

Stourbridge College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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.

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 who 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

Stourbridge College

West Midlands Region

Inspected December 1997

Stourbridge College is a general further education college in the metropolitan borough of Dudley. The college produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The report is detailed and covers most of the college's operations. A wide range of college staff was involved in the preparation of 37 subsidiary self-assessment reports. The report makes insufficient reference to the college's outward collaborative provision. Inspectors agreed with some of the college's assessments of curriculum areas but not with all of them. Most of the inspection team's judgements about the quality of areas of cross-college provision vary from those made by the college. Some strengths and a number of weaknesses identified by inspectors did not feature in the self-assessment report.

The college offers courses in all the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Courses are provided at foundation, intermediate, advanced and higher levels and there is a programme of leisure and recreational courses for adults. Provision in five curriculum areas was inspected, including that made in collaboration with other providers. The inspection also covered aspects of cross-college provision. Productive relationships exist with local employers, the community, schools and the local TEC. The college has a number of initiatives that are increasing participation.

The quality of teaching and learning is mostly good or satisfactory, but there were some unsatisfactory lessons in business studies. Students' achievements in engineering and health care are good and some are outstanding. There are some poor examination results in business studies. The induction process for new governors is thorough. There are well-developed procedures for staff development. Students and staff have good access to electronic communications. The college should address the following key issues: unreliable management information; few measures of performance or targets for improvement; no systematic analysis of students' achievements; the failure of the quality assurance group to provide a reliable overview of the college's performance; a revised management structure that is not fully effective; the lack of any appropriate financial qualifications held by members of the college management team; insufficient involvement of the corporation in the development and monitoring of the college's strategic plan and in the development of collaborative provision; and the low level of usage of some buildings and sites.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Construction	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	3
Business studies	4	Quality assurance	4
Health care	2	Governance	4
Psychology and sociology	3	Management	4

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Stourbridge College is based on eight sites around the town of Stourbridge. The town is in the south of Dudley Metropolitan Borough in the south west corner of the West Midlands. The college recruits from a wide catchment area including parts of the adjacent counties of Worcestershire, Shropshire and South Staffordshire. The college serves a diversity of socio-economic groups and students range from those who live in urban areas of high unemployment and poverty to those from affluent villages. The Metropolitan Council is the only large local employer. In September 1997, the unemployment rate in the Dudley area was 5.1 per cent.

2 In Dudley, only one school has a sixth form. There are four colleges in the borough which offer post-16 education. Within Stourbridge there is also a sixth form college. The proportion of young people in Dudley who stay on in full-time education after the age of 16 is low at 58 per cent compared with 71 per cent nationally. The college is working closely with some local schools to co-ordinate post-16 provision and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses in particular.

3 At July 1997, there were 12,334 part-time and 1,804 full-time students at college, of whom 82 per cent were aged 19 and over. There are 249 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 162 full-time equivalents are support staff.

4 The college's mission is 'to meet, raise and exceed expectations for learning'. In order to fulfil its mission and meet the needs of the community it serves, the college has five strategic aims:

- 'to improve the services to students to stimulate a desire or need for learning
- to create a workforce that is highly employable in the changing environment
- to have a dialogue between corporation

and our partner which will ascertain their needs and will inform our provision

- to create an environment which supports the acquisition of skills ensuring employability
- to maximise opportunities for public access which increase and widen participation'.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 1 December 1997. The inspection team evaluated the college's self-assessment report and studied information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted students' achievements data for 1995 to 1997. Inspectors evaluated the data against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. Approximately two months before the inspection, the college was notified of the provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors working for 44 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 79 lessons, looked at students' work and examined a variety of college documents. Inspectors met representatives of Dudley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local employers, community groups, staff from local schools and the University of Central England. Meetings were also held with governors, managers, college staff and students.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 54 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 9 per cent were less than satisfactory or poor. This profile is not as good as the national average 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 just above the average for the sector at 79 per cent. The highest attendances were in engineering at 88 per cent, and the lowest in business studies, and psychology and sociology at 66 per cent. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	5	3	1	0	11
GNVQ	0	5	5	1	0	11
NVQ	2	10	10	1	1	24
Other vocational	1	18	11	3	0	33
Total	5	38	29	6	1	79

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 3

7 A range of courses for full-time and part-time students was inspected, including courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Inspectors considered that in its self-assessment report, the college had overstated the strengths of its construction provision.

Key strengths

- thorough marking of students' work
- students' achievements on advanced GNVQ courses
- well-equipped resource centre
- students' portfolios of work

Weaknesses

- lack of students' awareness of the need to assess health and safety risks
- a failure to meet some students' learning requirements
- poor retention rates for some evening classes
- a failure to keep minutes of course team meetings
- no tutorials for part-time students

8 Much of the teaching of construction is satisfactory. In the best lessons, students are encouraged to draw on their previous learning and experience when demonstrating their skills and knowledge. There is good rapport between staff and students. Teachers regularly check that students understand the lesson. There are clear criteria for marking students' work to help them to be fair in their assessment. Teachers provide students with useful written comments on the quality of their assignment work. In some lessons, the learning activities were insufficiently demanding and they did not

challenge the students to think and extend their knowledge. For example, the students spent too much time copying from whiteboards. In other instances, teachers did not question the students effectively to ensure they had grasped the main points of the lesson. Some teachers found it difficult to meet all the learning needs of students of different abilities in the class. Part-time students do not carry out action planning to improve their performance.

9 Results on the GNVQ advanced course in construction and on the NVQ level 3 course are consistently above the national average. Most pass rates on construction are similar to the national average, apart from brickwork which is below it. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality of students' portfolios is a strength. Most students' practical and written work is good. There is a lack of students' awareness of the need to assess safety risks.

10 The inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the wide range of programmes and methods of attendance offered to meet the different needs of students and employers is a strength. Construction is an increasing part of the college's provision. Construction courses include GNVQ courses, NVQ craft courses, electrical installation programmes up to higher national certificate, and plumbing and gas programmes. In addition, there is a growing range of full-cost work and collaborative provision. The average number of students on the register in construction classes is 11. The use of performance indicators for the curriculum area is underdeveloped. There are tutorials for full-time students but none for part-time students. Course teams found it difficult to provide data on students' achievements. The college recognises there is little formal monitoring of students' progression and destinations after completion of their course of study.

Curriculum Areas

11 A full range of wood machines is available for students of carpentry and joinery. Electrical installation workshops are very well equipped with both tools and materials. Each workshop has a resource area with equipment and materials which are provided by the college's learning resource centre. The college loans text books to students on GNVQ advanced courses. Students have good access to information technology equipment. Accommodation for construction courses is good, with the exception of the area for the teaching of painting and decoration which is subject to flooding. The maintenance of some handtools is unsatisfactory. Some teachers do not have recent industrial experience.

Examples of students' achievements in construction, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced GNVQ	Retention (%)	88	94	77
	Pass rate (%)	88	81	78
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	86	82	87
	Pass rate (%)	55	57	67
NVQ level 3	Retention (%)	88	100	81
	Pass rate (%)	83	82	81

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

12 The inspection covered the engineering provision at the Hagley Road Site and the training in materials handling provided by a joint venture company at Kingswinford, about six miles away. The self-assessment report identifies many strengths with which the inspectors agree but it fails to identify and comment on several weaknesses. There is no reference in the self-assessment report to specialist resources or evidence arising from the observation of teaching.

Key strengths

- good practical lessons
- good and demanding assignments
- clear briefs for projects
- good, and in some cases, excellent pass rates
- some retention rates above the national average
- the wide range of courses available
- the range of good-quality equipment available in college and for the collaborative provision

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped schemes of work
- the limited range of teaching methods for engineering theory
- drab and uninspiring accommodation

13 The teaching of practical work is good. Students are particularly responsive when they are set demanding tasks which relate to their employment. The inspectors agreed with the statement in the self-assessment report that key skills are an integral part of courses. For example, teachers have designed a successful and innovative project for use on the GNVQ intermediate course. This brings together

aspects of mechanical and electrical engineering and helps the students to develop their key skills. Teachers pay careful attention to issues of health and safety. Much of the teaching in theory lessons is uninspiring and teachers talked too much without checking that the students understood their presentation. In many lessons, teachers missed opportunities to illustrate points with overhead projector slides or through the use of information technology. Several schemes of work and lesson plans were insufficiently detailed.

14 Most students' project work is of a high standard. Much of their other work is satisfactory. Pass rates on many engineering programmes are good. The pass rates on the higher national certificate course are excellent and have been 100 per cent for the last two years. Pass rates on the recently-introduced GNVQ intermediate course are more than 10 per cent above the national average. Retention rates on several engineering courses have improved. They are particularly good on the higher national certificates and on courses run by the collaborative providers. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that students' achievements in engineering represented a strength. The college also recognised as a weakness the lack of targets for retention and completion. Some students in the mechanical workshops displayed some uncertainty in their use of handtools and some failed to separate cutting and measuring tools on the workbench.

15 The courses run by collaborative providers are taken by students who would not normally attend college. The engineering team meets weekly. At recent meetings, the team has improved the recording of action points for improving courses. The engineering team undertakes end-of-year reviews for each course and identifies action required to improve the quality of provision. Students take part in these reviews and the minutes of the review meetings show that they are usually given the opportunity

Curriculum Areas

to express their views and concerns about their courses. The college could not produce reliable information about students' achievements in engineering easily or quickly and the inspectors had to spend a considerable amount of time trying to obtain this.

16 Engineering staff are well qualified. There is a good range of equipment available for courses in the college and for those which form part of collaborative provision. The college has recently carried out significant expenditure on engineering machine tools and fork lift trucks. There is a good range of engineering software. There is a lack of display material in engineering rooms.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
One-year full-time intermediate level	Retention (%)	*	85	74
	Pass rate (%)	*	92	71
One-year part-time intermediate level	Retention (%)	*	88	87
	Pass rate (%)	*	73	77
Two-year full-time advanced level	Retention (%)	*	73	64
	Pass rate (%)	*	58	88
Two-year part-time advanced level	Retention (%)	*	36	73
	Pass rate (%)	*	80	91
Two-year part-time higher national certificates	Retention (%)	*	80	91
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	100

Source: college data

*results not available

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 4

17 Business studies inspectors visited lessons for full-time and part-time students leading to GNVQs at intermediate and advanced levels, NVQs, GCE A levels and professional qualifications, including some which were part of the collaborative provision. Inspectors considered that in its self-assessment report, the college overstated the strengths of business studies but understated or omitted some of its significant weaknesses, particularly in relation to students' achievements.

Key strengths

- effective teaching of key skills to GNVQ students
- some students' work of exceptionally high quality
- the ability of students to work well on their own

Weaknesses

- many poorly-planned lessons
- little variety in teaching methods
- poor attendance on a number of programmes
- no target-setting
- poor pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses
- poor results at GCE A level in business studies and accountancy for the past two years
- generally declining retention and pass rates over three years

18 Most teachers share the aims of lessons with students. The relationship between teachers and students is good. In some instances teaching was effective. For example, the introduction of suspense accounts to

accounting technicians students was handled with great skill. The teaching of skills on GNVQ courses is good. Inspectors, however, did not agree with the college's judgement that teaching is planned well and that teachers use a variety of learning methods. Lesson plans, when available, are often of poor quality and schemes of work are no more than lists of topics. Most teaching lacks variety and does not engage the students' interest. The profile of the lesson grades was below the average for all lessons observed during 1996-97 according to the chief inspector's annual report. There is little contact over curricular issues between staff who teach on the collaborative provision and business studies teachers at the college.

19 The quality of some students' work on business and administration programmes is high. Inspectors were unable to make judgements on trends in students' achievements on advanced vocational courses because the college was unable to produce data on these for students enrolling in 1993, 1994 and 1995. Results on NVQ business and administration courses are similar to the national average but those on the GNVQ intermediate business course are poor. No targets are set for enrolment, retention rates or students' achievements, a weakness recognised clearly in the self-assessment report. The report also states there is systematic course review and evaluation, but the inspectors did not find this to be so. There is an effective internal verification process for most business and management programmes. The system for providing information on students' achievements and retention rates is unsatisfactory.

20 The college provides an appropriate range of courses. There are NVQ programmes in business administration from levels 1 to 3, GNVQ advanced and intermediate level courses in business and a range of courses leading to secretarial and management qualifications. Enrolments on collaborative provision have grown over recent years, although enrolments

Curriculum Areas

on college-based courses have declined. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises the lack of its effective links with industry and commerce.

21 Business studies staff are committed to effective working with other teams from across the college. There have recently been significant staffing changes and the new business team is still settling in. Most staff in the business and management area have teaching qualifications and many hold the training and development lead body awards. Full-time staff lack recent industrial experience. Staff development needs are identified during the staff appraisal process but they are not always acted upon. There are well-equipped and effectively-run open access learning centres, where students may work on their own using learning materials which suit their individual needs. The business studies workshop is, however, poorly equipped.

Examples of students' achievements in business studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	81	65
	Pass rate (%)	*	77	53
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	88	64	78
	Pass rate (%)	27	32	32
NVQ	Retention (%)	70	100	60
	Pass rate (%)	92	69	63
Professional	Retention (%)	77	92	67
	Pass rate (%)	71	77	37

Source: college data

*results not available

Curriculum Areas

Health Care

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered all aspects of the college's health and care provision, including courses offered by collaborative providers. In most instances, inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses identified by the inspectors were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- varied and appropriate teaching methods
- well-planned lessons
- appropriate learning assignments
- good results on GNVQ and BTEC courses
- well-motivated students
- good tutorial support
- good links with parents of students aged 16 to 19
- the well-managed curriculum

Weaknesses

- some poor marking of students' work lacking in guidance on ways of improving it
- lack of analysis of students' achievements
- no targets for students' achievements
- inadequate arrangements for the teaching of information technology

23 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the teaching in health and care represented a strength. There is effective lesson planning and teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching techniques. In lessons, teachers draw effectively on students' work experience. They give the students imaginative and carefully-planned assignments to help them

to develop their skills and extend their knowledge and understanding. Teachers provide effective learning support through tutorials and give students clear guidance on preparing portfolios and 'evidence diaries'. In a tutorial on an NVQ course, a student described how her portfolio work had enabled her to improve security arrangements in her workplace. Teachers return marked work promptly. Some marking lacks thoroughness and advice on how students can improve their work. In some lessons, teachers do not develop or amplify students' responses to questions and the pace is sometimes too slow to sustain the students' interest.

24 The quality of most students' written work is good. Success rates are high on most full-time programmes. The results on GNVQ courses are well above the national average and in 1997, the pass rate on the GNVQ advanced course was outstanding at 100 per cent. Retention rates on GNVQ courses have declined. Results on the BTEC national diploma course in childhood studies have also been good and students' retention has been better than it has been on the GNVQ courses. The students' retention rate on the part-time BTEC national diploma course is poor. The achievements of some part-time students are unsatisfactory. Students on some courses leading to NVQs are slow to achieve their qualification. These weaknesses in students' achievements are not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

25 The health and care curriculum is well managed at course level. Students' attendance is monitored and tutors maintain close links with the parents of students aged 16 to 18. The college's collaborative provision is attracting care sector employees who would not normally participate in further education. Course reviews do not include a thorough analysis of students' achievements and retention rates for the purposes of improving provision and planning the programme area more effectively. The lack of such analysis was recognised in the

Curriculum Areas

self-assessment report. The college had difficulty in providing accurate data on students' achievements on some health and care courses.

Examples of students' achievements in health care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced GNVQ	Retention (%)	*	77	69
	Pass rate (%)	*	89	100
Intermediate GNVQ	Retention (%)	*	81	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	81	67
National diploma in childhood studies	Retention (%)	*	83	83
	Pass rate (%)	*	98	98
NVQ level 2 childcare and education	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	57
NVQ level 2 care	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	38

Source: college data

*results not available

Curriculum Areas

Psychology and Sociology

Grade 3

26 The inspection mainly covered GCE A level courses, some general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) provision and an access to higher education programme. Some of the key strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors are referred to in the self-assessment report but inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- much good-quality teaching
- the variety of teaching methods
- good assessment methods
- responsive students
- the co-ordinated teamwork of teachers
- good curriculum development and management

Weaknesses

- some poor schemes of work and lesson plans
- some poor classroom management by teachers
- some low retention rates and poor attendance by students
- below average students' achievements
- insufficient resources

27 The teaching of psychology and sociology is mostly good. Teachers use a variety of effective teaching approaches including class discussion and the effective use of handouts and video films. They use assessment skilfully to assist the students' learning and to keep students informed about their progress. Teachers sustain students' interest well. They challenge the students to think and extend their understanding. The planning and organisation of most lessons are effective. A few lesson plans

were inadequate and the lessons in question were unstructured. Occasionally, teachers paid insufficient attention to the way the classroom was laid out and organised. For example, they did not control the lighting well and they failed to ensure that the seating arrangements were appropriate. Students on GCE A level courses are given little opportunity or encouragement to work on their own.

28 Students respond well to teachers in class and they are well motivated. Most of their written work is satisfactory. The self-assessment report acknowledges that students' poor attendance and low retention rates remain problems despite the recent setting of targets for attendance and retention. The self-assessment report fails, however, to give enough details about examination results which are below the national average. The college has not carried out any analysis of the value-added factor in students' achievements by comparing the final examination results students obtain with their attainment in GCSE when they started their course.

29 Teachers are well qualified. They work well as a team and meet regularly to discuss curriculum management and development, teaching and learning strategies and students' progress. They keep good records of their discussions and key decisions. Course records and supporting documentation are comprehensive and well maintained. Library books, information technology software and CD-ROM facilities for psychology and sociology are insufficient. The staff are developing a resource base of useful learning materials.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in psychology and sociology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level psychology	Retention (%)	*	57	39
	Pass rate (%)	*	65	54
GCE A level sociology	Retention (%)	*	58	46
	Pass rate (%)	*	70	43
GCSE psychology	Retention (%)	*	100	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	56	*

Source: college data

**results not available*

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

30 The inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in support for students which were identified in the college's self-assessment report. They found, however, other strengths and weaknesses which were not mentioned in the college's report. The college has already taken action to rectify some of the weaknesses it identified.

Key strengths

- pre-entry guidance for students and the good liaison with schools
- good assessment of students' literacy and numeracy needs and the effective action taken to meet them
- the well-organised induction programme for students
- the well-organised tutorial programme
- the system of reporting the progress of students aged 16 to 18 to their parents
- the careers education programme and the links with the careers service
- the careful evaluation of recruitment procedures

Weaknesses

- insufficient accreditation of students' prior learning
- insufficient updating of students' records of achievement
- the failure to obtain information on students' destinations

31 Support for students is well managed by two teams. The teams have recently been reorganised and they work well together to provide a coherent programme of support for students. However, some new procedures for the support of students are at an early stage of implementation and neither the inspectors nor

the college have been able to judge their effectiveness.

32 Procedures for providing students with guidance before they join the college are mostly effective. The college has a range of attractive publicity literature for courses. Links with local schools are good. College staff visit 25 schools to give pupils information and guidance on courses. There are pleasant advice centres at the Hagley Road Site and at the college shop in the Stourbridge High Street. The advice centre at Longlands is of poorer quality. College staff visit other venues to recruit students, such as bowling alleys and a nearby shopping centre. There are two open evenings for prospective students at which staff from the local careers service also offer impartial advice. Students with disabilities are encouraged to enrol on courses and the college has recently appointed a co-ordinator to assist them. New recruitment procedures include interviews with prospective students to discuss their needs. Recruitment procedures are carefully evaluated and where necessary, they are changed and improved. The college recognises in the self-assessment report that there is little accreditation of students' prior learning. The student induction process is carefully planned. Induction combines introduction to college facilities with an introduction to the student's specific course. Students receive a copy of the college's charter and the students' handbook.

33 There is an effectively managed programme of tutorials. All full-time students have a personal tutor. The college has recently reorganised the tutorial programme. It now includes personal support and academic guidance, careers advice, help with study skills and visits from outside speakers. Attendance at tutorials is recorded. Most students produce a personal action plan for the attainment of their individual goals. Some students, however, fail to keep their records of achievement up to date. The college sends parents of students aged 16 to 18 regular reports on their child's progress. It

Cross-college Provision

also holds parents evenings. In its self-assessment report, the college identified the lack of tutorial support for part-time students as a weakness. It has addressed this by designating a member of staff as someone whom part-time students may contact if they have problems.

34 The college provides good-quality learning support. This includes help with communications, literacy, numeracy and dyslexia. Learning support is provided through a network of college workshops. There are effective systems for assessing students' needs for learning support and for referring students for it. There are effective procedures for informing personal tutors of the outcome of assessments of students' needs for learning support. Tutors help students to devise action plans for their learning support. Learning support tutors monitor students' progress and keep the students' personal tutors well informed of this.

35 The college provides a good-quality counselling service which is well used. Students are referred to outside agencies for help when appropriate. The attractive college nursery takes children between the ages of two and five and makes some provision for children up to eight years old after school and during holidays. The college has a well-devised disability statement.

36 There is an effective careers advice and guidance service for students. This provides help with the preparation of curricula vitae and it arranges for students to have practice interviews. Training is given to tutors on ways of providing careers advice to students. Good support is provided for students who wish to progress to higher education and they receive help with their applications for higher education courses. The college does not, however, make information on job vacancies widely available to students. The college has strong links with Prospect Careers, the local careers service. In accord with the college's action plan for

improving its provision, more advice and guidance are now available for students who wish to enter employment.

General Resources

Grade 3

37 In the general resources section of its self-assessment report, the college has identified strengths and weaknesses for specialist areas and staffing. The report has a comprehensive assessment of learning resources. Inspection evidence generally supported the findings in the college's self-assessment report. However, the report did not identify a number of weaknesses identified by inspectors.

Key strengths

- some good accommodation
- the wide range of learning resource centres and subject rooms
- the accessibility of electronic mail and the Internet to students

Weaknesses

- the low usage of some buildings and sites
- some unsuitable and drab teaching accommodation
- the poor access to teaching areas and college facilities for wheelchair users

38 The college has eight sites. The condition of the buildings varies considerably and some accommodation is unsatisfactory for teaching purposes. Most of the college's accommodation is situated on the edge of Stourbridge town centre and on the Hagley Road Site. Most of the teaching accommodation on this site is good; classrooms are modern, well furnished and pleasantly decorated. Most accommodation at other sites is less suitable. Parts of the Westhill

Cross-college Provision

Centre cannot be used for teaching. Some buildings on some other sites contain only a few teaching rooms which are often not occupied. A number of classrooms are drab and contain few display of students' work. Three temporary buildings, which are in poor condition, provide teaching accommodation for electrical engineering and plumbing courses.

39 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the learning resource centres and subject resource rooms were a strength. There are several spacious subject rooms including those for mathematics, information technology, textiles, health and care, business studies and languages. There is also a specialist centre for teaching communication skills. Two learning resources centres give students access to a range of learning materials and facilities. The college has recognised, however, that the number of study spaces available in these centres is insufficient to meet students' needs. The main Hagley Road Site is open to students throughout the week. It is college policy to purchase key textbooks and loan these to full-time students for a year. However, most of the books on construction and engineering are out of date and are no longer used. The range of periodicals in these subjects bought by the college is narrow. Space in the main learning resource centre is limited.

40 In 1995, the college spent £500,000 on information technology resources and it has made considerable improvements in its computer equipment and software in the last three years. Much of the software is up to date. However, on occasions, the number of computers used for teaching purposes in the Hagley Road information technology centre is smaller than the number of students being taught with the result that students have to share computers. The college has networked its computers across all sites. There are good electronic communications systems which provide staff and full-time students with easy access to electronic mail. Access to the Internet,

through the computers in the learning resource centre, is being increased. The college has its own website. This provides useful information to staff, students and the public.

41 Many teaching rooms and college facilities, including the main learning resource centre and the curriculum centres are not accessible to students with restricted mobility. All the refectories are inaccessible to them, apart from the refectory at the Hagley Road Site. The college has made significant improvements to staff work rooms and communal areas. Increasingly, teaching staff are given work rooms close to their teaching areas. Sporting facilities for students are satisfactory.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

42 Inspection evidence identified many weaknesses that were not included in the college's self-assessment report on quality assurance.

Key strengths

- self-assessment reviews by staff
- clear quality assurance arrangements for the collaborative provision
- well-developed procedures for staff development
- clearly-stated commitment to providing a high-quality service to students

Weaknesses

- few performance measures and performance targets
- no arrangements for providing a reliable overview of the college's performance
- no systematic analysis of students' achievements or retention rates
- unsatisfactory criteria for evaluating the performance of course teams

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- unsatisfactory arrangements for reviewing the college's performance against charter commitments
- little use of statistical information in the self-assessment process
- some unsatisfactory methods for obtaining the views of students and other customers on the quality of provision

43 The college's mission and corporate plan embody the college's clear commitment to providing a high-quality service to students and other customers. This commitment is reflected in the college's developing system of quality assurance. This has been revised recently and changes have led to a system based on self-assessment and on team plans for improving the quality of provision. The revised quality assurance system, however, lacks some key elements of evaluation, such as the systematic analysis of students' achievements.

44 Oversight of quality assurance is the responsibility of the college's quality assurance group which is made up of senior managers. The group has not yet been able to provide an effective and reliable overview of the college's performance. It has subgroups responsible for various aspects of quality assurance but some of these have only just been established.

45 There are teams of staff which are responsible for assuring the quality of the curriculum, the student support services and the non-teaching support services, respectively. Between them the teams have responsibility for improving the quality of the college's provision. Each team prepares an annual operating plan listing objectives for the coming year. Under the revised quality assurance system, introduced in January 1997, teams hold quarterly evaluations of their progress towards meeting these objectives. The teams are bringing about some improvements. However, as the college has partly recognised in its self-assessment report,

the quality assurance system is not fully effective because the college has failed to set standards, and establish performance indicators or targets against which its improvements may be measured. The quality of the evaluations carried out by teams varies widely and is mainly poor. In a few instances, targets have been set for aspects of provision, and evaluation includes an assessment of the college's progress towards reaching these. Evaluation does not, however, include any systematic analysis of students' achievements, retention rates or students' views on the quality of their courses. Plans are in hand to establish standards, set targets and identify performance indicators against which the evaluation teams can assess the quality of the college's provision.

46 Following the evaluation carried out by each team, a panel of staff from across the college selects two of the college's objectives and reviews the extent to which these have been met. A score is agreed in respect of the progress achieved in meeting each objective and actions points for carrying out improvements are recorded. There are, however, no evaluation criteria to guide the evaluation teams and the panels. In its self-assessment report, the college does not acknowledge its failure to carry out any overall analysis of its performance on the basis of the team evaluations as a weakness. It is intended that the evaluation teams will produce self-assessment reports and that the findings of these, and of the panels reviewing the college's progress towards meeting objectives, will be fed back to the quality assurance group. The college plans to ensure that the findings of the evaluation teams and panels are built into its annual self-assessment report. To date, the college has produced only one self-assessment report and that was compiled in preparation for the inspection. It contains no overview of the college's performance.

47 The college has charters for students and employers. They are clearly set out but contain

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no standards against which the college's performance may be compared. There has been little formal monitoring of the extent to which the college fulfils its charter commitments, other than through procedures for dealing with complaints.

48 There are well-developed policies, systematic procedures and clearly-stated priorities for staff development. The inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the arrangements for staff development represent a strength of the college's provision. Most staff receive an appraisal interview. The main aim of the appraisal is to identify the training needs of staff. Appraisal is carried out by members of the college appraisal team who may not necessarily have had first-hand knowledge of the work of staff whom they appraise. The appraisal process does not include any evaluation of the appraisee's job performance. Some staff find the staff appraisal process more effective and helpful to them than other staff do. Most staff, however, agreed that their training needs, identified during their individual appraisal, are usually met. The college has a good record of training staff for vocational assessor awards. It has an agreement with the University of Central England to provide teaching training courses for staff on the college premises. Recently, the college achieved renewal of its status as an Investor in People.

49 The college produced a detailed self-assessment report that covered most of its operations. It identified strengths and weaknesses using the standard headings set out in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Few effective links exist between the college's self-assessment procedures and the college's quality assurance and strategic planning processes. The findings from classroom observations and statistical data were not used in the report and it makes insufficient reference to the college's collaborative provision.

50 The judgements made in the self-assessment are only occasionally supported by evidence. There was much consultation within the college over the preparation of the self-assessment report and staff from across the college were involved in producing 37 subsidiary self-assessment reports. In places, the quality of the self-assessment report was poor. The inspection team was unable to rely on much of the data on students' achievements initially presented by the college, and records held by teaching teams differed from those held centrally. The college's self-assessment report includes an action plan for improvement. This specifies proposed actions, states who has responsibility for carrying them out, and gives deadlines by which they must be completed. The report gives no indication, however, of how progress towards achieving improvements is to be monitored.

Governance

Grade 4

51 The inspectors agreed with a number of the strengths mentioned in the self-assessment report but consider that these are outweighed by weaknesses, some of which were not identified by the college.

Key strengths

- the induction process for new governors
- the effectiveness of monthly meetings of the finance and resources committee to consider financial reports

Weaknesses

- the insufficiency of the non-financial information provided to the corporation
- the insufficient involvement of the corporation in the development and monitoring of the strategic plan and short-term objectives

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- insufficient monitoring by the corporation of the development of collaborative provision
- inadequate preparation of papers for, and the poor recording of discussions and decisions at meetings
- the unclear terms of reference for some committees
- an insufficiently comprehensive register of interests
- the lack of adoption of a code of conduct for governors
- the lack of standing orders for the corporation

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

53 The corporation includes nine independent members, two staff members, two co-opted members, a local community member, a nominee of the local TEC and the principal. There were two vacancies at the time of the inspection. The inspection team agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the corporation had adopted an open approach, through advertising, to the selection of new governors. The corporation is seeking to broaden the range of skills and expertise of its members. The induction process for new governors is thorough, but thereafter governors receive little training. The corporation has recently completed a thorough evaluation of its own effectiveness. The chairman and vice-chairman have recently appraised the principal.

54 The corporation meets approximately every two months. The current clerk, appointed in October 1996 has no other responsibilities

within the college. Since August 1996, two meetings of the corporation have been inquorate. Often the papers for corporation and committee meetings, and the minutes of them, are not clear. The recording of discussions and decisions and particularly those committee recommendations which require the approval of the corporation, is not sufficiently clear. As an example, the governors' approval of the annual estimates of income and expenditure for 1997-98 is not recorded in the corporation minutes. The minutes of, and papers for, corporation meetings are available for public inspection. The corporation has not adopted a code of conduct for governors. There are no standing orders for the corporation or its committees, and the register of governors' interests is not sufficiently comprehensive, due to adoption of an early model.

55 There is an appropriate range of committees to cover the business of the college. The corporation has approved terms of reference for each committee. Those for the finance and resources, audit and search committees do not identify adequately their responsibilities. Detailed consideration is given to financial reports in the monthly meetings of the finance and resources committee.

56 The self-assessment report shows the governors are given opportunities to comment on the college's mission statement, strategic objectives and strategic plan. There is little evidence that they question strategies. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that the corporation is not systematically provided with written reports on the college's progress in meeting its short-term objectives. Governors are not regularly provided with sufficient information about the recruitment, retention and achievements of students. Their lack of this information is partly due to weaknesses in the college's management information systems but governors have not been persistent in requesting that such information be made available to them.

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57 The college enters into agreements with collaborative providers for the implementation of a significant proportion of its provision. The corporation was not adequately informed of the scope and nature of this provision, through the strategic planning process or specific reports. Some of the courses provided under collaborative arrangements in 1995-96 were not eligible for funding. As a result, the college experienced a significant delay in obtaining audit certification of its funding claim and its 1996-97 annual accounts. The corporation was informed of progress in resolving the problems identified by the auditors. There is evidence that some collaborative agreements were not signed in accordance with the college's approved procedures. The current chairman of the corporation was appointed in March 1997. He has been instrumental in developing the reporting and communication systems between college management and the corporation, particularly in relation to the strategic plan and collaborative provision. One example, as highlighted in the self-assessment, is the recent request by the corporation for a detailed quarterly report, from management, on the college's collaborative provision.

Management

Grade 4

58 **The college's self-assessment report includes some strengths and weaknesses in management with which the inspectors agree. The inspectors found, however, a number of other significant weaknesses not mentioned in the report.**

Key strengths

- the commitment of staff to managing the college collectively in teams
- the effective working of some teams in the revised management structure

- the college's productive relationships with outside bodies
- the successful initiatives to widen participation and promote equal opportunities
- the well-documented budgeting process and the good training for budget holders

Weaknesses

- the unreliability of the management information
- ineffective arrangements for setting targets and for monitoring progress towards their achievement
- the poor quality of some teams' operational plans
- the inadequacy of the arrangements for curriculum management for collaborative provision
- the failure to monitor the effectiveness of some policies
- no member of the college management team holds an appropriate financial qualification
- the inefficient production of financial reports
- the failure to account fully in management reports for changes to budgets
- inadequate and insufficiently up-to-date financial regulations

59 In recent years, there have been several reorganisations of the management structure. Some aspects of provision have been poorly managed but during the last year, some significant improvements have been made to the college's management. Currently, the college management team, six strategy groups and some 33 teams manage the college. The college management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals and five assistant principals. Staff are committed to managing the college

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collectively in teams. The responsibilities of teams and roles of team members are not always clearly defined or understood by staff across the college. The college has not determined how teams are accountable for their work. There is no systematic monitoring of the performance of teams. The self-assessment report does not identify any weaknesses in the team structure. Some teams operate effectively and have developed good communications between team members and with other teams. A few teams do not function well.

Arrangements by senior management for teams to receive support and guidance, and for monitoring whether they meet their objectives, are in the early stages of development. The deployment of staff is not fully effective. Some staff do not have defined roles and responsibilities.

60 The recording of decisions made in meetings, and of proposed subsequent action is often poor. Communications within the college are improving as a result of effective meetings, and briefings for staff, and the successful use of electronic mail facilities. Communication between the college and collaborative providers are improving but there are still few links at curriculum level.

61 Staff teams contributed to the strategic plan. The plan is drawn up in the light of labour market intelligence and there is a clear link between most of its objectives and its aims. Few of its objectives, however, relate to the improvement of the quality of provision for students. The college's operating statement for 1996-97 was of poor quality. It included targets which were not clearly defined and some proved too ambitious to achieve. Progress made in achieving targets is uneven and it is not systematically monitored. The improved operating statement for 1997-98 includes the college's strategic objectives and ways of assessing progress in achieving these. Some assessment criteria are not well defined. Almost halfway through the year, dates had not been set

for the achievement of several targets. Many teams' operational plans have not been updated to reflect the college's strategic objectives. The self-assessment report did not identify the weaknesses in the college's strategic planning.

62 In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that management information is weak. The college is not able to produce reliable statistical information on key aspects of its performance including students' retention rates and students' achievements. The accuracy of enrolment data is improving. Arrangements for monitoring students' progress are in the early stages of development.

63 The college has some excellent relations with outside bodies including schools, employers and community organisations. Several specific initiatives widen participation effectively and promote equal opportunities. The collaborative provision enables some students who do not usually enrol in further education to succeed in their studies and achieve qualifications. The effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy is not systematically monitored.

64 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The finance team has an appropriate number of suitably experienced staff to deal with its workload and responsibilities. No member of the college management team has an appropriate financial qualification or suitable experience, which restricts financial input to key strategic decisions. Management accounts are produced promptly, although insufficient use is made of automatic reporting from the accounting system. Consequently analysis and reporting are undertaken using spreadsheets, which is inefficient. College staff understand the budget process well and there are appropriate arrangements for training them in budgetary matters. Budget holders receive comprehensive reports on expenditure. However, the reasons behind changes to out-turn forecasts are not well explained in management reports. Those

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who wish to know what they are have to be present at meetings to hear oral explanations for them. Although regulations were updated, they do not cover a number of essential matters.

Conclusions

65 The self-assessment process provided the inspection team with a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with a number of judgements in the self-assessment report. However, they found that some strengths were overstated and that some weaknesses were understated. In addition, the inspectors found weaknesses which were not identified in the self-assessment report. The report did not include statistical data and it made insufficient reference to the college's collaborative provision. The observation of teachers' work in the classroom was not part of the self-assessment process. Overall, inspectors agreed with the majority of curriculum area grades awarded by the college, but with a minority of the grades awarded for aspects of cross-college provision. In all cases of disagreement, inspection evidence indicated that the college had been overoptimistic in its grading.

66 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	2
16-18 years	15
19-24 years	14
25+ years	68
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	42
Intermediate	23
Advanced	19
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	14
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	104	1,107	9
Agriculture	86	397	3
Construction	27	1,050	8
Engineering	176	2,301	18
Business	353	2,095	17
Hotel and catering	143	189	2
Health and community care	197	1,585	13
Art and design	423	1,054	10
Humanities	295	2,392	19
Basic education	0	164	1
Total	1,804	12,334	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	83	2	2	87
Supporting direct learning contact	29	0	0	29
Other support	106	27	0	133
Total	218	29	2	249

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£7,117,000	£8,517,000	£8,586,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn 1994-95; funded 1995-96 and 1996-97	£18.08	£18.01	£17.84
Payroll as a proportion of income	77%	70%	*
Achievement of funding target	100%	118%	*
Diversity of income	26%	21%	*
Operating surplus	-£346,000	-£910,000	*

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

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

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

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95) (subsequently adjusted), college (1995-96)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 96/29 (1994-95), college (1995-96)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 96/29 (1994-95), college (1995-96)

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	125	96	106
	Average point score per entry	2.5	2.8	2.4
	Position in tables	bottom third	bottom third	bottom 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	*	354	448
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	75%	81%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	128	199
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	47%	60%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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