

Stafford College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

Stafford College

West Midlands Region

Inspected November 1999

Stafford College is a large general further education college. Some 24% of its work is done through franchise partnerships with community and commercial organisations. When the current management team was appointed some two years ago the college faced significant problems and their full extent was not appreciated. Although there has been progress over the last year or so, many weaknesses remain. Unreliable management information and attempts to bring the franchised provision under control have taken a considerable amount of time, to the detriment of other aspects of management. The self-assessment report significantly overestimated the strength of the college's work. Although the report identified many relevant strengths, inspectors found that it overlooked many weaknesses and overstated some strengths. The self-assessment did not give sufficient weight to students' retention and achievements. The college was overgenerous in its grading of all except one aspect of cross-college provision. This was partly due to the fact that it gave too much weight to recent developments which have yet to prove their effectiveness. Work in six of the FEFC's programme areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision.

Much of the teaching is satisfactory but the proportion of outstanding lessons is well below

the average for the sector. The best teaching is well planned and makes use of appropriate learning activities. In less effective lessons, the needs of individual students are not given sufficient attention. The data on students' retention and achievements are unreliable. In some curriculum areas, students' achievements are good; in others many students perform poorly; in all areas there are some low retention rates. The management style is open and the management team have dealt successfully with some of the problems they inherited. Students are given impartial advice before they enrol. There is a comprehensive range of support services and good learning resources. Staff development is well managed. The college has widened participation and equality of opportunity is effectively promoted. There are comprehensive procedures for open governance and the governors are involved in monitoring the quality of provision. The college's financial management is weak and the governors have failed to pay sufficient attention to the college's financial performance. The college should improve: careers advice; additional learning support; the standard of some accommodation and its utilisation; access to rooms for students with restricted mobility; the specification of service standards; course reviews; management information systems; the monitoring and the control of the franchised provision; target-setting; contingency planning; and student retention and achievement rates.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	3
Hospitality and catering (franchised provision)	3	Quality assurance	3
Leisure and tourism	3	Governance	4
Health and care	3	Management	4
Art and design	2		
English, psychology and sociology	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Stafford College is a general further education college serving a population of around 320,000 in mid and south Staffordshire. The college's main campus is in the centre of Stafford. A second site, almost a mile away, provides accommodation for the majority of the art and design courses. There is additional leased accommodation close to the main site. The college also uses 104 venues in the community. These include local primary schools, public houses and a number of community centres, where basic skills provision is made for adults. Many of the jobs in the locality are in the manufacturing industries, despite a decline in the sector. The predicted growth areas for employment are business, retail distribution, hotels and catering, and public services. Overall, unemployment is low at 3.5% but two of the wards in Stafford are amongst the poorest 20% in the country. Of 16 years olds, 69% continue in full-time education.

2 The college offers courses in all the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) 10 programme areas. The college is the sole local provider of courses relating to construction plant and the licensed retail trade. It has increased its range of programmes at foundation level and offers a broad range of general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs). There is a wide range of part-time vocational programmes and many of these are linked to appropriate national vocational qualification (NVQ) awards. The college offers a substantial number of courses through franchise arrangements. In 1998-99, 33% of the college's FEFC funding was for franchised work. The majority of the franchised courses are in hospitality, licensed retail and food-related areas, and are provided in partnership with several national companies.

3 There are seven other general further education colleges in Staffordshire. The college led the Staffordshire Strategic Partnership on widening participation. The partnership

included all the further education colleges, the Staffordshire and Stoke local authorities, Staffordshire and Keele universities, the training and enterprise council (TEC), and the careers and employment services. The college has productive links with the members of the Staffordshire Learning Partnership and is involved in shaping the lifelong learning plan. It is an associate college of the two local universities. All six high schools in Stafford and its local boroughs have sixth forms. It recruits from 65 schools in Staffordshire and surrounding areas. It has joint working arrangements with 13 special schools and adult centres and also works with a number of schools to provide courses for adults.

4 In October 1999, the college enrolled 30,693 students, of whom 2,386 were full time. Of the college's students, 80% are aged 19 or over, including 65% over the age of 25. In 1998-99, 500 students studied on higher education programmes at the college. The college employs 504 full-time equivalent staff. The college management structure has been in place since August 1999. There are four people in the senior management team including the principal. There are seven schools with responsibility for different curriculum areas and 12 cross-college units for learning and business support.

5 The college's mission is 'to provide opportunities for achievement through high-quality education and training for the local community and further afield'. The college aims to:

- offer a broad range of programmes to all
- widen participation in education and training
- help students to gain employment and improve their career opportunities
- add to the richness of people's lives both materially and spiritually
- contribute to economic development and community regeneration

Context

- collaborate with both employers and public and voluntary organisations
- provide all staff with training and development opportunities so they are able to improve continuously upon the services offered.

The Inspection

6 Provision on the main sites was inspected during the week beginning 8 November 1999. Two weeks earlier, the college's franchised provision was inspected. Before the inspection, inspectors studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. For 1997, data contained in the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR) were used to provide information on students' achievements for the curriculum areas. The college has not yet made a valid ISR return for 1998 so it was not possible to produce a tabular summary of students' achievements for 1996 to 1998. It submitted data on students' achievements for 1998 and 1999 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. In most respects these data were found to be accurate but there was insufficient evidence to fully validate all the data. Some class registers were difficult to interpret. In these cases it was not possible to verify the number of students starting the courses. Inspectors spent a considerable amount of time working with college staff interpreting data, in an attempt to provide a fair and valid view of students' achievements. Despite these efforts, the achievement data for 1999 were incomplete and no reliable achievement data were produced for the franchised provision in hospitality and catering. The college was notified in August 1999 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 18 inspectors and two auditors working for a total of 85 days. They observed 117 lessons, evaluated students' work and

examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students. A written response to inspectorate questions was received from Staffordshire TEC.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 117 lessons inspected, 56% were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% were judged to be less than satisfactory or poor. The proportion of outstanding lessons, at 12%, was well below the national average of 20%.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	6	5	0	0	13
GCSE	0	4	0	0	0	4
GNVQ	0	6	11	3	0	20
NVQ	8	15	11	2	2	38
Other vocational	2	16	14	0	0	32
Other	2	5	3	0	0	10
Total (No.)	14	52	44	5	2	117
Total (%)	12	44	38	4	2	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*

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The average number of students in each lesson is depressed by the small numbers in some of the franchised provision work-based lessons.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Stafford College	8.0*	79
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*

*includes some franchised provision

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 20 lessons in computing and information technology (IT). The college produced a self-assessment report for the science programme area which includes computing and IT. It was based on 18 supporting self-assessment reports and inevitably contained some broad judgements. Nevertheless, inspectors agreed with several of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses
- appropriate learning activities
- good relationship between staff and students
- good achievement rates on national certificate course

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on many courses
- poor achievement rates on level 1 courses
- deficiencies in specialist accommodation
- insufficient use of IT in learning and course management
- lack of detailed feedback on students' assessed work

10 As identified in the self-assessment report, a wide range of computing and IT courses is offered by three schools in the college. The courses provide progression from foundation to level 4. They are taught in a variety of locations including local schools, industrial units, public houses and specialist accommodation within the college. The courses include: basic computer awareness; courses leading to awards from the Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G);

GNVQs in IT at all three levels; general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in IT; general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in computing; and national certificate in computer science. There is a good range of specialist short courses and full-cost professional courses. Many courses have informative schemes of work and appropriate assignments but few have detailed assignment timetables.

11 In about half the lessons observed, the quality of teaching was good and students were learning effectively. The working relationships between students and staff were generally good. In the best lessons, effective learning activities were used to motivate and retain students' interest. On a computer studies course, students were studying planning systems for project management. The lesson included a discussion during which basic concepts were developed using note-taking, individual exercises and group work. Students are given appropriate academic support during practical and theory lessons; learning support tutors work with students who have learning difficulties. Most students work effectively using applications software and develop appropriate practical skills. A GNVQ foundation group settled quickly to their task of designing a database, making effective use of the practical skills they had acquired earlier. In some lessons, teachers do not take account of the range of students' abilities. For example, on some team activities, some students were unsure of what to do whilst others were overworked. Teachers and students make insufficient use of IT and students do not use the Internet as part of their studies. The self-assessment report acknowledges that some of the teaching is poor and that some students are not learning effectively.

Curriculum Areas

12 Some high specification hardware and general software is used by students but facilities such as electronic mail or learning materials on an intranet are not available. Paper-based learning materials are of a high standard. A significant proportion of the accommodation is inappropriate: there is insufficient workspace for students in computer rooms; ineffective overhead projection facilities; and disruptive noise from adjacent groups in a large practical room. There is little use of display material. Students valued the opportunity to study close to home in the relaxed learning environment provided in the outreach centres. However, some of these centres are using inappropriate accommodation and furniture and unreliable equipment.

13 Overall achievement and retention rates are recognised as weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Achievements on the level 3 specialist courses in 1998-99 were at or above the national average. Those on the national certificate in computer science have been consistently above the national average for three years. However, achievements at the lower levels are less satisfactory and retention on many courses is low. No students have achieved the award on the desktop publishing courses for the last two years and less than 20% of the large number of students enrolled on the C&G 7261 course achieved the award. The standard of students' work is generally good. Some teachers' written comments on the work is insufficiently detailed. For example, students whose work was awarded a pass grade received similar feedback to those awarded a distinction.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
OCR computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	521	*	1,022
		Retention (%)	83	*	90
		Achievement (%)	74	*	**
C&G 7261	1	Number of starters	+	*	694
		Retention (%)	+	*	43
		Achievement (%)	+	*	43
Desktop programming	1	Number of starters	42	*	14
		Retention (%)	81	*	100
		Achievement (%)	94	*	0
GNVQ foundation IT	1	Number of starters	+	*	14
		Retention (%)	+	*	71
		Achievement (%)	+	*	50
GCSE IT	2	Number of starters	+	*	14
		Retention (%)	+	*	33
		Achievement (%)	+	*	100
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	34	*	29
		Retention (%)	71	*	69
		Achievement (%)	54	*	50
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	32	*	33
		Retention (%)	59	*	36
		Achievement (%)	41	*	90
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	#	*	44
		Retention (%)	#	*	77
		Achievement (%)	#	*	74
National certificate IT	3	Number of starters	13	*	14
		Retention (%)	69	*	71
		Achievement (%)	86	*	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college 1999

*ISR data not available

**incomplete data

+courses did not run

#last year of national diploma

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

14 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in engineering. They agreed with the majority of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found additional weaknesses. The report gave insufficient emphasis to students' retention and achievements.

Key strengths

- good pass rates on a majority of courses in 1999
- effective organisation of student support
- high-quality private study facilities
- good responses by students to set tasks

Weaknesses

- poor course management files
- poor achievement rates on GNVQ courses
- outdated workshop equipment

15 Engineering and construction are taught in the school of technology. The engineering provision extends across a broad range of engineering specialisms, including electrical and electronic, mechanical and manufacturing, welding and motor vehicle. However, there are few level 1 courses and many of the craft courses are offered at level 2 only. Course teams, the school staff, and the school managers meet regularly and these meetings are generally well minuted. Course management files are intended to have a common format but they are poorly maintained and inconsistent. Information is sometimes in inappropriate sections. Many of the files do not include retention and achievement rates or targets and trends. Students on some courses are not given details of their schedule of assignments at the beginning of the year and their load of assignment work is excessive at certain times. The school's student support unit administers

the register system efficiently and follows up absences rapidly. It organises appropriate learning support for students who are having difficulties with their studies. This is recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

16 The teaching observed was good or satisfactory. Most teachers follow detailed schemes of work. They introduce lessons by setting out the aims and summarise at appropriate points. In many lessons, opportunities are missed to enliven the learning. There is little use of discussion or demonstrations. The self-assessment report recognises some shortcomings in the quality of teaching. The assignment tasks set for students are appropriate to the level of courses. Coversheets for assignments are not always completed. The quality of marking is mixed. Some teachers give clear guidance to students on how to improve their work and correct grammatical mistakes. Others give insufficiently detailed feedback on written work.

17 Most teachers are appropriately qualified. Part-time teachers are kept well informed and encouraged to attend meetings. Some specialist accommodation has been refurbished to a good standard but the classrooms used principally by motor vehicle students are bleak. Modern IT facilities are available to support the teaching of computer-aided design, programmable controllers and other related disciplines. In the mechanical engineering, welding, and motor vehicle workshops, much of the equipment is old and no longer of industrial standard. This weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The specialist technology study centre provides a good area for private study. It contains a satisfactory bookstock and five modern computers and is supervised by a full-time librarian.

18 Many retention rates are around national averages. On the C&G welding course, all the students completed their studies last year. Pass rates were appreciably above national averages

Curriculum Areas

on the majority of courses in 1999. The pass rates on the national certificates in mechanical engineering and plant maintenance were 100%. Some courses have had poor pass rates over the last three years. The NVQ level 2 for vehicle mechanical and electrical systems pass rate was only 4% in 1997, and the C&G engineering systems maintenance pass rate was 11% in 1999. The GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses have had poor retention and/or pass rates in each of the last three years: in 1998 none of the 12 students who enrolled on the advanced course achieved the award and in 1999 only three of the 13 enrolled students achieved the intermediate award. Students respond well to questions and exercises during lessons. Some of their written work is of a high standard. They make good use of IT for research and in the production of reports. In practical lessons in the workshop, students are eager to progress, follow instructions carefully and work with confidence.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate and precursors	2	Number of starters	17	*	13
		Retention (%)	82	*	77
		Achievement (%)	64	*	30
NVQ	2 and 3	Number of starters	134	*	90
		Retention (%)	70	*	72
		Achievement (%)	47	*	80
C&G (excluding computer-aided design)	2 and 3	Number of starters	152	*	95
		Retention (%)	84	*	88
		Achievement (%)	57	*	48
GNVQ advanced and precursors	3	Number of starters	62	*	55
		Retention (%)	79	*	65
		Achievement (%)	55	*	89

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

*ISR data not available

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering (Franchised Provision)

Grade 3

19 Inspectors observed 34 lessons covering the college's franchised provision in four areas of the country. All of the provision is work-based and on licensed retail premises. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective arrangements for widening participation
- teaching that takes account of students' different abilities and prior experience
- good-quality, well-presented student logbooks
- students' acquisition of relevant vocational skills

Weaknesses

- weak target-setting
- inadequate monitoring of teaching quality
- some poor teaching
- no teaching of key skills

20 Inspectors agreed with the comment in the self-assessment report that the franchised provision has increased participation in education in an industry where the proportion of staff who are qualified is low. Since 1994 over 25,000 students have achieved a qualification. Many of these would not, traditionally, have entered further education. There are franchised programmes leading to NVQ and other awards in innkeeping, service of food and drink, professional cookery and food hygiene. There is a business plan for this area of work which is linked to the college's strategic objectives. It does not include action points, responsibilities, priorities, success criteria or

costs. Some general targets are set for enrolments but none are set for achievement and retention rates.

21 As the college recognised in the self-assessment report, the scrutiny of its franchise partners' work has been inadequate. Until March 1999, only 10% of partners had received a monitoring visit. The college has addressed this weakness by appointing field officers to make two visits a year to each retail unit. At the time of the inspection, they had visited almost half of the units, but had not analysed the data obtained. There is little checking of the quality of the teaching; a weakness identified during the previous inspection, and insufficient analysis of data on students' achievements. College staff with responsibility for franchised provision meet regularly. The agendas and minutes of their meetings are clear. Field officers provide good support to the franchise partners but there are no opportunities for the teachers on these programmes to meet each other.

22 Most teaching is based soundly on industry practice and is well supported by training materials and helpful workplace documentation. Teaching methods are generally appropriate. For example, role-play exercises to deal with awkward customers and demonstrations on how to take and process customers' orders. Most teachers give an appropriate introduction to each lesson and explain the topic clearly. They sometimes question the students but rarely take care to ensure that they have been understood. Most of the teaching takes account of students' different abilities, prior knowledge and experience. This was not mentioned in the self-assessment report. There is no provision for the teaching of numeracy, communications and IT and little additional learning support. Written planning of teaching is minimal. Comments by teachers on students' work are often inadequate. A few staff show little interest in teaching and provide poor tuition.

Curriculum Areas

23 Retention rates are around the national average. A weakness, not recorded in the self-assessment report, is the unsatisfactory level of achievement on some courses such as the NVQ level 2 course on food preparation and cooking. There are some good results. The pass rate on the NVQ level 2 course on the service of food and drink improved significantly between 1996 and 1998 and is now above the national average. The pass rate on the course leading to the British Institute of Innkeeping national licensee's certificate rose 14% between 1997 and 1998 to 92%. Generally, the students' logbooks are of good quality, and are well organised and well presented. Their vocational skills meet the standards required by industry. Some students are not clear about the role that Stafford College plays in the provision of their courses.

24 As the self-assessment report states, the college staff are well qualified and have substantial experience of the industry. Franchise partners' staff have sound knowledge of the trade and most have the relevant vocational assessor awards. Good specialist equipment is available for the development of students' skills, but few partners provide learning resources. Students are not made aware of the learning resources available in the college.

25 It is not possible to provided a tabular summary of retention and achievement rates in this curriculum area because the reliability and/or validity of the data could not be confirmed.

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

26 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in leisure and tourism. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good achievement rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses
- vocationally relevant assignments
- good range of courses
- effective course management

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- insufficiently demanding tasks in many lessons
- poor achievement rates for additional qualifications
- lack of up-to-date industrial experience amongst teachers

27 There is a good range of courses and opportunities for progression. There are full-time GNVQ courses at all levels and courses leading to NVQ level 2 in travel services and sport and recreation. This year the college increased its range of provision by adding a national diploma in sport science and a sports therapy diploma. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the range of additional vocational qualifications available to students would enhance their employment prospects. The additional qualifications include the Association of British Travel Agents certificate, a first-aid qualification, a community sports leader award and lifesaving qualifications. This year there is also a new overseas resort representatives course which is sponsored by a travel company, completion of

which guarantees an interview for employment. The courses are managed effectively. Team meetings are carefully minuted, course files are comprehensive and well ordered. Although there are good informal links with industry, the views of employers about the provision are not routinely collected.

28 Most of the teaching is satisfactory. Lessons are well planned and teachers have prepared some high-quality handouts for students. References are frequently made to vocational examples drawn from industry. Most students work well in lessons and participate fully in group work. In some lessons the tasks set for students are undemanding and more able students who complete them quickly are left with nothing to do. The self-assessment report highlighted some weaknesses in teaching but did not give them sufficient emphasis. Staff-student relationships are good and there is an effective tutorial system. Most students attend regularly but some are not punctual.

29 Assignment briefs are clearly written and include well-specified performance criteria. Students make good use of their IT skills in the presentation of their assignments. There are other opportunities for students to gain work-related experience. All students benefit from a residential programme and the resultant assignment work is effectively linked to other aspects of the course. Students on GNVQ advanced courses visit a holiday village and examine its customer services. All students on NVQ travel services courses complete a valuable work experience programme in local travel agencies. GNVQ students draw on visits to local tourist and leisure attractions to enhance their coursework. Students improve their organisational skills by running events such as 'murder mystery' evenings.

30 Students make good use of the simulated travel shop for role-play exercises and work experience. The shop is poorly located. Students on sport and recreation courses benefit

Curriculum Areas

from a sports hall and fitness suite which provide a realistic working environment but need further development. There is a group of dedicated teaching rooms with some good wall displays. Students make good use of the learning centre for lessons and private study. There is a good range of resources in the centre. The self-assessment report acknowledged that teachers on leisure and tourism courses lack recent industrial experience. They use their personal links with employers to keep up to date with current developments.

31 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that retention rates on most courses are poor. Retention on the NVQ level 2 in travel services in 1999 was 38% and on the Association of British Travel Agents certificate course it was 55%; both well below the national average. Achievement rates for GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses are above the national average and improving. There are poor pass rates on Association of British Travel

Agents certificate courses. All NVQ travel students who complete their courses progressed to employment in the industry. As noted in the self-assessment report, many GNVQ students progress to other college courses.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism	1	Number of starters	11	*	6
		Retention (%)	73	*	83
		Achievement (%)	88	*	40
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	43	*	45
		Retention (%)	65	*	73
		Achievement (%)	54	*	88
Association of British Travel Agents certificate (primary and advanced)	2 and 3	Number of starters	#	*	62
		Retention (%)	#	*	55
		Achievement (%)	#	*	26
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	Number of starters	95	*	49
		Retention (%)	85	*	65
		Achievement (%)	60	*	81

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

*ISR data not available

#course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 3

32 Inspectors observed 18 lessons in childcare, counselling and health-related courses. Franchised provision in five community venues was inspected. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective application of theory to practice
- well-planned and vocationally relevant assessments
- achievement rates above average on childcare programmes
- good progression to employment and higher education
- teachers' professional skills regularly updated

Weaknesses

- decline in retention rates on all full-time programmes
- failure to meet students' individual learning needs
- inadequate key skills development
- some uninspired teaching
- lengthy delays in the provision of learning support for some students

33 The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time care courses. More could be done to meet the needs of mature students. Recruitment to full-time courses is declining. There is extensive franchised provision of first-aid courses delivered in the community. Strong links exist with a range of employers. As identified in the self-assessment report, most courses include a well-planned period of work experience. Work experience is used effectively to relate theory to practice, a feature not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Roles and responsibilities within the

schools are clear. Formal and informal meetings include part-time staff. Modular courses are effectively co-ordinated by committed staff teams. Staff from other schools make valuable contributions to these teams. There is a well-planned induction programme which includes testing students to determine their learning needs. However, there is sometimes a delay in providing additional learning support to those identified as needing it. Short-term goals are not always set during individual tutorials. Systems for internal verification are well established. Planning and target-setting are not as effective as they might be, as the data on which they are based are often unreliable.

34 The self-assessment report identifies teaching as an area of weakness. Inspection confirmed that much of the teaching is uninspiring. There is insufficient development of key skills during lessons. Teachers do not organise activities to meet individual students' learning needs. Well-planned, vocationally relevant assessments are carefully marked and internally verified. Assignments are based on realistic exercises. GNVQ students had to plan a room for an elderly person wishing to take their own furniture into a residential home. Staff made detailed and helpful written comments on the work and identified areas for improvement. Students are encouraged to develop their investigative skills but some students on level 3 courses have poorly developed analytical skills.

35 Students make extensive use of a dedicated and well-resourced learning centre. There is a good range of materials for project work, including CD-ROMs and access to the Internet. There are good examples of students' work displayed on classroom walls. Good relations with a local university school of nursing have led to students having access to higher education reference materials. The staff are well qualified and they draw on their recent vocational experience to enliven lessons. They update their professional and IT skills through appropriate staff development.

Curriculum Areas

36 Achievement rates are above the national average on childcare courses and on the GNVQ intermediate in health and care. On the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing, the achievement rate for 1998-99 was 94%. Retention on all full-time courses is below the national average. In 1999, the GNVQ advanced health and social care retention rate was only 56%. Attendance in the lessons inspected was good at 90%. As identified in the self-assessment report, there are good rates of progression to employment and higher education.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First aid	1	Number of starters	2,352	*	2,487
		Retention (%)	99	*	99
		Achievement (%)	99	*	99
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	45	*	13
		Retention (%)	71	*	54
		Achievement (%)	87	*	86
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters	24	*	16
		Retention (%)	96	*	88
		Achievement (%)	100	*	86
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	28	*	16
		Retention (%)	93	*	56
		Achievement (%)	73	*	75
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	39	*	43
		Retention (%)	82	*	79
		Achievement (%)	93	*	94
BTEC national diploma childhood studies	3	Number of starters	58	*	28
		Retention (%)	97	*	82
		Achievement (%)	98	*	96

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

*ISR data not available

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

37 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in art and design. Inspectors agreed broadly with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- well-designed assignments
- the contribution of practitioner teachers and technicians
- improvements in pass and retention rates in 1999
- well-equipped specialist studios
- effective residential programmes

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on the GCE A level course
- low pass rates on some courses in 1997 and 1998
- insufficient monitoring of additional learning support
- limited access to some facilities for students with restricted mobility

38 As identified in the self-assessment report, the college offers a good range of full-time courses from intermediate to higher national diploma level. The introduction of a national diploma course with a common curriculum for the first year has helped students to decide on their subsequent specialist areas of study. Courses accredited by the Open College Network are offered to adults and full-time students to supplement their primary qualifications. Courses are generally well planned and well documented. They are reviewed effectively and the resultant action plans take account of the comments from external verifiers. The analysis of students' achievements is insufficiently

rigorous and this has made some judgements about trends inaccurate. Students' progress is monitored carefully and there have been recent improvements in the tracking of students' absences. Insufficient checks are made to ensure that students identified as needing additional learning support take it up. Full-time students develop a wide variety of working techniques. The acquisition of these techniques starts during residential activities which form part of the induction programme.

39 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the standard of teaching is generally good. Appropriate teaching methods are used which sustain students' interest but insufficient use is made of IT. Most teachers manage individual and group work effectively. They effectively promote the acquisition of drawing skills and an understanding of colour theory. Most students work successfully on their own but a few make slow progress in their studies. In a few lessons attendance rates were poor. Project briefs are clear and include assessment criteria. Most courses include real project design briefs which bring students in contact with external clients. Examples include the design and making of cardboard interiors for a well-known children's television programme and the manufacture by students of a cardboard car for display at a local garage.

40 The concentration of art and design facilities into two annexes has made it easier for the college to develop a stimulating learning environment. There are some deficiencies in the decorative state of the buildings and the quality of the furniture. There is limited access to some facilities for students with restricted mobility. Full-time courses have dedicated base rooms. Visually stimulating reference information and examples of students' work are well used by teachers. There is a good range of well-equipped specialist workshops. The library is well stocked with appropriate books and periodicals. Several of the full-time staff are

Curriculum Areas

also practitioners in their art form. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the full-time staff are well supported by practising artists, designers and photographers. Together they bring knowledge of the world of work into the classrooms and studios. Teachers and students are well supported by technicians, several of whom also teach part time.

41 There were improvements in retention and pass rates on most full-time courses in 1999 but the self-assessment report does not give sufficient weight to some poor achievements in 1997 and 1998. Pass rates on GCE A level and GNVQ advanced courses in art and design were below the national average in 1997 and 1998. Retention rates were poor on the GCE A level course in art and design for the three years

1997 to 1999. Students' practical work is of a good standard and their written work is generally satisfactory. Many students progress from advanced level courses to higher education.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	35	*	17
		Retention (%)	74	*	88
		Achievement (%)	73	*	79
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	36	*	#
		Retention (%)	69	*	#
		Achievement (%)	70	*	#
National diploma art and design	3	Number of starters	#	*	24
		Retention (%)	#	*	75
		Achievement (%)	#	*	86
National diploma design (graphics)	3	Number of starters	31	*	29
		Retention (%)	61	*	100
		Achievement (%)	94	*	86
National diploma foundation studies art and design	3	Number of starters	81	*	67
		Retention (%)	91	*	91
		Achievement (%)	86	*	98
GCE A level art	3	Number of starters	64	*	35
		Retention (%)	53	*	69
		Achievement (%)	41	*	95

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

*ISR data not available

#courses did not run

Curriculum Areas

English, Psychology and Sociology

Grade 3

42 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good range of courses
- lively and enthusiastic teaching
- close supervision of students' progress

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to students' individual learning needs
- insufficient checking of understanding in some lessons
- poor retention rates

43 The college offers a good range of humanities and social science subjects, from foundation to degree level. As the self-assessment report notes, this provides opportunities for progression. Courses in English, psychology and sociology at GCSE and GCE A level are offered at different times of day and over different time periods. The curriculum is well managed. Course teams meet regularly and their meetings are well minuted. Courses are generally well planned and suitably documented. Recently, there has been an increased emphasis on students' learning in lesson plans. Helpful written material is given to students to provide general guidance and information about their courses, and specific guidance on particular topics. Students' progress is closely monitored and well supervised. Action has been taken in response to complaints and suggestions made by students.

44 Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. The teachers' approach to their subjects is frequently lively and enthusiastic and

there are good relations between staff and students. Teachers give clear explanations of topics, often supported by helpful handouts. A few of the handouts contain typographical errors. In the most successful lessons, teachers gave students opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding in a systematic way. For example, in an effective GCE A level English language lesson for evening students, the teacher gave a lively and clear introduction to the concept of register, supported by well-produced handouts. Students were then given a series of well-designed exercises on formal and informal language. This enabled the students to develop their understanding and practise their skills. The students worked enthusiastically and successfully in pairs on these tasks. In some lessons, teachers make insufficient checks on the students' understanding and do not investigate why they have misunderstood the subject. Other common weaknesses include paying inadequate attention to meeting individual students' needs and providing insufficient opportunities for students to develop their skills. Students are attentive and responsive during lessons and work well in pairs and groups when invited to do so.

45 Assignments are carefully planned and marked. The comments written on students' coursework are clear and evaluative. Most of them give good guidance on how to improve, but a few are too brief. Students' errors in spelling and punctuation are corrected.

46 Teachers are well qualified and are suitably deployed. As the self-assessment report indicates, learning is well supported by up-to-date periodicals, books, audiovisual and computer-based resources. The resources are extensively used by students. The specialist classrooms are of good quality, with suitable furniture and wall displays relevant to the subjects. Classrooms are generally well supplied with teaching equipment, but occasionally the lack of a screen meant that overhead projector slides were difficult to see.

Curriculum Areas

47 Retention rates are generally below national average and some are poor. The self-assessment report acknowledges the low retention rates but underestimates this weakness. In an attempt to improve retention, the college has recently introduced systematic procedures to monitor students' progress.

Early indications are of some improvement in punctuality, attendance and the submission of coursework. Most pass rates on GCSE courses are close to national averages and some are above. Retention and pass rates on GCSE English literature courses are generally high. Pass rates on most GCE A level courses improved between 1997 and 1999, and many were above national averages.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English language (A to C grades)	2	Number of starters	218	*	206
		Retention (%)	65	*	65
		Achievement (%)	52	*	58
GCSE English literature (A to C grades)	2	Number of starters	15	*	35
		Retention (%)	80	*	71
		Achievement (%)	67	*	68
GCSE psychology (A to C grades)	2	Number of starters	83	*	63
		Retention (%)	78	*	75
		Achievement (%)	62	*	50
GCE A level English language and literature (one year – Associated Examining Board)	3	Number of starters	29	*	37
		Retention (%)	76	*	64
		Achievement (%)	73	*	91
GCE A level English language (two year)	3	Number of starters	86	*	41
		Retention (%)	71	*	75
		Achievement (%)	83	*	90
GCE A level English literature (two year)	3	Number of starters	56	*	41
		Retention (%)	55	*	59
		Achievement (%)	94	*	100
GCE A level psychology (one year)	3	Number of starters	111	*	60
		Retention (%)	63	*	65
		Achievement (%)	51	*	54
GCE A level psychology (two year)	3	Number of starters	71	*	52
		Retention (%)	58	*	58
		Achievement (%)	51	*	83
GCE A level sociology (two year)	3	Number of starters	101	*	93
		Retention (%)	63	*	46
		Achievement (%)	70	*	74
GCE A level sociology (one year)	3	Number of starters	53	*	40
		Retention (%)	74	*	73
		Achievement (%)	33	*	72

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

*ISR data not available

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Support for Students

Grade 2

48 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- impartial pre-course advice and guidance
- well-planned enrolment and induction
- comprehensive range of student support services
- good tutorial support

Weaknesses

- inadequate careers advice for some students
- weaknesses in additional support arrangements
- no evaluation of the services for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

49 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students receive impartial advice and guidance before enrolment. Students are well informed about courses through recruitment events such as open evenings, 'taster' days and opportunities to sample lessons before starting a course. The college directs its advertising particularly at those areas where students are under-represented. Admissions procedures are effective. Client services provide initial guidance for prospective students and arrange interviews with course tutors.

50 There is a good induction process which is valued by full-time and part-time students. Teachers are provided with a checklist of induction activities. An informative student handbook contains the charter, equal opportunities policy, and details of the college's services and facilities. Some students who join courses late do not receive an induction. There are effective procedures to facilitate the transfer of students to alternative programmes of study.

51 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that client services provide a wide range of helpful services for students. These include advice and guidance about careers, finance, welfare services, transport and childcare support. The services are well managed and there is a systematic evaluation of their performance. Arrangements for the allocation of financial assistance from the access fund, supplemented by the principal's hardship fund, are clear. There are well-organised arrangements for counselling and, where appropriate, students are referred to external agencies. The college has a chaplaincy representing different religious denominations. The college's disability statement is clear and informative. The college does not maintain up-to-date records of those staff who can communicate with students with hearing impairment. Some support and advertising material is not available in Braille or on audio tape. The student union is well supported by the college and it makes a positive contribution to college life. The union promotes a range of leisure activities and provides support and advocacy for students.

52 Tutorial support is good. It is well organised and in most curriculum areas there are effective arrangements to assess the progress of students and plan to improve their performance. Students have individual interviews with their tutors to monitor their progress and in most cases the main points are clearly recorded. Students find tutors helpful and supportive. Most students' punctuality and attendance are carefully monitored and appropriate action is taken where problems are identified.

53 Not all students receive sufficient guidance on progression to more advanced courses or to employment. Many course tutors do not make use of the contracted careers service staff to advise students. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Some vocational tutors make good use of their

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industrial experience to advise students on their future plans. The well-resourced area for careers guidance at the main site is organised effectively.

54 It is college policy that full-time and some part-time students should complete a diagnostic assessment in literacy, IT and numeracy as part of their induction. The assessments are marked by school staff and the results should be forwarded to the key skills co-ordinators. Some tutors do not return the assessment outcomes to the key skills unit and not all students are assessed for numeracy. Some tutors are insufficiently rigorous in monitoring students' attendance at key skills sessions. Not all heads of school are aware of the numbers of students in their school identified as needing additional learning support. Learning support is provided by a team of well-qualified staff. Students can obtain support at the learning centre through timetabled group sessions, as part of their main courses, through individual appointments or by calling at the learning centre. Very few students on the programmes delivered by the college's franchise partners receive additional learning support.

55 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled on appropriate courses and provided with the necessary support. The college has effective links with seven special schools who help to plan the students' progression to the college. Teachers are informed of the likely needs of students and given appropriate training to support them. Teachers are not always fully aware of the specialist equipment available to support students. The college has not carried out any evaluation of its services to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

General Resources

Grade 3

56 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good collections of reference materials
- well-organised learning resource centres
- accessible IT facilities for students
- good site security

Weaknesses

- some accommodation of an unsatisfactory standard
- low utilisation of accommodation
- poor access for people with restricted mobility
- a poor standard of IT provision for staff

57 The college's accommodation is not well matched to its needs. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there is too much teaching space. Managers are considering ways in which the amount of excess space can be reduced but the college lacks a fully developed plan to achieve the reduction. The need to maintain the college's financial reserves has prevented the college from considering developments that involve major financial outlay. Managers have recently concluded that decisions on the delivery of the curriculum and on approaches to students' learning must be taken before there can be any major changes in the use and layout of buildings.

58 The overall quality of the college's accommodation is satisfactory. Parts of it are good, particularly in areas where new teaching and learning facilities have recently been added. The college recognised in its self-assessment report that, in some areas, the standard of accommodation is poor. The Oval annexe

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includes three temporary buildings that are at the end of their useful lives and two converted houses that are not well suited to the college's needs. Since the last inspection, much has been done to rectify external problems but a substantial amount of internal and external upgrading and repair work is still required. In some buildings, significant improvements are needed to toilets, doors, floors, ceilings and glazing. Much of the general teaching accommodation on the main site is of a good standard. Rooms are adequately decorated, suitably equipped and many provide an appropriate setting for learning. However, some teaching areas are too long and narrow, and many are too large for the groups taught in them.

59 College managers carefully review maintenance requirements and their associated costs. They have commissioned surveys of the condition of the buildings. Comprehensive and carefully prioritised programmes of planned maintenance have been produced. However, the level of maintenance being undertaken is lower than that indicated as necessary in a recent accommodation survey.

60 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are good learning resources and that they are readily available to students. There are substantial stocks of reference materials, books and journals in the well-organised, centralised learning centre at the Earl Street building. This centre includes 11 generously equipped satellite study centres, each of which is focused on a coherent range of subjects. Each centre contains a good range of learning facilities, including study spaces, ready access to specialist guidance from study centre staff, and computers. A well-designed new centre for key skills provides an excellent learning environment and has added substantially to the facilities available to help students to learn.

61 The college has invested significantly in IT equipment. Students have ready access to computers and to the Internet. Surveys show that students are satisfied with the level of access they have to IT equipment. The provision of computers in staff rooms is inadequate. Those computers which are currently located in staff rooms are not of a good specification, not linked to the college's network, and not able to run modern software packages or read CD-ROMs. Some teachers have access to a computer but no printer. Many teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the IT facilities they can call on, particularly their lack of access to electronic mail. Some staff rooms are too small and lack storage space.

62 Students' social facilities are adequate. A large area in the Whitely building is set aside for the use of students, but the college acknowledges in the self-assessment report that the area needs refurbishment. This also applies to the refectory facilities which are situated next to the social areas. On the other sites there are no refectory facilities and the communal areas are inadequate. The self-assessment report acknowledges that access to some areas of the college is difficult for students with restricted mobility. The college is taking action to improve access. College managers have given close attention to security. On the main site, the revised arrangements provide a good combination of friendly reassurance to staff and students, and a strong presence standing in the way of unwelcome visitors.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

63 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough programme of lesson observations
- well-managed staff development
- strong commitment to quality assurance

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of some franchised provision
- underdeveloped service standards for cross-college functions
- weak course reviews

64 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college has a strong commitment to continuous improvement of the quality of its provision. The quality assurance procedures are understood and supported by staff. There are well-structured arrangements to monitor the quality of provision through comprehensive internal reviews that assess all areas of the college. Senior and middle managers monitor the resultant action plans and these show improvements in the performance of some schools and cross-college areas. In some cases external consultants and governors take part in the monitoring procedures. The responses to surveys of staff and students' views are carefully analysed and are used to monitor performance. There is a thorough programme of classroom observations based on clear standards for teaching and learning. Weaknesses in teaching are addressed through staff development. There is an efficient system for dealing with external verifiers' reports.

65 There are separate charters for college and work-based students, and for the community. The charters are not effectively disseminated. In a college survey, only a few community students claimed to have received a college charter. The student charter is clearly presented and contains some measurable standards. However, as the self-assessment report acknowledges, the service standards for the cross-college functions need further development. The targets for some functions are not sufficiently challenging and for others none have been set. There is a clear complaints procedure and actions to resolve complaints are effective and timely. Most complaints are resolved within a short time and complainants are notified of the actions being taken.

66 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is inadequate monitoring of some franchised provision. In particular, there was inadequate monitoring of licensed retail franchised programmes for most of 1998-99 when less than 10% of students were visited. Even when poor provision was identified, there was often no follow-up visit to check on progress. Insufficient attention is given to teaching and learning and achievements in the monitoring visits. The data gathered are inadequate and there is insufficient analysis of students' achievements. The college has taken steps to rectify these problems and new arrangements for the commercial franchised provision have been introduced this year. These measures include more frequent monitoring visits, the grading of provision and the development of action plans but the collection and analysis of data are still inadequate. Monitoring of the college's community franchised provision is more effective than that for its commercial franchised provision and in most cases effectively complements the partners' own arrangements.

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67 Most staff are involved in the self-assessment process. In the curriculum areas, self-assessment is based on course reviews and these are often weak. Few course review reports include clear, measurable targets and performance indicators. Most pay insufficient attention to students' achievements and many fail to comment on teaching and learning. Data on students' retention and achievements are inaccurate and unreliable. In most curriculum areas staff rely on their own arrangements but many of these are also inadequate. This lack of reliable data inhibits target-setting, analysis of trends and comparisons with national benchmarks. The self-assessment of cross-college functions is generally satisfactory but in some areas important aspects are not given sufficient attention. There is a lack of rigorous analysis and some features which are identified as strengths are no more than normal practice.

68 Staff development is well managed, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. There is an extensive and well-attended programme of staff development for all staff. The opportunities for staff development are highly valued by staff. Training is closely linked to corporate objectives. Most staff have annual review interviews and these are linked closely to staff development. Staff induction is effective and informative. The self-assessment report did not identify the potential value of the training provided for the staff associated with the franchised provision. Development days are arranged on a regular basis for field officers and other staff. The college provides systematic training for their partners' managers.

Governance

Grade 4

69 Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and some of the strengths. Some aspects of governance identified in the report as strengths are normal practice. Inspectors found additional weaknesses not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- good governor induction
- comprehensive procedures for open governance
- governors' involvement in the monitoring of academic performance

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of the college's financial performance
- poor oversight of franchised provision
- failure to make returns to the FEFC

70 The corporation has determined a membership of 14 including one staff and one student governor. A revised corporation membership has been approved to meet the requirements of the amended instrument of government. The corporation has successfully filled vacancies using an appointments process which has not yet been developed into a formal and publicly available process. Governors submit an annual statement of eligibility. Their range of expertise includes personnel, education, community affairs, finance, quality review, estates and general business skills.

71 The recently introduced induction arrangements for governors are thorough. New governors are given an induction pack, they attend an external training course, and they are allocated to a mentor. Each governor's training needs have been assessed and they are able to

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attend additional external training courses as necessary. Governors' development days are held which are linked to self-assessment and strategic planning. Governors receive regular briefings from the heads of schools.

72 The corporation met five times in the last year. Attendance is monitored, but is not formally reported to the corporation. A few of the governors have a poor attendance record. As noted in the self-assessment report, an appropriate range of committees supports the corporation.

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

74 Governors do not adequately monitor the financial performance of the college, a significant weakness not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The resources committee meets five times a year and reviews termly updates to the annual budget. Neither the resources committee nor the corporation has reviewed the actual monthly or termly financial outcomes in the last year. The governors do not acknowledge that this is an essential function of the resources committee or the corporation.

75 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the governors oversight of the franchised provision has been ineffective. Significant weaknesses in control were identified following a review by the college's external auditors some two years ago. This led to a serious delay in the submission of the college's financial statements and student data returns to the FEFC, as required by the financial memorandum, and constitutes a non-compliance with the corporation's responsibility under the instrument of government. The significance of these weaknesses is not adequately reflected in

the self-assessment report. The external auditors consider that the improvements which have now been made should address the control weaknesses, but this has yet to be tested.

76 Auditors considered that the corporation has comprehensive procedures for open governance. The corporation has established a 'whistleblowing' policy and a complaints and accolades procedure. All governors, and appropriate members of the college's senior management team, have completed a register of interests, although its public availability is not well known. There is an 'openness' statement which is distributed around the college. The statement refers to the public availability of corporation and committee minutes and papers. Confidential minuting of corporation and committee business is appropriately restricted. Senior and middle managers are invited to attend corporation meetings as observers.

77 As noted in the self-assessment report, governors are paying increasingly close attention to the quality of the college's provision. They have received and commented on information about examination results. An academic standards committee with clear terms of reference was established in January and has already considered surveys of teaching and learning in three schools. The academic board, which includes a governor member, reports to the corporation. The corporation has recently approved a comprehensive quality policy, which particularly focuses on students' performance.

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Management

Grade 4

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

Key strengths

- open, consultative management style
- management actions to address some of the major weaknesses
- effective widening of participation
- promotion of equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- ineffective management information systems
- weaknesses in the control of franchised provision
- some inadequate target-setting
- long delays in making financial and other returns to the FEFC
- insufficiently developed contingency planning
- weak financial management

79 When the current senior managers were appointed some two years ago the college faced significant problems. The franchised provision had grown to 50% of total provision and was not controlled effectively. The management information system was unreliable and many of the students' achievements were poor. The full extent of these problems was not appreciated at that time and senior managers have only gradually established a clear understanding of their nature and consequences. Many of the issues relating to data are complex and resolving them has involved detailed negotiations with the FEFC. Over the last year there has been some progress. The proportion

of franchised provision has been reduced to 24% and the high staffing costs have been reduced, but significant weaknesses remain.

80 There is still insufficient management information to enable college managers to exercise effective control over the commercial franchised provision. Until March 1999, there was a lack of effective monitoring of the licensed retail work. One major contract last year was signed nine months late and several contracts for 1999-2000 had not been signed at the time of the inspection. The college has recently improved controls and appointed more staff to monitor the provision. Entry procedures are now more rigorous but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of other changes. The management of the local community franchised provision is generally effective.

81 Some significant developments have been implemented by the new management team. There are now comprehensive learning reviews with action plans, monitored by senior managers. The strength of the new middle management structure, with its clear delegation of responsibilities, was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. However, students are not always clear with which staff to make contact when they attend classes in more than one school. There has been progress in recent months with a number of management initiatives, for example the monitoring of attendance. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the management style is open and consultative. Issues discussed by the senior management team are swiftly disseminated across the college. Regular bulletins and newsletters keep staff well informed. The academic board plays an active role in the development of the college.

82 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the management information system is inadequate. It produces inaccurate and unreliable data which hinders management at

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all levels. There are no reliable summative data for students' retention and achievements and it is not possible to make useful comparisons with other colleges. Target-setting and monitoring are rendered ineffective by the inaccurate data. Failure to agree funded units with the FEFC has prevented updating the system. The college has made an application to the standards fund for support to replace the system.

83 The college's strategic plan has clear corporate objectives. There are school and unit plans and they are clearly linked to key corporate aims that are revised annually. Staff are fully involved in the planning process.

84 The college believes that its staffing costs are too high but lack of secure data means that it is unsure about the magnitude of the problem. Management has taken action to improve the deployment of staff. Staff utilisation has increased and budgets are closely monitored.

85 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. Auditors did not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that financial management is a strength. The college was unable to finalise its 1996-97 financial statements until October 1999, and has not submitted financial statements for 1997-98. The college has not made timely returns of student data to the FEFC. The senior management team has not received monthly or cumulative management accounts containing actual results, comparisons with budgets and analysis of variances. Financial management has been limited to updates to the 1998-99 budget and amended forecasts. The college's upgraded financial system is not yet working well. The recently updated financial regulations do not contain a comprehensive fraud procedure and procedures governing overseas travel. The college internal audit service's annual report for 1998-99 made a large number of recommendations to strengthen internal control and the college has responded positively.

86 The college holds a strategic reserve and does not have any immediate solvency problems based on its three-year financial forecasts to 2001-02. These forecasts assume that the proportion of franchised provision will remain at a quarter of all FEFC-funded provision until 2001-02. The forecast identifies a significant deficit in core provision. Fully costed contingency plans to address these identified risks have not yet been prepared for the corporation.

87 The college has policy statements on equal opportunities. Action has been taken in specific cases in accordance with these policies. The academic board has agreed an action plan based on detailed monitoring of equal opportunities issues. Each school submits a checklist and action list. Staff training has been undertaken on equal opportunities issues. The effective promotion of equal opportunities was not recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

88 The college is making a significant contribution to widening participation, guided by effective market research. The IT learning outcentres and the franchised work with the licensed retail trade enable many students to work for qualifications, who would not otherwise be able to do so. The 'Learning Pub' is an innovative approach to the teaching of basic skills. The many useful links with franchise partners support an extensive programme of adult education in the area.

Cross-college Provision

Conclusions

89 The college's self-assessment report provided some help in planning and carrying out the inspection. However, it significantly overestimated the strength of the college's work. Although the inspection team considered that the report identified many relevant strengths, it found that some strengths were overstated and that many weaknesses were overlooked or given insufficient weight. Inspectors agreed with only three of the college's curriculum area grades. The self-assessment did not give sufficient weight to students' retention and achievements and the poor quality of the data about these aspects of provision reduced the effectiveness of the self-assessment process. The inspection team found that the college had been overgenerous in its grading of all except one aspect of cross-college provision. Too much weight was given to recent developments, the effectiveness of which could not yet be fully judged. Aspects of provision were judged to be strengths which were no more than normal practice.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (October 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	2
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	15
25+ years	65
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (October 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	35
Level 2 (intermediate)	10
Level 3 (advanced)	13
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	41
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	244	4,700	16
Agriculture	4	22	0
Construction	74	276	1
Engineering	176	623	3
Business	353	1,168	5
Hotel and catering	235	13,333	44
Health and community care	316	3,247	11
Art and design	507	2,135	9
Humanities	453	2,533	10
Basic education	24	270	1
Total	2,386	28,307	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 20% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 1999)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	222	24	34	280
Supporting direct learning contact	53	4	0	57
Other support	154	10	3	167
Total	429	38	37	504

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£14,156,000	£14,066,000	£13,663,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.07*	£15.51*	£16.20*
Payroll as a proportion of income	58%	59%	63%
Achievement of funding target	129%	94%	88%
Diversity of income	23%	28%	29%
Operating surplus	£451,000	£300,000	-£336,000

Sources: Income - college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

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

Payroll - college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

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

Diversity of income - college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus - college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

*provisional data

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