and the college makes effective use of their expertise, particularly in development work. For example, two governors employed by local companies are working in consultation with a senior manager to establish a business advisory committee and a database of college contacts with business.

66 The corporation meets at least termly. Meetings are well attended. Reports are well written and minutes are extensive. Corporation papers, with the exception of a small number of confidential items, are available for public inspection. The college has produced its own guide for governors, but has not yet established standing orders to guide the conduct of corporation and committee meetings. Although a register of interests has been established, it provides limited information on personal and financial interests; few governors and no college managers with significant financial interests have completed an entry. Clerking arrangements for the corporation are effective, though the clerk to the corporation does not have an appropriately detailed job description. The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure, and committee meetings are always well attended. A recent innovation

has been the establishment of the student services committee to oversee the quality of the college's student services. Existing terms of reference for the planning and resources committee do not adequately define its role and responsibilities. The planning and resources committee is not provided with financial management information at monthly intervals, and so is unable to exercise sufficiently frequent oversight of the college's finances.

67 Governors have a number of opportunities to evaluate the college's mission statement and strategic objectives, and to review the strategic plan. The plan does not include an operating statement summarising specific short-term targets, timescales and responsibilities for those aspects of the plan that the college intends to implement in 1997-98. The principal's report informs the corporation of college activities and covers a number of strategic issues. Governors regularly discuss progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives but the corporation is not provided with specific, written reports detailing progress in the delivery of short-term objectives.

68 Inspectors did not agree with the view presented in the college's self-assessment report that governors effectively oversee the quality of provision. Insufficient attention is given to reviewing students' performance. Although consideration is given to some year-end data, there is little commentary to assist governors in reviewing the information. The academic board, a subcommittee of the corporation, is charged with this responsibility, but does not carry it out effectively.

69 The budget is debated fully by governors. The college's strategic plans and financial forecasts are appropriately linked, and estimates of income and expenditure reflect planned activity within the college. Although governors are well aware of the college's financial position, they do not receive some essential summary financial information such as monthly and cumulative budgetary comparisons of income

# Cross-college Provision

and expenditure, and rolling cash-flow forecasts for at least one year ahead. Although the college's financial position in recent years has been strong, this information is important as it provides an advance warning of budget variances, and is an essential indicator of the solvency of the college.

## Management

### Grade 2

**70 Inspectors took particular note of the size and complexity of the college. The inspectors' findings are in broad agreement with the college's self-assessment. In a few areas, inspectors did not agree with the weighting given to judgements: the strength of equal opportunities and college information systems were overstated while the college's responsiveness and flexibility in meeting needs were understated.**

#### Key strengths

- a well-structured strategic planning process, to which departmental action plans are clearly linked
- managers have met the objectives set by the corporation
- regular review of the college's management structure
- a management structure which meets the needs of the college in most respects
- effective arrangements for communication
- excellent links with the local community and many productive partnerships
- the college's effectiveness in meeting the needs of students who traditionally find it difficult to study
- responsiveness to individual employers' needs
- equality of opportunity which is effectively promoted throughout the college's range of courses

- allocation of funds linked to student numbers and strategic objectives
- a finance team which is appropriate to the needs of the college in size and structure
- effective financial planning arrangements and timely production of financial management information

#### Weaknesses

- managers' implementation of their monitoring and control responsibilities
- incomplete and sometimes unreliable information on students' achievements

71 The strategic plan is developed in close consultation with staff at all levels of the college. Managers' reviews of their previous years' plans and targets contribute to the development of the overall plan. Department and unit plans for the following year are clearly cross-referenced to the objectives in the strategic plan. As the self-assessment report notes, the plan is well researched and there is comprehensive and detailed information on the areas from which students are recruited. Many of the objectives reflect the college's desire to make it easier for all members of the community to study. Managers have met most of the objectives set by the corporation which include growth, generating additional income and broadening the range of courses. The corporation has set a higher target for the retention of students this year, in recognition of a weakness it has identified.

72 As claimed in its self-assessment report, the college's management structure is constantly reviewed to ensure it matches the needs of the college, including the promotion of curriculum development. The recently established extra mural studies department is effectively building on the college's strength in offering alternative methods of study to traditional college-based work. Some cross-college units are used effectively to promote curriculum development

# Cross-college Provision

and spread good practice. Their organisation has been reviewed as developments have taken place, for example the growth of school links and marketing. In a few cases, multiple line management of a service or an individual causes difficulties. Staff valued the opportunity to contribute to the self-assessment report and to policy development working parties. Effective arrangements for communication included planned and regular meetings to enable the greatest possible number of staff to attend.

73 The self-assessment report identifies failures of management control which have led to weaknesses at programme level. However, inspectors consider that these are more significant than is implied in the report. Managers do not always carry out their monitoring and control responsibilities effectively. More aspects are affected than those noted in the report. For example, there are inconsistencies and weaknesses in areas such as tutorial support and quality assurance. The college has a clear understanding of managers' information needs. A new system to meet these is being commissioned and much relevant information is, or soon will be, readily available to managers. However, information on students' performance provided for the college information system is not always complete and, in a few cases, it is unreliable. Allocation of funds to sections is linked to student numbers and strategic objectives. The college provides a good range of information, including course costings, which is valued by heads of department. Centralised allocation of staff and accommodation has improved efficiency.

74 The college's excellent working links with the local community have contributed to its success in bidding for funding to meet inner city regeneration. In partnership with the TEC and Birmingham City Council, the college has secured funding for numerous European Community funding initiatives. This funding makes a significant contribution to the college's income. The college is very flexible in meeting

the needs of students and of individual employers. Business representatives emphasised the willingness of the college to work with them on training developments. Information on different parts of the college's contacts with industry are not always effectively co-ordinated and, in a few areas, links with industry could be improved. Centres in the community are located to meet specific local needs. Inspection supported the self-assessment report's claim that equal opportunities are effectively promoted: for example, the college provides specific vocational courses for women in areas where they are traditionally in a small minority. The self-assessment report overstates the quality of management of equal opportunities since arrangements to maintain this aspect are not fully established. The college's good links with schools and the self-assessment report's evidence of effective partnerships were endorsed by the teachers the inspectors met.

75 Within the scope of its review, the FEFC's audit service concludes that the financial management of the college is good. The finance team is led by a qualified accountant, there is an appropriate number of suitably qualified and experienced staff to deal with its workload and responsibilities. Strategic plans are appropriately supported by financial forecasts, and the procedure by which they are established is clear and well understood. Management accounts are produced within 10 working days, in accordance with best practice, and are regularly considered by senior management. Budget holders receive timely reports on expenditure, and expert advice when required. Financial regulations have not been thoroughly revised since incorporation, and do not cover a number of essential matters. The college's internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's internal control system.

# Cross-college Provision

## Conclusions

76 The college's self-assessment report was carefully and thoroughly prepared at short notice. The college linked its self-assessment report to its strategic and operating plans and to its existing quality procedures. The report offered a helpful point of departure for the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the specialist grades which the college had awarded in the report. There was less agreement with the cross-college grades, although the inspectors' profile for these was relatively high. Inspectors found that the report had some tendency to underestimate weakness and had not considered with sufficient rigour the weighting of strengths and weaknesses to support some grades. The profile of college grades for observation of teaching and learning was higher than that found by inspectors. However, the college had acknowledged that its grading of lessons might have been over optimistic. In some areas the report had not given significant emphasis to judging students' achievements, in part because the information available sometimes lacked clarity. Nevertheless, inspectors concluded that the self-assessment process had been valuable in enabling the college to identify ways of improving the quality of its work and had the potential further to improve quality.

77 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	6
16-18 years	14
19-24 years	16
25+ years	64
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	64
Intermediate	17
Advanced	13
Higher education	6
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	728	1,042	9
Agriculture	62	107	1
Construction	568	1,102	8
Engineering	401	905	6
Business	740	3,005	19
Hotel and catering	41	13	0
Health and community care	1,263	2,464	18
Art and design	230	609	4
Humanities	859	4,741	28
Basic education	468	877	7
Total	5,360	14,865	100

Source: college data

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 1997)

	Per- ament	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	233	7	33	273
Supporting direct learning contact	103	1	5	109
Other support	119	4	5	128
Total	455	12	43	510

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£12,777,000	£18,676,000	£21,306,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£15.66	£16.05	£17.66
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	68%	66%
Achievement of funding target	124%	115%	122%
Diversity of income	32%	23%	*
Operating surplus	£273,000	£282,000	£70,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Note: the figures for 1994-95 do not include the former St Philip's College

\*data not available

### Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	57	262	250
	Average point score per entry	3.1	3.1	3.5
	Position in tables	bottom third	bottom third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	58	93	70
	Percentage achieving qualification	88%	84%	84%
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	101	101
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	65%	66%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the figures for 1994-95 do not include the former St Philip's College

\*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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