

Sutton Coldfield 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

Sutton Coldfield College

West Midlands Region

Inspected January 1998

Sutton Coldfield College is a large further education college to the north east of Birmingham. The college produced a clear self-assessment report. However, the report contained little judgement on the quality of teaching and learning. The college did not undertake lesson observations as part of the self-assessment process. In general, inspectors agreed with the grades awarded in the report.

The college provides courses in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas and it also offers courses in higher education. Courses in six programme areas were inspected. The college is effective in meeting the needs of those in the local community and from further afield. Links with local employers and the community are strong. The quality of the college's work in art and design is outstanding. The management and governance of the college are good. The audit committee is particularly effective in carrying out its responsibilities. The new management structure is beginning to operate well. Support for students is effective. There has been recent substantial investment in resources. Of particular note are the well-equipped modern technology centre, the high-quality refectory and the amenities building at the Lichfield Road Centre. The quality of

accommodation at some other centres is less good. The college's quality assurance system has recently been substantially revised and the effectiveness of this revision has yet to prove itself. The college should improve: attendance and retention in a number of areas; the quality of achievements in mathematics; and its tutorial programme. In addition, the college should ensure that all its staff are deployed effectively and efficiently and that it completes the implementation of its staff appraisal programme.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	4	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Business studies	2	Quality assurance	3
Office/secretarial studies	2	Governance	2
Care and childcare	2	Management	2
Art and design	1		
Humanities	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Sutton Coldfield College is to the north east of Birmingham. Sutton Coldfield, which became part of the City of Birmingham in 1974 following local government reorganisation, is largely a residential area. The local unemployment rate of 4 per cent is below that of 11 per cent for Birmingham as a whole.

2 The college's mission is to: 'increase prosperity in the West Midlands by providing first class education and training for all'. The college's largest centre on the Lichfield Road houses the administrative offices and teaching areas for most departments. Courses in art and design are based in a converted commercial building about a mile away. The site at Erdington is three miles away, closer to Birmingham City Centre, and houses mainly craft engineering courses. Three further smaller sites are: the old art school which provides general classrooms; Emmanuel Court which houses management courses; and a group of temporary buildings which are used for some of the college's childcare courses.

3 In 1996-97, the student population was 9,598 and this figure represents a 28 per cent growth since 1993-94. Nearly all the 3,321 full-time students are on courses which are funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The number of part-time students declined significantly in 1994-95 but thereafter they increased to reach their 1993-94 levels by 1996-97. During 1996-97, the college introduced a simplified management structure and was reorganised into nine academic departments. The college employs approximately 302 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 130 full-time equivalents are support staff and a further 28 full-time equivalent are agency staff.

4 The college draws its students from a large area of Birmingham and the West Midlands. Forty-five per cent of full-time students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and many of these

come from the inner-city area of Birmingham. In 1997, the percentage of 16-year-old pupils in Birmingham who gained grade C or above in five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects was 35 per cent, and this proportion is below the average for the West Midlands of 39 per cent and that for England of 45 per cent. The participation rate of students who remain in full-time education after the age of 16 in Birmingham is below the national average at 65.6 per cent in 1996. There are seven secondary schools in Sutton Coldfield and all have sixth forms. There are eight colleges of further education, three sixth form colleges and many secondary schools in Birmingham as a whole.

5 The college has an employers' forum which aims to serve industry across the city. The technology, business studies and secretarial and office technology departments are all providers of full-cost programmes for industry. The college is seeking to expand the level of its services to industry and it is working in partnership with local major industrial companies.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 12 January 1998. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years from 1995 to 1997. The inspectors found some discrepancies in these data. For example, a small amount of the data did not accord with the information contained in the pass lists issued by examining bodies. In the main, however, the inspectors were able to reach agreement with the college about students' achievements in the areas inspected. About two months before the inspection, the college was notified of the sample of areas to be inspected. The college's departments prepared self-assessment reports for particular curriculum areas. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors over 42 days and an auditor over four days. They observed 92 lessons, including tutorials, and examined students' work and a wide variety of college documents. Inspectors held meetings with governors, college staff, students, parents, local employers, members of the Birmingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and representatives from schools and community groups.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 61 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 5 per cent were found to be less than satisfactory or poor. 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 in the lessons inspected was 74 per cent compared with the average for general further education colleges of 73 per cent in 1996-97 according to the same report.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	6	4	0	0	10
GCSE	0	2	2	1	0	5
GNVQ	2	3	11	1	0	17
NVQ	0	4	4	0	1	9
Other vocational	15	24	10	2	0	51
Total	17	39	31	4	1	92

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics

Grade 4

8 Twelve lessons were observed. The inspection covered: access courses; courses leading to general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCSE; the qualifications of the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G); the key skill of application of number within vocational courses and the mathematics provision in the college's open learning centre. The self-assessment report, which was principally concerned with science, made insufficient reference to mathematics and it identified only a few strengths and weaknesses in relation to this subject area. Some of these weaknesses were also identified by the inspectors but they found others. Although the inspectors agreed with some of the strengths, they considered that the college had judged the quality of its mathematics provision to be better than it really was.

Key strengths

- GCE A level students' enthusiasm for, and close involvement in, their studies
- the help and support with numeracy provided by the open learning centre
- new developments to increase the range of mathematics courses

Weaknesses

- the insufficient involvement of students in learning activities in many lessons
- the failure to meet the needs of some students with poor social and mathematical skills
- the poor achievements of students on many courses, especially GCSE mathematics
- students' poor attendance, punctuality and retention rates

- unsatisfactory arrangements for collating and analysing information on students' achievements
- a lack of planning and co-ordination in the teaching of GCSE mathematics and the application of number key skill on general national vocational qualifications (GNVQ) courses
- insufficient resources, unsuitable accommodation and little staff development

9 Some teachers are committed to ensuring that they teach their subject well and that the students are successful. In many of the GCE A level mathematics lessons, the teaching is pitched at an appropriate level and the students participate fully in the learning activities. When necessary, teachers provide their students with additional help. A well-established and useful mathematics support service is provided each day by the open learning centre to help students on a one-to-one basis. In the less successful lessons, teachers failed to engage the interest and attention of students fully. They allowed the pace of work to become too slow and they spent too much time dictating notes. Some students were disruptive and they had done little work in preparation for the lesson. Students' punctuality and attendance were often poor. Some lessons started late and finished early. There were insufficient resources and some lessons took place in unsuitable accommodation. Some staff found it difficult to cope with classes in which some students had varying levels of mathematical skills, and also poor social skills.

10 In general, students' achievements over the last three years have been below the national average in GCE and GCSE for further education colleges. The pass rate on most GCE A level courses in mathematics is below the national average. On GCE A level mathematics courses enrolments have increased by 78 per cent over the past three years but the retention rate has

Curriculum Areas

declined from 84 to 64 per cent. The results in GCSE mathematics have been consistently below the national average for further education colleges for the last three years. Enrolments for GCSE courses have increased by 26 per cent whilst the retention rates of GCSE students have declined from 88 to 74 per cent over the same period. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that poor retention rates remain a significant problem, particularly in relation to the GCSE course and the recently-introduced C&G foundation course in numeracy. The report does not acknowledge, however, that the GCSE mathematics 'resit' course does not meet the needs of many students who take it. There is no reference in the report's action plan to the need to find alternative provision for these students.

the accommodation used for the teaching of mathematics is unsuitable. The college is addressing these problems with resources. Mathematics teachers have received little recent staff development training.

11 Arrangements for the collection and analysis of information about students' performance in mathematics are unsatisfactory. Recently-introduced manuals on quality assurance procedures for courses are incomplete. There are no examples of documented analysis of students' achievement or retention rates. At the time of the inspection, there was a vacancy for the post of senior programme leader for mathematics. The teaching on the GCSE course for full-time students and the teaching of the key skill of application of number on GNVQ courses across the college are not well planned and properly co-ordinated. There are insufficient paper-based learning materials or other resources for teaching mathematics. Some of

Examples of students' achievements in mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level mathematics one and two-year provision	Retention (%)	84	61	64
	Pass rate (%)	52	68	57
GCSE mathematics	Retention (%)	88	84	74
	Pass rate (%)	25	29	26

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

12 Ten lessons were inspected in the department of technology. This department provides a wide range of engineering courses at craft and technician level. As the self-assessment states, these courses meet the needs of full-time students, part-time students in employment, and local industries. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. However, many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors differed from those identified by the college.

Key strengths

- the broad range of engineering courses and learning activities
- the effective use of relevant industrial applications in teaching and learning
- the good retention rates on some courses
- the well-equipped modern technology centre at Lichfield Road
- the good-quality teaching accommodation at Lichfield Road

Weaknesses

- the lack of detail in schemes of work
- the insufficient involvement of students in learning activities in some lessons
- poor pass rates on some courses
- the lack of quantitative performance indicators and targets in course reports
- the unattractive appearance of the mechanical workshop at Erdington

13 Courses are funded by the FEFC, the local TEC, and local employers. Courses funded by the FEFC include both full-time and part-time day-release courses. The local TEC funds full-time and part-time skills-based courses.

Full-cost short courses, for example on hydraulics, are provided for local employers. The advanced engineering centre which the college has set up to provide specialist courses for companies, uses the latest manufacturing and process control technologies.

14 The self-assessment report contained no comments on the quality of teaching and learning. Most schemes of work consist of a list of teaching topics, and give little indication of the activities to be undertaken in lessons. On most courses, students experience a suitable mix of activities, including theory teaching, laboratory and workshop tasks and computer-based work. On many courses, students are required to complete assignments that relate to industrial situations. Students' briefing sheets on assignments clearly state the tasks required of the students, the timescale within which they must be completed and the penalties for the late submission of work. Students' work is usually marked and returned promptly. In many lessons, teachers use relevant handouts but some are of poor quality. Students' projects on full-time courses have a strong and realistic industrial basis. For example, when carrying out their projects, students on electronics courses are given a total cost for components which they must not exceed. In some lessons, teachers did not ensure that students were fully involved in learning. Teaching aids were not always used to best effect. In a few lessons, teachers failed to monitor the progress of individual students.

15 Most students are industrious during lessons and work with a minimum of supervision. Students' work is of an appropriate standard. Students' attendance is satisfactory and during the inspection it was 80 per cent. Some students were late for lessons despite a departmental system whereby action is taken against persistent latecomers. Retention rates on a number of courses are above average. For example in 1996-97, the retention rate on the first certificate in engineering course was 92 per

Curriculum Areas

cent and in 1995-96, it was 100 per cent on the C&G servicing course in electronics. The pass rate on a number of courses is below the national average. In 1996-97, the pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course in engineering was 39 per cent, and it was 38 per cent on the national diploma course. The self-assessment report did not comment upon students' achievements on these courses.

16 There is a clear management structure. Course teams meet regularly. Thorough internal verification procedures are being extended to all courses. Annual reports are produced by course teams. Reports identify relevant strengths and weaknesses and have action plans for improving quality. Although the department monitors its progress towards the achievement of specified targets, it does so without numerical data such as students' achievements. The lack of such data is not mentioned in the self-assessment report. At Lichfield Road, engineering is housed in a suite of modern teaching rooms. These contain good computing and laboratory equipment. As noted in the self-assessment report the college has received substantial funding from the competitiveness fund to equip a suite of rooms with modern hardware and software of industrial standard. The main

electrical and mechanical workshops at Erdington are equipped to the standard required by the relevant training bodies. Although suitable for teaching basic engineering skills, some of the equipment in the mechanical workshop is dated. Computer-controlled machinery is up to date. The recently-extended electrical workshops provide modern teaching facilities. Teachers and technician tutors are suitably qualified. Some have received specialist training in the handling and use of the recently-purchased modern equipment. All staff have industrial experience, although in some instances this is not recent.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Full-time, intermediate level	Retention (%)	88	76	75
	Pass rate (%)	84	72	55
Part-time, intermediate level	Retention (%)	88	92	76
	Pass rate (%)	52	41	37
Full-time, advanced level	Retention (%)	80	53	66
	Pass rate (%)	75	90	62
Part-time, advanced level	Retention (%)	99	86	85
	Pass rate (%)	52	75	64
Other	Retention (%)	97	99	89
	Pass rate (%)	69	66	77

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

17 Inspectors observed 13 lessons on a wide range of courses including GNVQ at all levels; GCE A level business studies; accounting on higher national certificate and Association of Accounting Technicians courses, marketing, management and personnel programmes. Although inspectors broadly agreed with judgements in the college's self-assessment report, it contained little reference to teaching and learning and did not fully evaluate students' achievements.

Key strengths

- the comprehensive planning and teaching of lessons
- the high quality of the learning materials
- the good standard of students' assessed work
- the high standard of students' achievements in many areas
- the well-organised curriculum and the effective arrangements for curriculum development
- the high quality of the resource centre

Weaknesses

- the decline in students' achievements and retention rates on some courses
- the lack of clear guidance for students on note-taking

18 Teaching and learning are carefully planned. Teachers provide the students with help and guidance in their learning. They use an effective range of teaching and learning methods and give students strong support in group activities. They make regular checks of students' understanding. The quality and breadth of learning materials prepared for students, including those used for their

induction, are a particular strength. Work experience is well planned. It is organised carefully to ensure that: it provides the students with a broad learning experience; furthers their personal development; relates to the rest of the course; and provides opportunities for the students' skills to be assessed fairly and effectively. The slow pace of a few lessons led to students becoming bored. Students were not always given appropriately clear guidance on how to take notes. Some teachers talked for too long and did not make good use of the handouts they gave their students. In a few lessons teachers did not give clear or accurate explanations of topics or concepts.

19 In general, students' achievements are good. The quality of students' work is good and, in some instances, such as management courses, it is high. Students receive detailed feedback on the quality of their assessed work. Internal verification processes are thorough. Verifiers frequently provide constructive written feedback to assessors. In the last three years, students' achievements, at all levels of GNVQ courses and in GCE A level business studies and Association of Accounting Technicians examinations, compare favourably with national pass rates. An analysis of students' achievements in GCE A level shows that many students obtain higher GCE A level grades than those predicted for them on the basis of the GCSE grades which they held when they started their course. Students' retention and attendance rates are high on a number of courses. On other courses, however, retention rates are falling, as the self-assessment report acknowledges. On some courses, such as those leading to the GNVQ at intermediate level, there has been a decline in students' achievements but this is not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

20 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the curriculum is well organised and that there is good curriculum development across a broad range of provision.

Curriculum Areas

The college has taken part in the piloting of a new GNVQ intermediate business course. The students' retention rate on this pilot course has been poor. The modular structure of the pilot course has been of some benefit to the students. For example, it has enabled some students who had to join the course late to commence their studies successfully and plan and organise their studies effectively. Management roles are clear and appropriate and communications between staff are effective. Minuted team meetings, comprehensive course files, and critical reviews of courses indicate the determination of staff to improve the quality of provision. Students spoke positively of their experiences at college. At departmental level, however, there are no data on the views of students about the quality of provision.

21 The staff are committed to furthering their professional development. All teachers are well qualified. Most have higher degrees and/or professional qualifications, and they also hold vocational assessor awards. Many are external examiners. The GNVQ resources centre and the management centre are first-class learning environments. As noted in the self-assessment

the high-quality resources centre provides students with a valuable opportunity to develop the skills of working on their own.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ intermediate business	Retention (%)	92	82	92
	Pass rate (%)	70	76	49
GNVQ advanced business	Retention (%)	93	76	63
	Pass rate (%)	66	76	64
GCSE accounting	Retention (%)	100	71	91
	Pass rate (%)	28	42	27
GCE A level business studies	Retention (%)	100	63	64
	Pass rate (%)	70	73	70
Association of Accounting Technicians intermediate (NVQ level 3 accounting)	Retention (%)	79	80	91
	Pass rate (%)	3	79	62

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Office/Secretarial Studies

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in administration at levels 1, 2 and 3 and secretarial group certificates of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It also included specialisms within medical and legal secretarial disciplines, and RSA Examinations Board (RSA) single subjects including computer literacy and information technology (IT). Thirteen lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report. In particular, inspection evidence supported the findings of an internal review completed subsequently. Some weaknesses found by the inspectors, however, had not been identified in the report.

Key strengths

- the well-planned schemes of work and lesson plans
- the high level of support available to students in lessons
- the training office
- the effective work experience scheme
- students' results in RSA single subject examinations
- the monitoring and recording of students' progress and tutors' reports on students
- up-to-date IT equipment and software, and modern office furnishings

Weaknesses

- the failure of teachers, in some lessons, to meet the needs of students of widely differing abilities
- insufficient integration of key skills and the inadequate assessment of students' attainment in key skills

- little accreditation of students' prior learning
- tasks that fail to develop students' understanding

23 Lessons have clear aims and objectives. Teachers check that students understand the lesson and that learning has taken place. In the best lessons, teachers used a suitable variety of different methods to encourage students to work effectively on their own. These strengths in teaching and learning were not identified in the self-assessment report. Relations between staff and students are good. There was particularly good practice in the management and organisation of the training office as a realistic working environment. A well-organised work experience programme helps students on courses leading to NVQs, to build up evidence of their achievements and this was recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. Weaknesses not identified in the self-assessment report included teachers' difficulties in managing classes containing students with widely differing abilities, and the failure to ensure the regular integration of students' attainments in key skills.

24 Some tasks and assignments set for students on courses leading to NVQs were unimaginative. Overall, students' attendance and retention rates are good. The work produced by students in IT skills is often of a high standard. Students in shorthand lessons showed a good grasp of theory. As identified in the self-assessment report, results in RSA single subject examinations are good, and many are above the national average. Students' portfolios of work on courses leading to NVQs are well organised. At NVQ level 3, care is taken to include evidence of students' achievements on work placements. Where students have relied upon evidence of their achievements in simulated tasks, rather than real work, their portfolios have been less impressive. During the last three years, there has been significant

Curriculum Areas

fluctuation in the pass rates of students on courses leading to NVQs, and some rates have been poor. There was, however, no reference to these pass rates in the self-assessment report. Most students, however, achieved a number of NVQ units and the college makes provision for these students to obtain a full NVQ subsequently.

25 The programmes are well managed, as indicated in the self-assessment report. There are effective systems for monitoring students' progress but as the self-assessment states, action planning for improving the students' performance is insufficiently systematic across the department. Students' additional support needs are identified and they are referred to the study centre for help, if necessary. However, many students prefer to receive support in a tutorial group. Staff follow up students' absences systematically but they are reluctant to withdraw students from a programme, even after their sustained and unexplained absence. The department has implemented the college's quality assurance systems well and has been the pilot for an internal audit and the production of a business plan. This plan aims to address issues not previously identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors considered that there was insufficient evidence to support

the claim in the self-assessment report that flexibly-arranged courses of study are available. The development of the learning and IT centre proposed in the action plan is, however, well advanced.

26 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the IT rooms available to the curriculum area are up to date. Rooms are well equipped and furnished. The facilities in the training office provide a particularly good training environment. The software in some rooms has been updated, though the weaknesses with some software, noted in the self-assessment report, have not yet been addressed. Much of the equipment is not fully used. Staff are well qualified, but do not yet have the necessary qualifications to accredit students' prior learning.

Examples of students' achievements in office/secretarial studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 2 administration	Retention (%)	94	84	88
	Pass rate (%)	73	46	52
NVQ level 3 administration	Retention (%)	82	87	70
	Pass rate (%)	57	70	56
Shorthand speed	Retention (%)	86	96	88
	Pass rate (%)	61	63	81
RSA audio and wordprocessing	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	87	56	76

Source: college data

*continuous enrolment prevents calculation of an annual retention figure

Curriculum Areas

Care and Childcare

Grade 2

27 Fourteen lessons were observed on courses in care and childcare. In the main, inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment of care and childcare. Detailed and comprehensive self-assessments were completed by all the teams in the department and were collated to form an overall self-assessment report. This gave a clear account of the strengths of the department with which the inspection agreed. The report failed, however, to identify some weaknesses in teaching and learning. Several of the weaknesses stated in the self-assessment had been addressed effectively by the time the inspection took place.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- support for individual students
- some outstanding and many good examination pass rates
- the students' success in progressing to higher education, or to appropriate employment
- well-managed curriculum areas and courses
- the vocational experience of the staff

Weaknesses

- poor attendance rates on several courses
- poor and declining retention rates on some courses
- the failure to extend students' knowledge in some poor lessons
- the lack of clear targets in the department's development plan

28 The recently-created department of care and childcare studies offers Edexcel courses at

foundation, intermediate and advanced level in childcare studies, care and health sciences and courses in children's care and education that prepare students for careers in nursery nursing. Several counselling and access to higher education courses are also offered.

29 Teachers plan courses carefully. Schemes of work are constructed to cover the requirements of syllabuses and to provide a range of interesting and imaginative learning experiences for students. Most lessons provided students with a variety of appropriate activities which included opportunities for students to organise their own learning. Some students made good use of these opportunities but others did not. Teachers support students well. During lessons they gave effective help to students in planning work. In a few lessons, teaching failed to extend students' knowledge or understanding sufficiently. Teachers did not always make good use of visual aids. Students were attentive in lessons but their attendance was poor on several courses. Students arrived late for a number of lessons.

30 Pass rates are good and, in some cases, outstanding. In 1996 and 1997, the pass rate on the BTEC national diploma course in caring services was 100 per cent. In 1996, the pass rate on the BTEC national diploma course in health studies was 100 per cent, and in 1997, it was 92 per cent. There are also high pass rates on access and counselling courses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's judgements about low retention rates on GNVQ courses. On two of these courses, the proportion of students who complete their course has declined over the last three years. A large proportion of students on the access to higher education courses in nursing and midwifery progress to higher level courses in nursing or related subjects. Students on the BTEC national diploma course in health studies are successful in progressing to higher education.

Curriculum Areas

31 Courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly and good records are kept of decisions taken and of action needed. Well-kept manuals contain appropriate documentation for each course. Teaching teams have written criteria for good teaching. They have also agreed on the factors that make courses effective and they refer to these to help them to decide how courses will be taught. The plans of each curriculum team reflect the departmental plan. However, there is a need for more precise targets at all levels, especially for students' achievements and retention rates. The self-assessment report notes strengths in staffing, and weaknesses in resources. Inspectors concluded that accommodation and equipment had both strengths and weaknesses. There were good specialist rooms with appropriate equipment in the main building but teaching rooms on the other sites were bare and utilitarian.

Examples of students' achievements in care and childcare, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma nursery nursing	Retention (%)	86	61	82
	Pass rate (%)	90	100	75
BTEC diploma caring services	Retention (%)	88	83	76
	Pass rate (%)	86	100	100
BTEC diploma sciences (health studies)	Retention (%)	85	79	68
	Pass rate (%)	91	100	92
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	78	39
	Pass rate (%)	*	72	71
Access to health careers	Retention (%)	78	62	68
	Pass rate (%)	94	80	84

Source: college data

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 1

32 Inspectors observed 18 lessons across a range of specialist art and design courses. These included: BTEC national diploma courses in graphic design, multi-disciplinary design, fashion and textiles, three-dimensional design, illustration; BTEC foundation and GNVQ advanced courses in art and design; and GCE A level courses in art. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths which the college gave in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- high-quality teaching in all programmes
- the strong emphasis upon drawing skills and the use of colour
- the thorough attention to art and design history
- students' achievements well above the national average for vocational courses
- above average retention rates on vocational courses
- the high number of students progressing to higher education or relevant employment
- efficient and effective management of all aspects of the curriculum
- effective tutorials
- good range of specialist equipment

Weaknesses

- little specific provision for part-time students
- inaccessibility of accommodation to wheelchair users
- the significant number of computers with insufficient memory to run industrial application programs

33 The college offers an extensive range of full-time courses in art and design, including one at higher education level. Students said that they were attracted to these courses because of the art and design department's long-standing and good reputation. Vocational courses are well established and these offer students clear progression routes. Many of the specialist design courses at advanced level have been recently developed from broader and more general courses. Although some students progress from one course to another within the college, most students are on courses which lead to higher education institutions. There is little provision which is specifically for part-time students. Arrangements are made for part-time students to attend elements of full-time courses.

34 Teachers work well as a team. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teaching and learning programmes are well planned and schemes of work are detailed. All assignment briefs are detailed and they are written in a standard way to include aims and objectives. There are high standards of teaching on all the courses. It is particularly strong in the art and design history component. Tutorials are effective. Students receive guidance from staff who are practising professionals across a range of vocational work in art and design. Arrangements for assessing students' work are clearly defined and teachers communicate them to their students effectively. On all courses, strong emphasis is placed on the development of students' skills in drawing and the use of colour. Most students on the advanced level courses achieve good formal skills in drawing and painting. IT is effectively taught to students who have differing levels of attainment and ability.

35 As recognised in the self-assessment, students' achievements are well above the national pass rates for all advanced vocational courses in further education colleges. The overall retention rate is also above the national average for vocational courses. In 1997, there was a significant decline in students' retention

Curriculum Areas

rates on the GNVQ course at intermediate level. Many students progress to higher education courses. On some courses, and on GCE A level courses in particular, students' punctuality and attendance are poor. Work experience arrangements for graphic design students are good but they are less satisfactory on some of the other specialist design courses.

spacious and could accommodate more students.

36 Course reviews are thorough, although the setting of specific targets is not well established. The monitoring and evaluation of courses are linked to strategic and operational planning. There is, however, no long-term plan for developing the curriculum. Some course documents are inaccurate. Teachers are well qualified and many have relevant and recent professional experience. The quantity and quality of technical support are good. Some staff have little experience of teaching students with disabilities. Some part-time staff are used inappropriately as course tutors. Under the terms of their contracts, they are only on the college premises at certain times during the week and, consequently, they may not be available when students want to see them. The department has a good range of equipment. IT equipment is available for all students. Computing is well integrated with course programmes, but most of the computers have insufficient memory to run industrial applications programs. Several studios are

Examples of students' achievements in art and design, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, national diplomas and certificates, BTEC foundation, access)	Retention (%)	69	73	83
	Pass rate (%)	96	93	98
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	80	85	60
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

37 Twelve lessons were observed in history, psychology and sociology. These subjects are taught on GCSE and GCE A level courses, and within an access to higher education programme. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment of the quality of the humanities provision. The self-assessment report did not, however, sufficiently emphasise weaknesses in students' achievements and retention rates.

Key strengths

- the good quality of the teaching
- the importance given to the development of students' critical and analytical skills
- the encouragement given to students to develop communication skills
- the careful assessment of students' work
- the good results in GCE A level psychology and sociology and on the access course
- the high number of students progressing to higher education
- the innovative development of the curriculum

Weaknesses

- the narrow range of teaching methods
- poor attendance by students
- some very poor retention rates
- poor examination results in GCSE and GCE A level history
- some poor-quality accommodation

38 Inspectors broadly agreed with the claim in the self-assessment that teaching is generally effective and that teachers use up-to-date learning materials. An impressive feature of the

teaching was the encouragement given to students to think for themselves rather than rely on the text book or the teacher for answers, theories or interpretations. Most lessons are well structured. Information is presented in a logical and ordered way which enables students to understand key concepts and assimilate new knowledge. In a psychology class on Freud, the teacher presented the main theories and associated experiments in a stimulating and rigorous way, which held the students' interest. Teachers made effective use of question and answer techniques.

39 Those students who attend lessons regularly display good understanding and acquisition of what is being taught. The best written work by students is well presented and analytical and it demonstrates their good understanding of the topic or concept under consideration. A significant minority of work is poorly presented and contains elementary errors in content, interpretation, grammar and spelling. Assessment is used well by staff to inform and improve students' learning. Using excellent proformas, the staff provide students with detailed comments on the quality of their work and they allocate grades according to clear criteria. Attendance and completion rates on some courses are very poor, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. During the inspection, the average attendance was 69 per cent, well below the college's target.

Examination results are good in sociology and psychology at GCE A level, where they are above the pass rates for further education colleges, and on the access to higher education course. Many students progress to higher education.

40 Teachers are well qualified. They are fully informed about changes to the examination syllabus in their subject areas. There has been some innovative curriculum development and this has led to the creation of the new critical thinking course. The inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that there is scope for improving the quality of course

Curriculum Areas

reviews. Recently, course teams have been meeting more regularly and decisions taken at meetings have been recorded more systematically. The inspectors also agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the 'subject quality manuals' need to be improved in order that quality assurance may be carried out with greater care and rigour. At present, no comparison is made between the grades students achieve in GCE A level and the GCSE grades they held on starting their GCE A level course. The identification of the value-added factor of their experience in the college could improve quality assurance.

41 Some accommodation is good but much is poor. A great deal of teaching takes place in rooms without visual displays or any sense of identity with a subject. They are, in many instances, uncomfortable. The library resources for this curriculum area are adequate. Resource bases for subject areas have, however, not been developed. As the self-assessment report recognises, there is scope for greater use of IT across courses and subjects.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level sociology	Retention (%)	100	44	38
	Pass rate (%)	45	69	71
GCE A level psychology	Retention (%)	100	48	48
	Pass rate (%)	68	76	77
GCE A level history	Retention (%)	76	64	65
	Pass rate (%)	47	49	56
Access to higher education (humanities)	Retention (%)	*	64	62
	Pass rate (%)	*	95	97
GCSE all nine subjects (average)	Retention (%)	*	81	84
	Pass rate (%)	32	43	33

Source: college data

*data not available

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

42 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They found other strengths and weaknesses, however, which the college had not recognised. The college has already taken action to address some of the identified weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the quality of the advice and guidance for students before enrolment
- the new induction and enrolment procedures
- the range of additional learning support available to students
- the quality of the guidance and advice for students on progression to higher education and employment
- the effective financial support and advice for students

Weaknesses

- the poor implementation of the college's tutorial policy
- the inadequate arrangements for reporting the progress of students receiving additional support for their learning
- the low uptake of additional learning support

43 Prospective students receive impartial advice and guidance. Recruitment methods include visits to schools and open days.

The college advertises its courses in the local press, on the radio, on buses, in the libraries and through a home page on the Internet. The prospectus is informative and attractive. Course booklets and leaflets are not well presented. The college does not produce publicity materials in community languages.

There are clear and thorough procedures for students' enrolment and induction. The college recognises that the accreditation of students' prior learning and experience is not well developed. Most students said that they had found enrolment and induction procedures to be effective.

44 All full-time students are diagnosed to establish whether they require additional support for literacy and numeracy. The additional learning support available for all students is of good quality and it includes help with communications, numeracy, language and study skills. The college produces a range of materials and services to meet the requirements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students can obtain additional support for their learning by calling at the college's study centre. They can receive support through group sessions or one-to-one tutorials. The study centre has received the approval of the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). Assessment of the support required for students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties is carried out by external agencies. There are regular reviews of students' progress by additional learning support tutors. Much of the documentation about students who receive support is thorough but there is no effective system for informing course or subject teachers about the progress of these students. The number of students receiving basic skills support is low in relation to those who have been identified as being in need of help. The self-assessment report identifies the provision of additional learning support as a strength but it does not refer to the ineffective reporting of students' progress to course teachers.

45 Full-time students have regular tutorials. There is little tutorial support for part-time students. Inspectors did not agree with the college that all course tutors work to achieve agreed standards for tutorials and that they are well planned. Some schemes of work for tutorials are poor and planning documentation

Cross-college Provision

for individual tutorials is weak. Tutors willingly provide students with help and support outside tutorial periods. In most curriculum areas, meetings are held from time to time at which parents of students aged 16 to 19 are informed of the progress of their sons or daughters and of the careers options open to them. In some curriculum areas, students' progress is adequately monitored during tutorials. There are, however, no systematic arrangements for carrying out such monitoring across the college.

46 The college's guidance and advice service on progression to higher education and employment is effective, as the self-assessment report indicates. Most tutorial programmes include useful guidance on higher education and careers. Many students progress to higher education. Information centres provide a wide and appropriate range of materials on careers including CD-ROM databases, videos, films and books. The library also holds some careers information. A local careers service is contracted to provide students with additional guidance and talks about careers. The college offers extensive guidance and help on courses and career options to students, their parents and members of the local community, after the publication of examination results.

47 The college has reorganised its personal counselling service. The self-assessment report indicates that there had been poor access to, and insufficient use of, the counselling service. The college has recently addressed this problem by providing students with information on counselling at induction and by publicising the service more widely. Students who had used the service considered that it had met their personal requirements. The counsellor holds an appropriate professional qualification. Students are referred to outside agencies for help where appropriate. The college provides a useful financial support and advice service which is well used. It is responsible for the administration of the college access funds and it provides information for students on other

sources of financial support. It also provides students with assistance in relation to travel and social security matters. Childcare facilities are available at the Lichfield Road Site, but not at the Erdington Site.

General Resources

Grade 2

48 The inspection covered many of the college's general resources and facilities, including learning resources. Inspectors' judgements were broadly in agreement with those in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- the quality of much of the accommodation
- the new student and staff refectory building
- the range and quality of general resources
- the strategy to improve the availability of IT resources
- the effective monitoring of room usage
- well-planned maintenance programme for equipment and accommodation

Weaknesses

- the poor quality of some facilities at some centres
- the poor accessibility of the Erdington Site and the design centre for wheelchair users
- the lack of a computer network for premises other than the Lichfield Road Centre

49 The college has made several improvements to its resources since the last inspection. College managers and governors

Cross-college Provision

have given high priority to investment in accommodation and equipment, as outlined in the strategic plan. There are well-planned short-term and long-term maintenance programmes. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that vocational areas are well equipped.

50 The college is located on five centres, four of which are within one mile of each other. The main centre at Lichfield Road is spacious and has extensive grounds. It has a mix of old buildings, some modern premises and 16 temporary classrooms. The premises are well decorated and there is clear signposting to all parts of the site. Most teaching accommodation is well maintained. Classrooms are clean and tidy. Most are well furnished but some temporary classrooms are not. As recognised in the self-assessment, some of the accommodation at other centres is poor compared with that at Lichfield Road.

51 At Lichfield Road, there are ramps to assist wheelchair users and there are lifts to upper floors. The inaccessibility to wheelchair users of parts of the buildings at other centres is identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. At the Erdington Site, only the ground floor is accessible to wheelchair users and some parts of the design centre are inaccessible to them. Students in wheelchairs can only reach teaching and communal facilities at the design centre by using the goods lift.

52 Accommodation at the Lichfield Road Centre is well managed. There are maintenance and minor works programmes which aim to ensure the continuous improvement of the accommodation. A 10-year maintenance programme has been recently updated, following advice from a professional surveyor. The use of accommodation is effectively managed.

53 During 1997-98, the college is implementing a capital programme costing £2.36 million. Work already completed includes

the new block housing student and staff refectories, leisure facilities and a new learning resources centre at Lichfield Road. This resource centre is double the size of the existing library, which it will replace. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that there is a need to increase the bookstock in the library. College managers have allowed for a 20 per cent increase in the library budget for the next three years.

54 Learning resources are well managed and they meet the needs of the different curriculum areas. As recognised in the self-assessment report, good support is available for students to develop computing skills in the learning resource centres. Students' use of these facilities is carefully monitored. The college has invested significantly in computing equipment and has adopted a good strategy to extend the single college IT network in stages. The network is now in place in the main buildings but it has not yet been extended to the other main centres. Computing facilities, including the Internet and many CD-ROM applications, are readily available to students. A strategy to upgrade existing computers to a common standard is being achieved. The ratio of computer workstations to students is 1:10.

55 Facilities for students at the Lichfield Road Centre are outstanding. The new building and the adjacent sports hall and fitness area provide high-quality communal and recreational facilities. Inspectors' judgements concurred with the self-assessment findings that students' facilities on the other sites are of a poorer standard. There is limited provision for hot meals at the design centre and the library is closed during the lunch hour.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

56 The college's assessment of its quality assurance focused on recent developments and made little reference to strengths and weaknesses before 1997. In relation to its quality assurance arrangements, some of the strengths were overstated and some weaknesses found by the inspectors were overlooked.

Key strengths

- the revised and improved quality assurance system
- the college's monitoring of the measurable standards of performance specified in the college charter
- the comprehensive staff development programme linked to strategic and course team plans
- the useful surveys of the views of students and staff
- the reliability of the statistical data used in the self-assessment process
- the internal verification systems

Weaknesses

- the lack of rigour in some course reviews
- uneven use of performance targets and indicators
- shortcomings in the evidence base used for self-assessment
- the lack of clear standards for some cross-college services
- insufficient development in measuring the value-added factor in students' achievements

57 Progress on some aspects of quality assurance in the college has been slow until recently, as noted in the self-assessment report.

The college has a clear commitment to improving its quality. The previous quality assurance system was based upon a system of course reviews, which were presented to departmental boards of study and to the academic board. Some of the reviews lacked detail, particularly in respect of performance indicators and action plans for improving provision. Little action resulted from the reports to academic board and there was no overview of the college's performance. Reports from external verifiers, as stated in the self-assessment, show that the college has reliable internal verification procedures.

58 The revised quality assurance system, introduced in 1997, is clearly linked to the strategic planning cycle and self-assessment process. As a result, staff teams have been able to identify their strengths clearly and decide on the actions needed to address any weaknesses. All course teams are required to maintain quality manuals designed to support the self-assessment process and to help staff to improve the quality of provision. The manuals include data on performance and they record progress towards the achievement of targets. Some manuals are more detailed and complete than others.

59 The college has introduced a system of 'continuous quality improvement'. Departments and cross-college services regularly monitor the quality of the provision they make. In addition, detailed information about the quality of the college's performance is obtained through surveys of the views of students and staff, and from comprehensive data produced by the college's information system. The new quality assurance system is well devised but, as the self-assessment recognises, it is too early to judge whether it is effective. In both this and the previous inspection, inspectors found that the college did not have a systematic approach to calculating the value-added factor in students' achievements. Staff have carried out some useful work on ways of calculating the

Cross-college Provision

value-added factor, but its effectiveness has not been widespread across the college. Some curriculum areas analyse and evaluate students' achievements more thoroughly than others.

60 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that its self-assessment process, which involved all employees and covered all aspects of the college's work, was a strength. The self-assessment report was the first produced by the college. It identified strengths and weaknesses and incorporated an action plan to address weaknesses. It included a statement on progress made since the previous inspection. Teams of staff were trained to carry out the self-assessment process. Using performance data provided centrally, they produced separate self-assessment reports from which the college's main self-assessment report and action plan were derived. The main self-assessment report was moderated by the college's strategic self-assessment group and it was approved by the senior management team. However, the college did not involve any external organisations, or people from outside the college such as employers, in checking the report. The college has recognised that there are weaknesses in the evidence base for the report. For example, insufficient use was made of data on performance and there is little evidence about the quality of teaching and learning because formal observation of teachers' and students' work in the classroom did not form part of the self-assessment or quality assurance process. In accordance with its action plan, the college has begun to strengthen its evidence base for self-assessment. For example, systematic observation of teaching and learning now takes place and two audits have been rigorously carried out of the way the curriculum is planned, developed and implemented. Progress in fulfilling the action plans arising from the self-assessment process has been carefully monitored.

61 The college has identified standards for its provision and it has developed some useful

criteria for quality assurance. The inspectors did not agree with the claim, made in the self-assessment report, that these standards apply to all areas of the college's work. For example, standards have not been identified for some cross-college services. The monitoring of the college's performance against these standards was incomplete.

62 The college charter contains clear and measurable standards. It is supported by a carefully monitored college complaints procedure and a detailed plan for assessing the college's performance against these standards.

63 Inspectors agreed with the statement in the self-assessment report that staff development is comprehensive and linked to strategic and team plans. Most staff say that they have an annual interview at which their professional development and staff development needs are discussed. The budget for staff development is £40,000. This does not allow for substantial costs, such as those for training assessors and for providing cover for staff who are away on training. An extensive range of staff development activities includes external courses and conferences and, increasingly, training events within the college. Support is given to staff who wish to improve their professional qualifications. Industrial placements enable staff to update their vocational knowledge and skills. Staff new to the college receive an induction pack and undergo an induction programme.

64 In 1993, the college decided to aim for the Investor in People award, but it has not yet achieved it. Progress in developing a staff appraisal system has been slow until recently. A new appraisal system for all college employees has been introduced. Some 70 per cent of staff have now been appraised. In discussion with inspectors, staff said they had found the appraisal valuable in helping them to identify their strengths and strategies for their professional development.

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Governance

Grade 2

65 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but a number of weaknesses in relation to governance have yet to be addressed.

Key strengths

- the governors' broad range of skills and experience
- the effective use of committees
- the thorough self-evaluation of the corporation's performance
- the extensive involvement of governors in the development of strategic plans
- the good working relationships between governors and senior management
- the effective clerking arrangements
- the particularly successful monitoring by the audit committee

Weaknesses

- procedures for informing governors about progress in strategic planning not fully implemented
- the insufficient provision of non-financial management information for governors

66 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

67 The current membership of the corporation comprises the principal, two staff governors, two co-opted governors, 11 independent governors and a TEC nominee. Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds. The corporation

has resolved to reduce its membership to 15. The search committee recommends the appointment of governors on the basis of merit, bearing in mind the need to maintain an experienced and balanced membership. Appointment procedures for governors are inadequately documented. New governors receive induction and appropriate guidance. They are also offered regular training. Governors conduct their business efficiently, take an active interest in the college, and clearly understand the distinction between governance and management. As noted in the self-assessment the corporation has recently completed a thorough review of its own performance.

68 Clerking arrangements for the corporation are effective. The corporation meets at least once a term. Governors receive well-written reports. Detailed minutes of meetings are kept. Most meetings are well attended but the attendance of a number of governors has been sporadic. Corporation minutes and papers, excepting a small number of confidential items, are available for public inspection. The corporation adopted an early model code of conduct for its members. This is not now sufficiently detailed. The corporation adopted an early model for a register of interests but this is not sufficiently comprehensive. It does not include all governors' financial interests and involvement with organisations which could give rise to a conflict of interest. Standing orders have not been established to guide the conduct of the corporation and its committees.

69 As indicated in the self-assessment report, governors are extensively involved in the strategic planning process. The operating plan provides specific targets, timescales and responsibilities for those aspects of the strategic plan which the college intends to implement in 1997-98. Governors regularly discuss progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives, but the corporation is not provided with specific written reports which indicate progress in

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meeting short-term objectives. The corporation does not receive sufficient management information on students' enrolments, retention rates and destinations. The governors have not received reports about the extent to which the college's health and safety policies are monitored.

70 The budget is debated fully by governors. The college's strategic plans and financial forecasts are appropriately integrated, and estimates of income and expenditure are realistic. Governors receive sufficiently detailed financial management information at regular intervals.

71 Much of the detailed work of the corporation is undertaken by its committees which meet regularly. Each committee has written terms of reference that have been approved by the corporation. Existing terms of reference for the strategy, finance and resources committee do not comprehensively define its role and responsibilities, such as those it has for monitoring the effectiveness of the capital expenditure programmes. This committee receives financial management information at monthly intervals. The audit committee monitors the implementation of audit recommendations effectively and it has developed performance indicators for internal audit.

Management

Grade 2

72 In the main, inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its strengths in management. Some strengths and weaknesses were, however, understated. The self-assessment report offered no evidence to substantiate weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the staff's good understanding of the college's mission and objectives

- the effective strategic and operating plans
- good communications
- the responsiveness to community needs
- thorough market research
- the staff's clear understanding of the revised management structure
- the competency and effectiveness of the finance team
- the effective financial planning arrangements and the reliable reporting on financial matters

Weaknesses

- some inefficient deployment of staff
- underdeveloped departmental business plans
- insufficient use by middle managers of management information

73 The college is effectively managed and it is able to achieve most of its objectives. Managers review the curriculum regularly and they usually take effective action on curricular issues when necessary. There is a clear schedule of management meetings and comprehensive minutes are kept of these. The minutes suggest that some issues are not satisfactorily resolved at meetings because they are raised again under 'matters arising' when the minutes are discussed at subsequent meetings. The college has recently commissioned an independent bench marking exercise to review the college's performance. The inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the academic board was ineffective. The college has reconstituted the academic board as a means of improving its effectiveness.

74 The comprehensive strategic plan has clear aims and objectives and these are well understood by staff at all levels. It has demanding targets and is firmly linked to the college's financial objectives. Most staff have the

Cross-college Provision

opportunity to participate in strategic planning and in the formulation of business plans.

The operating plan is well presented. It includes quantitative targets and timescales within which these must be reached and it clearly specifies responsibilities for managers. In addition, managers are set targets against which their performance can be measured. Departmental plans are at an early stage of development and they lack quantitative targets.

75 The new management structure builds on the best features of the structure it has replaced, and it is proving effective. Most staff are clear about their roles. The tasks of assistant principals are clearly linked to the strategic plan. Staff believe that the new management structure has removed some duplication of roles and that it has reduced bureaucracy.

Departmental managers have more responsibilities than before and they are carrying these out well. The changes in the way the college is managed have been introduced carefully and with sensitivity in order that staff may adjust to them easily. As the self-assessment report indicates, communications within the college are good. Checks have been carried out to ensure that the college complies with health and safety regulations. These have led to departmental action plans for ensuring that health and safety priorities are met.

76 Although the majority of staff are effectively and efficiently deployed, a significant number are not. This was identified in the self-assessment report and effective measures have been taken to address this weakness. Some areas of the college make substantial use of part-time staff. Fifteen part-time teachers and four agency teachers are used as course tutors and some do not have enough time to attend to all the needs of the students in their tutorial groups.

77 The college offers a wide range of courses. There are close working relationships with the TEC, special schools and other further education

providers. College managers are well represented on many local educational bodies. The college has a number of higher education partnerships with local universities. Some local employers said that although they found the college supportive towards them, it did not always respond to their needs promptly enough. The college has a good working relationship with a local motor company which has an open learning centre on its premises. College staff run NVQ programmes for the company's employees in this centre using open learning methods whereby the employees work on their own at times which suit them, using learning materials suited to their individual needs.

In addition, college staff run some distance learning programmes from this centre for those who cannot attend it regularly and who may need to study away from the company's premises or at home. The college provides short courses for industry. College staff thoroughly research the needs of the local labour market and the extent of the competition from other educational institutions locally. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively throughout the college but this is not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

78 The college's management information system provides a wide and useful range of data on students, including information about their achievements and retention rates. It also maintains a record of some of the students' views about the college and its provision. In general, the non-financial information provided by the system is accurate and it can be produced promptly. The inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that this information is not always presented in ways which help managers to carry out their duties more effectively.

79 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Financial forecasts and strategic plans are appropriately integrated, and the procedure by which they are

Cross-college Provision

established is clear and well understood. Management accounts are produced within 10 working days, in accordance with best practice, and are regularly considered by governors and senior management. Budget holders receive comprehensive and timely reports on expenditure, and expert advice when required. Comprehensive financial regulations have been established, and financial procedures have been appropriately maintained. A comprehensive external review of the college's performance has recently been undertaken. The college's internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's internal control system. An effective and appropriately qualified finance team is led by the college accountant.

this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

Conclusions

80 The college's self-assessment report was linked to the college's strategic and operating plans and to the recently-revised quality assurance procedures. The report provided a useful basis for the inspection. However, the teaching and learning sections of the self-assessment reports were insubstantial, reflecting the fact that the college had not undertaken any observation of teaching and learning before producing its self-assessment report. The observation of teaching has now been introduced in all departments. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment view that some sections of the self-assessment report were significantly better than others. There was a close correlation between grades awarded by inspectors and those in the self-assessment report. The inspection team concluded that the self-assessment process had strengths. In particular, it had led to the widespread involvement of staff in the monitoring and evaluation of their own and the college's performance and the accelerated development of the college's quality assurance system.

81 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	31
19-24 years	15
25+ years	52
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	13
Intermediate	17
Advanced	52
Higher education	6
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	12
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	613	777	14
Construction	10	26	0
Engineering	233	595	9
Business	560	1,698	23
Hotel and catering	103	2	1
Health and community care	421	1,174	17
Art and design	400	128	6
Humanities	921	1,596	26
Basic education	60	281	4
Total	3,321	6,277	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	136	8	28	172
Supporting direct learning contact	34	3	0	37
Other support	83	10	0	93
Total	253	21	28	302

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£10,708,000	£11,273,000	*
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£15.83	£16.09	£16.79
Payroll as a proportion of income	65%	64%	*
Achievement of funding target	106%	104%	*
Diversity of income	37%	32%	*
Operating surplus	£769,000	£521,000	*

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

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)

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

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

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (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	432	453	448
	Average point score per entry	3.4	3.9	3.8
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	255	290	348
	Percentage achieving qualification	80%	84%	81%
	Position in tables	middle third	top third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	211	251
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	73%	61%
	Position in tables	*	top 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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**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
April 1998**