

Stratford upon Avon 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

Stratford upon Avon College

West Midlands Region

Inspected February 1998

Stratford upon Avon College is a general further education college serving the town of Stratford upon Avon, the county of Warwickshire, the north Cotswolds fringe, and parts of south Birmingham. The self-assessment report was the third completed by the college. There was wide consultation on the report within the college. Staff from curriculum and support areas worked in teams to produce reports for their areas. These were summarised and aggregated to produce FEFC programme area and cross-college reports. The inspectors agreed with the majority of the grades in the college's self-assessment report. The college did not, however, identify a number of key weaknesses and it was overgenerous in its judgements about some areas.

The college offers a wide range of courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in eight of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in four of these areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has a range of higher education courses, and an extensive adult education programme which is offered at various locations. There are productive links with local employers, a wide range of community groups and organisations, local universities and the local TEC. Standards of teaching and learning range from satisfactory to very high. The

college's work in performing arts and media is outstanding. College staff give excellent support to students. There are well-established quality assurance arrangements. A new system for reviewing management objectives and targets has led to more effective monitoring of management performance. IT resources, the library, and the learning resource centres are of a high standard. The college should improve: the less effective teaching and learning in some areas; students' achievements and retention on some courses; weaknesses in aspects of strategic and operational planning; inefficiencies in staff deployment; the poor utilisation of accommodation; and compliance with some statutory requirements for governance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	3	Support for students	1
Hospitality and catering	2	General resources	2
Performing arts and media	1	Quality assurance	2
English and access to higher education	3	Governance	3
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 The college's main buildings are on a site close to the centre of Stratford upon Avon. A short distance away, the college also has an accommodation block for higher education and overseas students. The college offers a wide range of courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, several higher education courses, and an extensive adult education programme at 36 different locations. There is substantial provision for local business through the Stratford Enterprise Centre. In July 1997, there were 995 full-time and 3,174 part-time students at the college. Just under a third of full-time students are on courses in performing arts, media and catering. There is also a substantial general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) programme, in which over 25 per cent of full-time students participate.

2 The college estimates the population of its main catchment area to be approximately 80,000, widely spread across small towns and villages. It draws its students mainly from Stratford upon Avon, south Warwickshire and the north Cotswolds fringe. Substantial numbers of students travel from north Warwickshire and south Birmingham. In recent years, there has been a rapid growth in service sector employment in Coventry and Warwickshire. Seventy-three per cent of the employees in the district of Stratford upon Avon work in service industries, mainly associated with tourism. There is also significant employment in metal goods manufacturing and construction. Unemployment in Warwickshire is low, at 3.6 per cent, and it continues to decline.

3 There are five 11 to 16 high schools, two 11 to 18 high schools and three grammar schools with sixth forms in the Stratford upon Avon area. The nearest colleges of further education are in Royal Leamington Spa and Evesham, both approximately 10 miles distant. In 1997, 78 per cent of 16 year olds in south

Warwickshire entered full-time education and training. In the Coventry and Warwickshire area, achievements, in relation to most of the national targets for education and training, are above the average for the United Kingdom. Seventy-two per cent of pupils have achieved grade C or above in five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects, or equivalent, by the age of 19, and 63 per cent have achieved two GCE A level passes or equivalent by the age of 21. Forty-seven per cent of the workforce is qualified to national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 or equivalent, and 24 per cent to NVQ level 4 or equivalent.

4 Through its mission statement, the college is committed to providing high-quality, cost-effective education and training. The college aims to provide students with a broad range of skills, knowledge and understanding, and to enable them to achieve appropriate qualifications in order that they may make a full contribution to society and obtain maximum satisfaction in return. The college is organised in four divisions. Two cover academic areas. The other two divisions have responsibility for personnel and quality assurance, and administration and finance, respectively. There are 11 schools and nine support services.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 9 February 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and it had reviewed information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years, 1995 to 1997, which were checked before the inspection against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors working for a total of 29 days, and an auditor for four days. Inspectors observed 56 lessons and some tutorials. The inspection team also examined students' work and a wide variety of college documents. Meetings were held with governors, employers, parents, a representative from the Royal Shakespeare Company and community representatives. Inspectors met the principal of a neighbouring college, heads of local schools, and university representatives. They interviewed college managers, staff and students.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 64 per cent were rated good or outstanding, and 4 per cent were less than satisfactory. This compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected 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 during the inspection was 76 per cent. This compares with an average of 77 per cent for general further education colleges according to the same report. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	9	5	0	0	16
GCSE	1	4	8	2	0	15
GNVQ advanced	0	2	2	0	0	4
NVQ	0	6	1	0	0	7
Higher education including access	0	3	1	0	0	4
Other	6	3	1	0	0	10
Total	9	27	18	2	0	56

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics

Grade 3

7 The inspection covered GCE A level mathematic subjects, GCSE mathematics and the provision of additional learning support. Ten lessons were observed. The self-assessment report presented findings on a wide range of programmes including mathematics, physical sciences and computing. It made some references to strengths and weaknesses in specific subjects. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report did not give clear judgements on the quality of mathematics provision and that it did not identify some key areas of weakness.

Key strengths

- good range of mathematics courses
- supportive and effectively-planned teaching
- achievements above national averages on a number of courses
- good staff development activities
- good learning resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of students' communication and information technology (IT) skills
- inadequate monitoring of some students' progress
- poor achievement of students aged 16 to 18 in GCSE examinations
- inadequacies in curriculum organisation
- lack of a comprehensive assessment of the quality of mathematics provision

8 The curriculum provides a good range of courses leading to qualifications in mathematics. Students retaking GCSE mathematics also have an opportunity to take the City and Guilds of

London Institute (C&G) numeracy qualification. The college recognises that, as a result of the way the curriculum is organised, it is difficult for students to take the GCSE course over more than one year. The additional studies programme for GCE A level students includes a course in the foundations of advanced mathematics and a statistics course accredited by the open college network. Teachers work together to review and evaluate their teaching programmes and they have identified action needed to address some weaknesses in the GCSE course. However, there is no comprehensive action plan for addressing weaknesses across all mathematics courses.

9 Teaching is planned effectively to cover syllabuses and to provide appropriate guidance for individual students. The sequence of topics to be covered in classes is agreed by the mathematics team and it is set out in detailed schemes of work. The timetable for GCSE groups includes an opportunity for students to work on their own in the well-equipped learning resource centre. There is insufficient opportunity for students to work together in groups and little attention is given to the development of the students' communication skills. Teachers do not make sufficient use of IT and other resources such as graphical calculators during lessons. Students' work is appropriately marked. GCE A level students complete a suitable amount of assessed work. Their coursework is well presented. The self-assessment report did not identify two weaknesses in relation to GCSE provision. Firstly, some teachers set few assessments for GCSE students. Secondly, GCSE students do not set out their solutions to problems clearly.

10 Mathematics staff provide assistance in mathematics for students taking courses in other curriculum areas. Students are assessed during induction by their tutors and mathematics staff in order to find out whether they need additional help in mathematics. Students receive effective individual tuition. In many

Curriculum Areas

instances, teachers do not adequately complete the forms which record students' learning needs in mathematics and ways of meeting these. Students are required to draw up individual action plans which specify their learning objectives and how they will evaluate their progress. There was no reference in the self-assessment report to the absence of detail in these action plans or to the lack of effective monitoring of the additional support provided for students.

11 For the last two years, the GCE A level pass rate has been above the national average for further education colleges. The retention rate on the GCSE mathematics course has been good. In the current year, however, the students' attendance on this course has been poor. In general, retention rates have fallen on one-year and two-year courses. In the last two years, students aged 19 and over have done particularly well in GCSE mathematics and in 1997, 83 per cent of students aged 19 or over gained grade C or above. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that the GCSE results of students aged 16 to 18 are unsatisfactory. The results of most students on the mathematics in education and industry foundations of advanced mathematics course are good and in 1997, 22 of the 25 students who sat the examination gained a merit or distinction. In 1997, 69 per cent of students who took the C&G numeracy certificate examination passed it. Local industry awards a

prize annually to the student in the college who has made outstanding progress in mathematics.

12 Mathematics teachers are well qualified and nearly all have a degree and a teaching qualification. All have attended recent training courses to help them to keep up to date with mathematics examination schemes and they have received training in the use of IT. There is an appropriate range of study materials for GCSE and numeracy courses. Students have access to six computers and a good range of CD-ROM mathematical software. The library also has a good range of text books on mathematics.

Examples of students' achievements in mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE mathematics	Retention (%)	85	80	80
	Pass rate (%)	26	30	34
GCE A level (including both one- and two-year courses)	Retention (%)	78	70	71
	Pass rate (%)	77	83	82

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 2

13 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in hospitality and catering. These were on courses leading to general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced level, NVQ levels 2 and 3, and the higher national certificate. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of the quality of the provision, but they found some strengths and weaknesses which were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the wide range of teaching methods
- the effective planning of lessons
- the teachers' use of their own and students' work experience in lessons
- good results on the NVQ level 3 kitchen and larder course
- students' teamwork
- the well-organised hospitality and catering curriculum
- strong links with industry

Weaknesses

- the results on the NVQ food service course in 1997
- some insufficiently demanding lessons
- some teachers' poor questioning of students
- some old and substandard equipment

14 Most teaching and learning is of a good standard. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching methods are effective. These include good individual help and guidance for students in lessons. Most lessons are carefully planned. Teachers appropriately adapted their teaching method when taking lessons in realistic working

environments. Teachers introduce their lessons well. Most make the aims and objectives of lessons clear. They ensure that their teaching closely reflects the objectives of GNVQ and NVQ units. They make good use of their own and students' industrial experience. In a successful lesson on quality assurance systems in industry, the teacher explained the quality assurance arrangements of a local hotel. He then skilfully drew on the experience of a student who worked part time in the hotel to show how these arrangements worked in practice. In some lessons, teachers give students work which is not sufficiently demanding and it fails to extend their knowledge and skills. Some teachers did not question students thoroughly enough to check that they understood the lesson. In a few instances, teachers themselves were not exemplars of best trade practice.

15 The pass rates on most courses are good. The self-assessment report did not mention the outstandingly good results of students on the kitchen and larder course leading to NVQ level 3. In 1996, the college replaced its BTEC diploma course in hotel, catering and institutional management with a GNVQ course in hospitality and catering. In 1996, the pass rate on the BTEC diploma course was 100 per cent and in 1997 the pass rate of the first cohort to complete the GNVQ course was 62 per cent. In 1997, the results of students on the food service craft course at level 2 were unsatisfactory and they were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Retention rates for hospitality and catering courses are similar to the national averages for colleges in the further education sector. Students' attendance is good. Students are set clear and demanding targets and most are able to meet these. They display good practical skills although there is scope for improving their skills in the use of kitchen knives. Students work well in teams. NVQ level 3 students research and plan exciting and innovative menus for the college restaurant.

Curriculum Areas

16 The hospitality and catering curriculum is well structured and effectively organised. Staff have a good awareness of costs. They hold regular meetings and they monitor and review their own and their students' performance against targets. There is a good range of full-time and part-time courses and this meets the needs of students and industry. Students are enabled to work for qualifications which are additional to the main award for which they are studying. The college offers programmes of learning and assessment in the workplace. In response to a local shortage of trained reception and housekeeping staff, the college is providing a training course for staff from several hotels in the locality. The college has strong and valued links with local industry. These are fostered through the network of work placements for students, the industrial liaison committee and through the work which the college carries out with local employers. These links were identified in the college's previous inspection report and they are clearly shown as a strength in the current self-assessment report.

17 All teachers have appropriate qualifications and relevant experience in the areas they teach. Most have qualifications as vocational assessors and verifiers. Staff attend programmes of professional development and some have updated their industrial experience. Accommodation for hospitality and catering courses is appropriate and includes pastry and food production kitchens, a coffee shop and a restaurant. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the facilities in the restaurant are of a high standard. The range of equipment is adequate and of a standard found on good commercial premises in the industry. As the self-assessment recognises, several pieces of equipment are old and some containers, trays and cupboards are unsatisfactory.

Examples of students' achievements in hospitality and catering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Intermediate GNVQ hospitality and catering	Retention (%)	+	+	80
	Pass rate (%)	+	+	75
Advanced hospitality and catering	Retention (%)	+	+	59
	Pass rate (%)	+	+	62
National diploma in hotel, catering and institutional management	Retention (%)	79	86	+
	Pass rate (%)	93	100	+
NVQ level 2 food preparation and cooking	Retention (%)	68	65	56
	Pass rate (%)	90	86	83
NVQ level 3 kitchen and larder full time	Retention (%)	100	94	100
	Pass rate (%)	93	100	100
NVQ level 2 food and drink service	Retention (%)	68	65	56
	Pass rate (%)	76	64	42

Source: college data
+course not running

Curriculum Areas

Performing Arts and Media

Grade 1

18 Eighteen lessons were observed, covering the full range of GCSE, GCE A level and BTEC national diploma courses in media and performing arts. Lesson activities included a live recording in a television studio and a public performance of a play. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths and few weaknesses in performing arts and media.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- innovative and stimulating work leading to productions and recordings
- the range of learning opportunities away from the college
- high pass rates on BTEC national diploma and GCE A level courses
- students' success in progressing to higher education or appropriate employment
- the high standard of students' practical work and attainment in key skills
- outstanding specialist accommodation and equipment
- versatile teachers and technicians

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on a few courses in 1997
- poorly-organised and poorly-presented written work by some students

19 The college offers a broad and growing range of media and performing arts courses at advanced and higher education level. Students enrich their main studies by taking additional courses. For example, GCE A level media students develop practical skills by working for the C&G qualification in television and video

production. The college offers a specialist course in technical theatre and a course which gives mature students practical experience of drama prior to attending university. There are no suitable intermediate courses that offer an alternative to GCSE. Courses are well managed. Performing arts courses are timetabled flexibly to enable the students to fulfil an ambitious commitment to put on drama productions once a term.

20 The inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching and learning are planned thoroughly. Course handbooks are informative. Teachers explain course objectives and assessment criteria to the students. Teachers encourage students to work on their own, but ask questions to check that students understand what they are doing and offer them advice when appropriate. Lessons are designed to give students an appropriate mixture of theory and practical work. Assignments are demanding. For example, as part of a musical theatre project students were required to choose music from two contrasting eras in the twentieth century and to make comments on the social history of the period through their performance. The written feedback which teachers give students on the quality of their work is not always sufficiently thorough.

21 As the self-assessment report states, students benefit substantially from opportunities to learn at locations away from the college. Media students spent a week in Cornwall producing video recordings of a high standard. During the inspection, BTEC first-year students gave a polished performance of Ariel Dorfman's play about war, *Widows*. Students take productions to local schools, and the Edinburgh and Glastonbury festivals. The college has productive industrial links such as those with the Royal Shakespeare Company. In 1997, media students attended live recordings of situation comedies and a production of 'Can't Cook, Won't Cook' at the BBC Television Centre.

Curriculum Areas

Visiting actors provided students with valuable insights into the Hollywood film industry.

22 Inspection findings confirmed the college's claims about the outstanding quality of its specialist resources. There is a well-equipped drama studio, suitable for productions of a professional standard, and a large hall with a sprung floor and wall mirrors. As a result of the significant growth in student numbers, some classes have to use rooms which are unsuitable for lessons which combine written work with practical activities. The purpose-built media suite, funded through a grant from a public company, is exceptionally well equipped. It includes new purpose-built television and radio studios, video and audio editing facilities, a recording studio and a darkroom. Equipment throughout the suite is up to industry standard. Teaching and learning are well supported by six technicians, some of whom work at weekends to assist with productions.

23 The students achieve outstanding pass rates on BTEC national diploma courses and in GCE A level theatre studies. In 1996 and 1997, the pass rates at grades A to C and A to E in GCE A level theatre studies, were 22 per cent above the national average for students of all ages in further education colleges. The examination results of students taking GCSE

examinations in drama and media studies were poor in 1996 but they improved considerably in 1997. The retention rates of students on BTEC national diploma and GCE A level courses were high in 1995 but they have declined subsequently. Retention rates have improved significantly on GCSE courses. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report did not give sufficient emphasis to these weaknesses in retention rates. Most students progress to higher education or to work in media and performing arts.

24 The inspectors agreed with the findings in the self-assessment that students demonstrate good technical and practical skills. Performing arts students acquire proficiency in oral communication and teamwork skills. A student in the role of director co-ordinated effectively the work of 20 other media students, both actors and stage crew, for a seven-minute video film on current newspaper items. Students acquire sophisticated presentation skills through public performances. Some students do not organise their written work well. The presentation of their work is poor and they make little use of IT to improve it.

Examples of students' achievements in performing arts and media, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level theatre studies	Retention (%)	92	67	64
	Pass rate (%)	81	94	97
BTEC national diploma in performing arts	Retention (%)	94	71	73
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	96
BTEC national diploma in media studies	Retention (%)	83	80	66
	Pass rate (%)	100	81	96
GCE A level media	Retention (%)	97	76	83
	Pass rate (%)	79	85	89

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English and Access to Higher Education

Grade 3

25 Inspectors observed 16 lessons on GCE A level courses in English and the access to higher education programme. The college's self-assessment report gave a single overall grade for the humanities programme area. It did not provide separate assessments of the English provision and the access to higher education programmes. Inspectors found key weaknesses in English and in the access programme which were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned and skilfully-managed lessons
- the teachers' encouragement of students to respond readily and thoughtfully in lessons
- the variety of appropriate teaching methods on the access to higher education programme
- good achievements of students on higher level courses
- well-designed learning support materials
- the teachers' careful and constructive marking of written work

Weaknesses

- the poor range of teaching strategies used in English
- class sizes too small to facilitate discussion and interaction in many lessons
- poor GCSE results
- students' low retention rates and poor attendance

26 Most lessons are well planned and skilfully managed. The majority of teachers use well-conceived and relevant teaching materials, most of which have been developed by staff in the college. Teachers encourage students to express personal views on topics under discussion and the students respond readily, confidently and perceptively. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers in access to higher education lessons use a wide variety of appropriate teaching methods. In English, the range of teaching methods used is narrow. In many lessons, teachers did not give students sufficient opportunity to express their own ideas. The small size of classes on some English courses and on the access programme inhibits good discussion and effective interaction between students in lessons. Audiovisual resources were used to good effect on the access programme. They were also used well in some English lessons, but poorly in others. Students' written work is of an appropriate standard. Work produced by access students is of high quality. The coursework produced by GCE A level English language students is often imaginative and it shows that the students acquire good analytical skills. Teachers mark written work carefully and constructively.

27 The self-assessment report acknowledges that GCSE results are poor. The college is currently reviewing the suitability of GCSE courses for some students and it is investigating whether alternative provision might not be more appropriate for them. Students who complete higher level courses achieve good results. In 1997, the pass rate for GCE A level English literature was 92 per cent. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises as weaknesses the low completion rate for students on access courses, and students' poor attendance and low retention rates on English courses.

28 The management of English courses is fragmented. Administratively, the staff who teach English on different courses are based in

Curriculum Areas

various divisions and schools across the college. As a result, it is difficult for English teachers to meet regularly, share good practice and work together as a team to decide how best to plan and review provision. The access programme is well managed and targets for students' achievements have recently been included in its action plan. There are, however, too many subject options for the number of students recruited to the programme. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the flexible entry arrangements, allowing students to join the access programme at one of three starting points in the year, are a strength. Teachers are well qualified and most have teaching qualifications.

Examples of students' achievements in English and access to higher education, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE English	Retention (%)	89	87	86
	Pass rate (%)	53	68	39
GCE A level English literature	Retention (%)	94	77	81
	Pass rate (%)	98	98	92
Access to higher education	Retention (%)	72	63	64
	Full achievement* (%)	44	66	45

Source: college data

**note that some students gain credits towards the full achievement*

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

29 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements about the quality of the support provided for students. They did not, however, agree with some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been addressed before the inspection took place.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry guidance for students
- the helpful and informative disability statement
- the effectiveness of the personal tutorial system
- the guidance for students on progression to careers and higher education
- the maintenance and completion of students' records of achievement across the college
- the diagnostic assessment of students' literacy, numeracy and IT skills
- the provision of work experience for students
- the effectiveness of the counselling and welfare service for students

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped arrangements for the accreditation of students' prior learning
- the reporting of termly progress on additional learning support

30 Support for students is well managed. As noted in the self-assessment, students receive effective and impartial advice before joining the college. Course information is sent to 65 schools, local libraries, and other centres. Courses are advertised in the press and on local radio. The college holds two open evenings a

year for prospective students. Pupils from local schools visit the college to sample courses. The quality of publicity literature is good. The college's targets for dealing with applications from and offering interviews to prospective students are met.

31 The college's disability statement contains much helpful information. An additional needs group with external representatives advised on its content. The college encourages applications from students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some specialist equipment has been purchased to assist students with learning difficulties. The building of two new lifts has enabled wheelchair users to reach rooms above the ground floor more easily. The hall of residence has two bedrooms specially adapted for those with restricted mobility.

32 As the self-assessment report states, the college has a thorough induction programme. Students reported that they had found this effective in introducing them to the college and the demands of their course. They also commented favourably upon the helpful student handbook. All full-time and many part-time students receive diagnostic assessment of their literacy, numeracy and IT skills. The needs of students with dyslexia are also identified and met. Arrangements are made to provide additional learning support to those students who need it. Students who receive this support are required to draw up action plans for the improvement of their basic skills, and to set their own learning objectives for literacy and numeracy. These actions plans are not always sufficiently specific. Some of the reports on students which the learning support staff send to tutors, do not give enough details of what the students have achieved. The attendance of some students at group sessions for learning support is poor. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that there has been little development of arrangements in the college for the accreditation of students' prior learning.

Cross-college Provision

33 All full-time students and many part-time students have personal tutors. The tutorial programme is planned well and flexibly to allow tutors to use appropriate tutorial materials which they have devised themselves. There is a useful handbook for tutors. It stipulates that tutors should plan the tutorial programme in conjunction with the students but some tutors fail to do this. The attendance of most students at tutorials is good but some GCSE students do not attend their tutorials regularly.

34 Students receive much help with their applications for entry to higher education and employment. Two members of staff have responsibility for giving relevant careers advice and guidance. There is an effective partnership agreement with the local careers service. Many students receive careers guidance interviews. The college has a well-resourced careers library. Meetings are held for parents of full-time students aged 16 to 19, at which they receive information about their children's progress. Each summer, a 'higher education evening' is arranged for parents whose children plan to progress to higher education courses. Advice on entry to higher education is also available for part-time students. Students' applications for entry to higher education are carefully checked, but a small proportion suffered delays in processing. Most full-time and some part-time students complete records of achievement. After checking them during tutorials, most students produce their records of achievement with the aid of a wordprocessor. As claimed in the self-assessment report, the college has particularly well-documented procedures to assist students and employers on work experience, including one that applies to working overseas. Many students, including those in non-vocational areas, undertake work experience.

35 The counselling and welfare service offers students effective financial and personal guidance. Counsellors are available daily and they may be consulted on a 'drop in' basis or by appointment. Students receive valuable help

with making applications to charitable trusts for financial assistance. Clear records are kept of the extent to which the service is used. The counselling service produces an informative annual report on its work and this specifies its targets for the following year. The college does not have its own childcare facilities, but information is provided on childcare services which are available nearby. Advice is available to students on how to obtain accommodation locally.

General Resources

Grade 2

36 The inspectors generally agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in resources. The self-assessment report omitted, however, to identify as a significant weakness the under-utilisation of the accommodation.

Key strengths

- good-quality accommodation
- well-maintained buildings
- effective adaptation of accommodation
- a well-planned, well-resourced library
- the good learning resource centres
- the easy accessibility of modern computers

Weaknesses

- the low level of use of much accommodation
- insufficient space in some classrooms
- the lack of sporting and recreational facilities

37 As the self-assessment report states, the college buildings, car parks and landscaped areas are well maintained. A new media and classroom block was opened in September 1997. There is good-quality furniture and

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equipment in most areas. As the college has developed, managers have adapted the buildings to meet the college's changing priorities. A redundant coal store has been successfully converted into modern music practice rooms. A surplus motor vehicle workshop has been enclosed to create a useful practical construction area for creative arts students. Apart from a small number of teaching areas and some administration offices, most buildings and classrooms are easily accessible to people with restricted mobility.

38 The college does not make effective use of its accommodation. A database on room usage has recently been developed. This produces accurate information which shows that many rooms are poorly or inappropriately used during the week. Some classes are timetabled to use rooms which are too small for them. As a result, the range of teaching and learning activities which can be carried out in such accommodation is severely restricted.

39 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the library is well planned and well stocked. It is centrally located and provides students with an attractive and spacious area in which to study. Library staff identify effectively the information services needed to support college courses. They attend course team meetings and consult teaching staff when reviewing library stock. The views of students about the library are gathered regularly. The library has extensive opening times, including evenings, Saturday mornings, and mornings during most holiday periods. Well-equipped, attractive learning resource centres for IT, key skills, business and modern languages are open to all college students. The centres are managed by support staff. Their location next to departmental staff work rooms is convenient for students who seek specialist assistance. The key skills workshop has a wide range of materials to meet the needs of GCSE English and mathematics students and the needs of other students in relation to

communication and numeracy. The workshop is well used by students from a variety of courses.

40 IT resources are of high quality. The college has made significant investments in IT equipment over the last two years. As a result, the college has a reliable computer network and students have easy access to high specification computers. Most computers are sited in the IT learning resource centre where specialist help is available to students. Technician support is readily available throughout the college, during both the day and evening.

41 The students' restaurant is adequately furnished and serves as a common room and informal study area. Adult students and students on higher education courses have their own modern and well-equipped common room. The training restaurant and popular coffee shop are open to students, staff and the local community. The college has few facilities for sport and recreation, as it notes in its self-assessment report. There is a small but well-equipped fitness room which is privately run and students may use this at a concessionary rate.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

42 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of its quality assurance arrangements. They identified some weaknesses, however, which were not mentioned in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the college's strong commitment to quality assurance
- the effective quality assurance procedures for courses
- the close monitoring of the performance of college teams

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- good quality assurance procedures for training and collaborative provision
- the effective staff appraisal system and the good staff development plan

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of evidence from lesson observations in the self-assessment process
- insufficient self-assessment of, and action-planning by, subject areas

43 The college has well-established quality assurance procedures. There is a clear policy on quality assurance. This contains a plan for quality assurance which specifies key elements of the quality assurance process. In March 1995, the college achieved the Investor in People award. The current self-assessment report is the third such report the college has produced. There is insufficient focus on individual subjects in the current self-assessment report and consequently there is little identification of weaknesses in specific subject areas. Evidence obtained from lesson observations was not used in the self-assessment process at course, programme or school level, although it is taken into account by the senior management when writing the college's self-assessment report. Some of the content of the action plans drawn up by schools is insufficiently specific but this issue has been partly addressed following the principal's mid-year review of the quality of provision.

44 The comprehensive system of course team meetings, course logs and quality assurance files is effective. It enables course teams to monitor the effectiveness of their work, including their progress towards reaching their targets. Staff pay close attention to external verifier reports. Some measurable improvements have occurred as a result of the quality assurance process. For example, standards of organisation and assessment on the GNVQ leisure and tourism courses were significantly improved as a result

of timely and effective monitoring. Course and programme teams make little use of comparative performance data such as the average retention rates or average examination results for the sector, against which they may assess students' performance. As the self-assessment report indicates, the college does not calculate the value-added factor of GCE A level students' achievements which would enable comparisons between predicted and actual achievements. In 1997, service teams began work on the identification of service standards but this has not been taken forward.

45 There is a strong culture of review and evaluation in the college, as the college's self-assessment report notes. The views of students on the quality of provision are regularly sought and action is taken on them. For example, the responses made by overseas students to a questionnaire led to staff development activities designed to improve the support for these students. Service teams, for example the library and 'flexible learning centre' teams, also seek, and respond to the views of their users. The college's charter specifies some measurable standards for the college's services and provision. The college regularly monitors the extent to which these standards are attained.

46 Quality assurance procedures for the college's training and collaborative provision are effective and efficient, although they are not mentioned in the college's self-assessment report. The Stratford Enterprise Centre complies with the college's self-assessment procedures. Post-course questionnaires are sent to all course delegates and their responses are recorded centrally and acted upon promptly. Work placement records are well organised and thorough. Collaborative provision is monitored effectively. College staff make regular visits to the collaborative provider and students are asked to complete an evaluation form. The college regularly seeks and responds to the views of employers.

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47 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that the staff development programme and staff appraisal procedures are effective, valued by staff, and integral to the quality assurance process. Permanent full-time and associate staff are appraised in an annual appraisal cycle which includes half-yearly reviews of their performance. In 1996-97, all appraisals were completed on time. Staff development needs arising from appraisals are included in the college's staff development plan. The processes for evaluating and disseminating the results of staff development are clear and they work well. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is little involvement of part-time staff in the appraisal process and in the reviews of the quality of provision.

Governance

Grade 3

48 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report overstated some strengths of the college's governance. The inspectors identified a number of weaknesses which are not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the governors' commitment to the college
- the governors' range of skills and experience
- the governors' involvement in the development of strategic plans
- the clerking arrangements for the corporation

Weaknesses

- the corporation's non-compliance with some statutory requirements
- inadequate corporation approval and monitoring of financial forecasts and performance

- the insufficient involvement of governors in monitoring progress in the implementation of strategic plans
- insufficient reporting of non-financial management information to governors

49 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument of government. The full corporation is not sufficiently involved to demonstrate that it fulfils requirements under the articles of government. The corporation substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

50 Governors devote a considerable amount of time to the college. They come from a wide range of professional and business backgrounds. The membership committee scrutinises the appointment and reappointment of governors, taking account of the need for members to have appropriate skills and expertise, and the availability of suitable candidates. Procedures for the appointment of governors have not been comprehensively documented. A development and training programme has been established. Governors clearly understand the distinction between governance and management. They work well with senior managers who attend corporation meetings by invitation. The chairman and principal meet frequently. As the self-assessment report states, attendance at corporation meetings is good. Governors have recently evaluated their effectiveness as a corporation.

51 Sound administrative arrangements support the corporation's work. Corporation meetings are well planned and they are minuted effectively. Discussion is clearly focused and agreed actions are well recorded. Corporation papers, apart from confidential items, are available for public inspection. Standing orders

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are regularly updated. Governors have established a code of conduct. The clerk to the corporation maintains a register of the financial and personal interests of governors and of staff with significant financial responsibilities. The register is updated annually, and is available for public inspection. As indicated in the self-assessment report, governors are involved in framing the college's strategic plan. A working group of governors has recently been established for strategic planning. Governors do not receive specific, written reports on the college's progress in attaining short-term objectives nor do they receive comprehensive and regular management information on students' enrolments and retention rates and on the achievement of unit targets.

52 The college's financial performance shows a shortfall against budget, and the year-end financial position had to be revised accordingly. Financial forecasts are not approved by the corporation before being forwarded to the FEFC. Instead, they are approved by the chairman of the finance and general purposes committee. Governors are insufficiently involved in setting and monitoring financial performance targets, and they do not receive full management accounts at termly intervals. Neither the corporation nor the finance and general purposes committee have exercised adequate and frequent oversight of the college's finances. As a result, the full corporation is not sufficiently involved to demonstrate that it fulfils its responsibilities under the articles of government.

53 The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure. It has been formally agreed that governors should serve on those committees where the best use may be made of their expertise. Each committee has terms of reference which have been approved by the corporation. Terms of reference for the finance and general purposes committee do not fully define its role and responsibilities. The performance monitoring and quality review

committee investigates the quality of the college's provision. It receives reports from the executive on examination results, curriculum-related matters and the self-assessment process. The audit committee has appropriate terms of reference. However, it has sometimes considered matters which could compromise its independence. For example, the committee has considered issues of general governance such as the corporation's self-assessment and its code of ethics. Furthermore, it has not been fully effective in its consideration of how internal audit recommendations are implemented. Formal reports of the business of the committees are received by the corporation as a matter of routine. Effective arrangements have been established for the appointment, appraisal and development of senior staff.

Management

Grade 3

54 Inspectors agreed with a number of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that some strengths were overstated. Although the college identified several important weaknesses in management in its report, it overlooked some key weaknesses and understated others.

Key strengths

- effective communication at all levels within the college
- a clear marketing strategy and detailed market research
- productive links with a range of external bodies
- thorough monitoring of management objectives
- the effective finance team

Weaknesses

- inefficient deployment of staff

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- poor operation of the current management structure
- aspects of strategic planning
- inadequate budgeting arrangements

55 The new principal had been in post for just over five months at the time of the inspection and had, therefore, not been principal in the period covered by the self-assessment report. Reviews have been undertaken recently to address cost-efficiency, the management structure and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The principal undertakes a mid-year review of the achievement of management objectives and targets outlined in action plans. This review is proving to be an effective means for managers to monitor the college's performance.

56 Inspectors concurred with the finding in the self-assessment report that communications are effective at all levels within the college. The senior management team meets weekly. There are regular meetings of staff teams and of individual members of staff with their line managers. The college newsletter provides a useful means of briefing staff on current issues and topics. There is a staff handbook. This is regularly updated and it is valued by staff.

57 Inspectors identified a number of weaknesses in the strategic planning process. As recognised in the self-assessment report, there has been little involvement of staff in the development of the current strategic plan. The plan does not contain a three-year financial forecast nor does it have detailed economic and financial targets. There is no operating statement in the plan showing how the strategic objectives will be achieved. The action plans for each school or service area, originating from the self-assessment report, relate to many of the strategic objectives. However, inspectors could not support the college's claim that there is an effective and direct link between the self-assessment process and the strategic plan.

58 The senior management team consists of the principal and four vice-principals. Heads of schools and service areas form the middle management tier. In 1996, the college's management structure underwent a major restructuring. The revised management structure has shortcomings which are recognised in the self-assessment report. There are significant variations in the size of schools and service areas and in middle managers' workloads and scope of responsibilities. Some managers do not have a sufficiently clear understanding of resource management and they need training to help them to discharge their new responsibilities. In general, personnel management systems and procedures are effective. The management information system provides timely data for the requisite returns to the FEFC and for a variety of comprehensive reports for managers.

59 There are inefficiencies in staff deployment, which the college identified in its self-assessment report. The college recognises that there are inherent problems with the current resource allocation model and that it should be changed. The use of the model has resulted in uneven workloads for staff.

60 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths of its links with external bodies. There are strong collaborative links with Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, universities, local employers and community organisations. The college is developing closer collaborative links with local further education colleges. The college has a clear marketing strategy and there is detailed market research to support strategic and operational management. The marketing plan contains clear marketing objectives which are in line with corporate objectives. The self-assessment report referred to the extensive market research which the college carries out through various surveys.

61 There are some dimensions of equality of opportunity which are not effectively promoted

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and managed. As recognised by the college in the self-assessment report, valuable help is given to those staff dealing with international and adult students. There has, however, been insufficient monitoring of the curriculum to ensure that it conforms with the principles of equal opportunity, particularly in relation to issues such as race and gender. The college recognises the need to revise its policy on, and procedures for, equal opportunities. The personnel team undertakes detailed monitoring of staff recruitment in order to ascertain that the college fulfils its commitment to be an equal opportunities employer. The team presents an annual report on recruitment.

62 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The finance team is led by the college accountant, and has an appropriate number of suitably-experienced staff. Management accounts are produced within 10 working days in accordance with best practice. Budget holders receive timely reports on expenditure, and expert advice when required. Comprehensive financial regulations and procedures have been established. Anticipated activity levels within the college for 1997-98 do not reflect the approved budget. It has been revised by college management but has not been formally approved by governors. The college is not meeting its financial targets for 1997-98. This is due to a reduction in income with no compensating decrease in expenditure. The senior management team is developing strategies to improve the college's financial health.

63 The senior management team does not formally receive full management accounts at sufficiently regular intervals. Instead, the college accountant meets weekly with senior managers to review the college's financial performance. The college's internal auditors identified a number of significant weaknesses in the college's internal control system in 1996-97. Some of the resulting recommendations were

not given proper consideration at the time, though a more positive response is now in evidence. The college's external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's internal control system.

Conclusions

64 The college's self-assessment report was carefully prepared. It provided a useful starting point for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the majority of grades in the self-assessment report. They agreed with the college's grades for two of the curriculum areas. The scope of the college's self-assessment was broader than the scope of the inspection in the two areas where there was disagreement about the quality of curriculum provision. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report for management overstated some strengths and omitted a number of weaknesses. The self-assessment grade for governance was considered especially overgenerous.

65 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)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	25
19-24 years	16
25+ years	52
Not known	6
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	18
Intermediate	9
Advanced	25
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	44
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	63	455	12
Engineering	29	53	2
Business	103	287	9
Hotel and catering	133	58	5
Health and community care	81	88	4
Art and design	188	8	5
Humanities	398	2,084	60
Basic education	0	141	3
Total	995	3,174	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	70	32	0	102
Supporting direct learning contact	50	0	0	50
Other support	31	0	0	31
Total	151	32	0	183

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£5,714,000	£5,610,000	£5,955,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£20.60	£19.63	£19.89
Payroll as a proportion of income	64%	71%	62%
Achievement of funding target	94%	102%	(est) 104%
Diversity of income	39%	33%	35%
Operating surplus	-£103,000	-£273,000	£392,000

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

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

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

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	125	167	193
	Average point score per entry	4.3	4.1	3.9
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	129	176	137
	Percentage achieving qualification	81%	80%	68%
	Position in tables	middle third	top third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	65	68
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	68%	66%
	Position in tables	*	middle 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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends *(continued)*

Students' achievements

		<i>1994-95</i>	<i>1995-96</i>	<i>1996-97</i>
Advanced academic	Pass %	78	70	74
	Retention %	77	79	83
Intermediate academic	Pass %	54	31	37
	Retention %	72	55	83
Advanced vocational	Pass %	79	84	68
	Retention %	78	70	81
Intermediate vocational	Pass %	56	64	64
	Retention %	71	56	66

Source: college data

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