

Stoke-on-Trent College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL*

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 104 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Stoke-on-Trent College

West Midlands Region

Inspected October 1999

Stoke-on-Trent College is a large further education college, which serves Stoke-on-Trent and its locality. It recruits many students from disadvantaged areas. The achievements of local school-leavers are low compared with national standards, but improving. The college's self-assessment involved all staff. It was built up from the reports of individual teams and groups and supported by extensive lesson observation. The report was moderated by senior managers and approved by the corporation. Inspectors agreed with some judgements in the report but considered that the significance of some weaknesses, particularly in relation to students' retention and achievements and the quality of teaching, had been understated.

The college has made substantial progress since the last inspection. That inspection was carried out at a time when the corporation and senior management were undergoing substantial change. The college had incurred a large deficit. Students' retention and, particularly, achievements were below sector averages. The college's standing in the community was also significantly diminished. The college's deficit has been significantly reduced and much attention has been given to rectifying the very major weaknesses reported previously. Governors and managers have worked hard to secure improvements. The college's position as a reputable provider of further education has been re-established. Managers have restored staff confidence and given a clear sense of direction. Although the college's students' achievements improved significantly between 1997 and 1998, they are below the average for general further education colleges. Student retention declined between 1996 and 1998.

There are outstandingly good links with many local groups and partners. The college makes a significant contribution to widening participation by providing courses in many centres in Stoke. Collaboration with the City of Stoke-on-Trent Sixth Form College has led to the recent establishment of a new centre at Burslem aimed at raising participation in the northern part of the city. Inspectors awarded eight grades in seven programme areas. The management of franchised provision was particularly effective. The quality of teaching in humanities was unsatisfactory. In the other programme areas, the quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory overall but inspectors observed some lessons in which the teaching was dull and uninspiring. In particular, teachers did not take sufficient account of the different learning needs of students. Achievement and retention rates are poor on many courses. Governors have made good progress in rectifying the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report and many aspects of governance reflect good practice. Management has energetically tackled many of the difficulties that faced the college but further progress remains to be made. Quality assurance arrangements have not yet led to sufficient improvement in students' achievements. The college should improve: student retention and achievement rates; the rigour of quality assurance; course reviews; and arrangements to offer students additional learning support. It should complete its financial recovery.

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

Summary

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Information technology and computing	3	Support for students	2
Construction crafts	4	General resources	3
Manufacturing and ceramic technology	3	Quality assurance	3
Hospitality and catering	3	Governance	2
Hairdressing and beauty	2	Management	3
Childcare	2		
English, history and geography	4		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Stoke-on-Trent College is based on two main sites, Cauldon campus near the city centre and Burslem campus, 3 miles to the north. Three 'neighbourhood colleges' and over 100 satellite centres serve communities across the city. Students are drawn primarily from North Staffordshire and, to a lesser extent, South Cheshire. The catchment area is economically deprived. Wages are 20% below national averages and 24% of the college's students live in wards designated by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) as deprived.

2 The educational achievements of school-leavers in Stoke-on-Trent are significantly below those nationally. In 1999, 36% of year 11 students from Stoke-on-Trent schools gained five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, compared with 46% nationally. Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) estimates that only 6% of the city's population possess degrees compared with 13% nationally. According to a Basic Skills Agency survey in 1998, 40% of people aged 16 to 60 in the city have low or very low numeracy skills and 18% have low or very low literacy skills.

3 In 1998-99, the college enrolled 28,606 students. Of these 3,990 were on full-time courses. The average age of students was 34 and 4% were from minority ethnic groups. About 12% of students claim benefits. The college employs 830 full-time equivalent members of staff, 462 of whom have direct learning contact with students. This makes the college one of the largest employers in the city.

4 The college's mission is to provide lifelong learning and achievement for the whole community by developing provision that meets the needs of individual students. Key strategic goals include raising participation in education and training, increasing students' achievements and being a responsive, flexible, effective and efficient college. To achieve these goals, the college aims to make provision accessible to the

local community and seeks to strengthen its reputation with the local business community as the first choice for training.

5 The college is committed to inclusive learning and widening participation and has explored new ways of enabling learning to take place in the community and in local industry. Collaboration with industry has, for example, enabled learning resource centres to be set up on employers' premises.

6 The college offers courses in all 10 FEFC programme areas and has developed a wide range of student support services. The college has also developed a range of partnerships and has become the lead local college in a number of initiatives, for example, the provision of New Deal across Staffordshire. The college works in partnership with the local education authority (LEA) to provide adult education through the 'College in the Community'. A partnership with the local sixth form college has created a new sixth form centre at the Burslem campus, managed and staffed by both colleges. The college is a federated college of Staffordshire University and is the largest higher education provider among Staffordshire and Shropshire colleges.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 18 October 1999. Two weeks earlier some of the college's franchised provision was inspected. Before the inspection inspectors studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. For the two years 1997 and 1998, data derived from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR) were used to provide information on students' achievements. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1999. Inspectors checked a sample against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The data were found to be mostly accurate but there was some under-reporting of withdrawals on two-year courses.

Context

8 Sixteen inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 78.5 days carried out the inspection. They observed 118 lessons, scrutinised students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, a local member of parliament, managers, students, employers and representatives of the local TEC and local community organisations.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 118 lessons inspected, 57% were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% were less than satisfactory. This compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	2	1	0	0	4
GCSE	0	2	2	1	0	5
GNVQ	1	12	8	1	0	22
NVQ	3	17	13	2	0	35
Further education access	1	2	0	0	0	3
Higher education	2	1	1	0	0	4
Basic education	0	3	7	0	0	10
Other vocational	4	7	6	1	0	18
Other	1	8	6	2	0	17
Total (No.)	13	54	44	7	0	118
Total (%)	11	46	37	6	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Stoke-on-Trent College	12.0	76
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Information Technology and Computing

Grade 3

11 Inspectors observed 27 lessons in the departments of computing and community education information technology (IT). Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment reports for these areas. Inspectors found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching
- GNVQ advanced IT pass rates consistently above the national average
- the wide range of courses
- courses provided for local businesses

Weaknesses

- some dull and unimaginative teaching
- retention and achievement rates below the national average on some courses
- some unsatisfactory quality assurance at course level
- some poor accommodation
- inappropriate networking and electronic mail facilities for specialist courses

12 The faculty offers a wide range of courses from foundation to higher education in computing and IT. Large numbers of students take IT courses in local centres throughout the area. Of particular note are the successful courses offered to local businesses and industry. Some courses are not well managed. Quality assurance procedures are not fully implemented for all courses. Some course reviews contain incomplete documents, unsupported by firm statistical evidence or critical judgements. Other reviews are more critical and evaluative and take account of students' opinions. Course team leaders have only recently been appointed to

support course management. The high proportion of teachers on fractional contracts causes difficulties in communication. These problems were recognised in the self-assessment report.

13 Some teaching, particularly in the advanced and specialist computing subjects, is good. Teachers use appropriate vocabulary in lessons and ensure that there is sufficient technical support for students. There were some good examples of the use of IT to support learning. For example, in a lesson developing students' skills in low-level programming, a simulation package was used by students very successfully to convey difficult concepts. In another lesson, students were using the college intranet and the Internet to research aspects of health and safety and the *Data Protection Act*. Other lessons were uninspiring. Teachers used inappropriate methods such as the dictating of notes and repeated themselves excessively. Handouts and overhead projector slides were of poor quality. Group work was poorly organised. For one lesson, two groups were timetabled in the same large room. This caused difficulties for teachers and students. The high ratio of part-time to full-time teachers causes difficulty in the teaching of courses. The wide range of specialist courses makes it difficult to provide cover when teachers are absent, a concern expressed by students in course reviews. The college has recognised that there are few female students on some courses and is taking action to remedy this.

14 Pass rates on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced IT course have been above the national average for the last three years. Those at intermediate level are improving. Some modules in the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 726 computing course have pass rates above the national average. Pass rates on the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) computing course have been poor for the last three years. The level 1 computer literacy

Curriculum Areas

course in IT has, in the last year, achieved a pass rate above the national average. Retention rates for the courses vary significantly from year to year. Assignment work is appropriate for the levels being taught. However, many comments written by teachers on students' work are too brief to help students to improve their performance.

15 Much of the accommodation used by specialist computing and part-time IT students is good. However, in some accommodation poor access, noise, inappropriate location of whiteboards and computer screens hindered learning. Some accommodation used by community IT students was inappropriate.

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

There are enough computers for specialist students to use but the absence of a college-wide electronic mail source, individual log-on accounts and a student file store on the college network has an adverse impact on students' learning on these courses. The specification and number of laptops for community IT students is good but printing facilities need improvement. Some materials and testing schemes are being developed on the college intranet to deliver parts of the specialist courses. There is little appropriate display of students' work or other relevant IT materials. Teachers have appropriate vocational experience, but there is some lack of the specialist skills required for some areas of work.

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
RSA computer literacy and information technology course	1	Number of starters	3,777	1,637	843
		Retention (%)	97	82	80
		Achievement (%)	21	61	92
C&G 7261 in IT modules	1	Number of starters	61	76	106
		Retention (%)	85	67	73
		Achievement (%)	62	88	68
GNVQ foundation IT	1	Number of starters	22	37	10
		Retention (%)	76	97	63
		Achievement (%)	45	8	90
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	36	20	22
		Retention (%)	86	67	75
		Achievement (%)	56	75	100
C&G 7261 in IT modules	2	Number of starters	44	114	173
		Retention (%)	73	75	81
		Achievement (%)	89	71	65
C&G 7261 in IT modules	3	Number of starters	24	50	64
		Retention (%)	65	81	72
		Achievement (%)	88	84	72
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	28	16	38
		Retention (%)	61	94	81
		Achievement (%)	75	94	92
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	45	18	23
		Retention (%)	78	82	77
		Achievement (%)	27	17	22

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

Curriculum Areas

Construction Crafts

Grade 4

16 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2 and 3 in construction crafts. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, the report understated the weakness in students' achievements and overstated the quality of teaching.

Key strengths

- a broad range of construction craft courses
- good, well-equipped specialist accommodation
- good teaching of practical subjects
- good links with local high schools

Weaknesses

- teaching not effectively planned for mixed-ability classes
- students' achievements well below the national average
- some retention rates below the national average
- information upon hazardous materials not readily available to students

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the construction craft provision provides a wide range of full-time and part-time courses. There are good links with local schools, including the provision of link courses for large numbers of school pupils.

18 Schemes of work are clear and practical lessons are effectively planned. Practical work is carried out safely and simulates industrial practices. Information that some students might require before working with hazardous materials was not readily available to students. Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods, including IT in the resource centre.

However, some students lack basic computing skills. High-quality teaching aids were used in many lessons. Good examples were seen of the use of a signer to support a profoundly deaf student and of a writer to support a student with dyslexia. In the less successful lessons, teachers failed to engage the attention of all the students. Some students drifted in and out of the lessons and, in one lesson, disruption by students upset the pace of the work. Teachers did not always check that learning had occurred. Many groups contained students of varying ability and teachers were not always successful in providing work which took account of their needs. For example, students sometimes waited for long periods before receiving assistance from the teacher. Some students are receiving additional learning support. The teaching of key skills for full-time students is carefully planned and timetabled.

19 Over the last three years retention rates have fluctuated. Achievement rates at all levels of NVQ have been below the national average. The self-assessment report identified the weaknesses in retention but not those in achievements.

20 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. Several teachers have developed IT skills to extend their teaching methods. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers need to update their industrial knowledge.

21 Workshops provide an effective training environment. Most hand tools and handheld power tools are new and reflect industrial standards. The wood-machining workshop has benefited from a significant grant that has enabled several new machines to be purchased. The high-quality equipment and resource areas are identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. The library provides a sufficient range of textbooks to support the courses offered, in conjunction with other textbooks available in the resource centres.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ	1	Number of starters	41	47	71
		Retention (%)	78	77	61
		Achievement (%)	32	49	70
NVQ	2	Number of starters	191	219	214
		Retention (%)	31	49	39
		Achievement (%)	32	55	67
NVQ	3	Number of starters	33	121	45
		Retention (%)	64	88	71
		Achievement (%)	42	46	59

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

Curriculum Areas

Manufacturing and Ceramic Technology

Grade 3

22 The inspection covered manufacturing and ceramic technology and franchised provision in manufacturing. Inspectors observed 16 lessons. They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment reports.

Key strengths

- effective teaching in most lessons
- high retention rates in many areas
- improving achievement rates over the last three years
- effective links with local organisations to widen participation
- good specialist facilities

Weaknesses

- an overall falling retention rate
- the majority of achievement rates below the national average
- franchised provision students disadvantaged in relation to main campus students
- incomplete monitoring of course quality

23 Manufacturing and ceramic technology is based at Burslem. Apart from a single full-time course, the provision is part time. The area covers fabrication and welding technology, mechanical and manufacturing engineering, computer-aided engineering, quality assurance and ceramic technology. All courses are provided from foundation to advanced level. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that franchised provision effectively widens participation by involving students who would not otherwise take advantage of college courses. The flexible provision caters for shift workers and others who would not find attendance at

college feasible. Students are willing to take courses in a work situation which is familiar and accepted.

24 There is incomplete monitoring of course quality by course teams. Course monitoring and review makes little use of external verifier reports and of students' perceptions of their courses. Students are not represented on course teams. Inspectors found effective quality assurance for franchised provision.

25 The teaching in most lessons is effective, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Schemes of work are appropriate. Most teachers use lesson plans that contain aims and objectives together with the structure of the lessons and the teaching activities involved. Handouts and course notes are of good quality. Students' practical work is of a high standard. Safe working practices are observed at all times in workshops. Teachers relate lesson topics to the experiences of the students. Question and answer techniques are used effectively to draw out students' experience, to involve students in discussion and as a method of evaluating learning. In successful lessons, teachers employed an appropriate variety of teaching methods to promote and maintain students' interest. In one lesson, students' knowledge and understanding was checked in a quiz and the teacher's recapping of salient points effectively consolidated students' learning. IT was used for document production, design and component manufacture. In some lessons, the teacher talked too much and provided too few opportunities for students to ask questions. Students' attendance is closely monitored. Students' files are well organised and well maintained. Students on courses based at the college receive a diagnostic assessment in literacy and numeracy and learning support is made available to them. However, similar support is not available for students on franchised provision courses.

Curriculum Areas

26 Retention rates are high on many courses. On C&G craft courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 retention rates range from 77% to 100%, well above the national average. However, retention rates are falling overall. In ceramics and C&G level 1 courses, the retention rate has fallen from 100% to 63% and 99% to 77%, respectively, in the last three years. Most achievement rates are below the national average but have improved over the last three years. On C&G courses at levels 2 and 3, achievement rates have risen from 45% to 69% and from 54% to 82%, respectively. The pass rates for level 3 in 1999 were above the national average.

27 Specialist resources are of good quality. Spacious general engineering, mechanical and fabrication and welding workshops have good specialist facilities. These include a pipe-welding area and a pottery production line. An area devoted to mechatronics contains a mini-factory production line with robots, programmable logic controllers and a computer-aided design facility, the latter linked by video to a local factory. Technician support is adequate. Teachers have appropriate engineering and teaching qualifications and have obtained verifier and assessor awards. Recent staff development has related mainly to new technology in computer-aided design and manufacture and educational developments, including GNVQ training.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in manufacturing and ceramic technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Ceramics courses	1	Number of starters	22	35	158
		Retention (%)	100	71	63
		Achievement (%)	100	64	75
C&G courses	1	Number of starters	88	62	100
		Retention (%)	99	82	77
		Achievement (%)	0	2	50
C&G courses	2	Number of starters	358	297	301
		Retention (%)	87	80	80
		Achievement (%)	45	55	69
NVQ franchised provision	2	Number of starters	*	956	734
		Retention (%)	*	66	61
		Achievement (%)	*	45	86
C&G courses	3	Number of starters	14	24	33
		Retention (%)	93	79	100
		Achievement (%)	54	37	82
Advanced technician	3	Number of starters	66	43	40
		Retention (%)	67	44	62
		Achievement (%)	63	67	75

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

*courses not offered

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 3

28 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the strength of course and curriculum management was understated. Some aspects identified as strengths were examples of routine practice. Some weaknesses, for example, in students' achievements, were understated.

Key strengths

- effective course and curriculum management
- well-organised and varied work experience for GNVQ students
- foundation provision matched to students' needs
- effective key skills coverage on GNVQ foundation and intermediate programme
- strong links with industry and other training providers

Weaknesses

- insufficient provision of vocational support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in practical lessons
- poor retention and achievement on some courses
- weaknesses in classroom management
- teachers' failure to check students' progress in some lessons

29 The college offers courses in hospitality and catering leading to GNVQ, NVQ, higher national diploma and other professional qualifications. Account is taken of community and employment needs in the design and delivery of the NVQ courses. Foundation provision meets the needs of students with different ability levels and learning requirements. On some programmes students can start at any time of the year.

30 Course teams meet regularly. Teachers work well together to plan courses and assessment. Course documentation is of a high standard. Schemes of work are detailed and well organised. Students' progress is systematically reviewed and recorded. Close attention is paid to students' attendance. Teachers monitor retention and achievement rates against college and national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC.

31 Teaching is satisfactory. In the more effective lessons, teachers make clear their objectives and set appropriate tasks. All courses have well-presented informative handbooks. The wide range of activities provided for students is supported by good-quality learning materials. There is effective support for the majority of students on foundation and GNVQ intermediate courses to enable them to develop key skills. Learning resources developed for key skills are imaginative and students enjoy using them. For example, a group of students was designing a 'virtual restaurant'. The tasks covered the full range of communication, application of number and IT key skills. They included complex calculations relevant to the students' own experience. In the less successful lessons, teachers did not vary the learning activities enough and students lost interest. In one lesson, the first task for students to undertake on their own was introduced 20 minutes before the end. In a few lessons, learning was impeded by the disruptive behaviour of a few students. Teachers did not always check students' progress or summarise the content of the lesson. There is insufficient support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in practical vocational lessons.

32 The general standard of GNVQ students' work is satisfactory at all levels and reflects the increased support given to helping them with portfolio building. The advanced students' work includes good examples of research and evaluation. The construction of NVQ portfolios

Curriculum Areas

lacked imagination. Few portfolios contained original materials, although some included photographic evidence. The majority of students used IT confidently both in the resource centre and in their assignment work. Most students are well motivated and express satisfaction with their choice of course.

33 Poor retention and achievement rates on some courses were identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness. The retention rate on the NVQ level 2 course has improved from 45% in 1997 to 79% in 1999. The pass rate on the NVQ level 3 course has improved from 11% in 1997 to 87% in 1999 but the retention rate declined to 59% in 1999, significantly below the 1998 national average. On the GNVQ advanced programme, the pass rate in 1998 of 33% was 40 percentage points below the national average. In 1999, only five of the completing students achieved the qualification. The retention rate for this course in 1997 and 1998 was significantly below the national average.

34 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that links with industry and other training providers are a strength. The Hanley Building Society sponsors the college's student exchange with the Lycée Jean Monnet in Limoges. There are also good community links. Some sugarcraft courses are delivered in community centres. Students on return-to-work courses prepare lunch for residents in sheltered accommodation. Work experience for GNVQ students is well organised and carefully monitored. Industrial visits are also used to widen students' learning.

35 The standard of accommodation is satisfactory. The realistic work environments offer different styles of service appropriate for assessment at all levels of the provision. The kitchens are adequately equipped but the layout presents difficulties for observation and assessment. Students make effective use of the

resources centre and its computers. The library holds a good range of books, journals and CD-ROMs. Teachers are appropriately qualified and some have recently undertaken short periods of industrial updating.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ in catering and hospitality	1	Number of starters	+	26	40
		Retention (%)	+	88	98
		Achievement (%)	+	74	100
NVQ in food preparation and cooking	2	Number of starters	143	176	205
		Retention (%)	45	36	79
		Achievement (%)	72	65	91
GNVQ intermediate hospitality and catering	2	Number of starters	23	6	9
		Retention (%)	78	83	89
		Achievement (%)	44	60	100
NVQ in catering and hospitality	3	Number of starters	21	*	37
		Retention (%)	90	*	59
		Achievement (%)	11	*	87
GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering	3	Number of starters	38	30	27
		Retention (%)	58	20	81
		Achievement (%)	81	33	*

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

*very small numbers involved

+courses not offered

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty

Grade 2

36 Inspectors observed 16 lessons, in the college-based and franchised provision. They agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report. Some of the identified weaknesses had been rectified before the inspection. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching and learning
- enrichment activities for students
- high standard of practical accommodation and specialist equipment
- effective implementation of professional and commercial standards in the salons
- effective management of courses
- students' good practical skills

Weaknesses

- failure to develop students' IT skills
- inappropriate accommodation for theory sessions
- some poor retention rates

37 The college offers a very broad range of courses in hairdressing and beauty. There has been a large growth in the number of students. There is a particularly broad range of beauty therapy courses.

38 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the standard of teaching and learning is good. Well-designed lessons are linked to coherent schemes of work. Aims and objectives are clearly defined and shared with students at the start of lessons. Teachers check students' learning carefully. The well-planned lessons motivate and interest students. Teachers vary their teaching methods frequently and appropriately. There is good use of

rigorously updated resource packs. Students are encouraged to participate fully in the lessons and they answer questions well and with enthusiasm. Practical lessons are well organised and well managed. Salons reflect commercial realism, providing a good client base and assessment opportunities. Most students display good practical skills early in the course. They are encouraged to work on clients as soon as possible and they demonstrate appropriate communication skills. They work safely. A health and safety award forms part of the induction process. However, in one beauty lesson, students did not display professional practice. Assessments are all carried out in college practical sessions. Students understand the assessment process and are given productive feedback on completion of the assessment. Internal verification is effective.

39 The well-presented students' portfolios clearly show how the students' work conforms to assessment requirements. Teachers mark them carefully. The portfolios display evidence from a range of sources, including good use of photographic work. There is some evidence of IT skills in a few portfolios, although IT is not included in the programmes. There are no computers in the department for students to use and they make little use of the resource centre. In one lesson, beauty therapy students were introduced to appropriate programmes on CD-ROMs. There are many opportunities for students to extend their experiences within the industry, including visits to national hair events and the 'Clothes Show'. Beauty therapy students have the opportunity to work with local groups such as the Parkinson Society to offer massage and other treatments and with local theatre groups to provide make-up for productions. One student was runner-up in a national make-up competition.

40 The curriculum is well managed by the programme managers and course leaders. Course teams meet regularly and their meetings are appropriately minuted. Roles and

Curriculum Areas

responsibilities are clear and understood. Action-planning is an integral part of these meetings. Course documentation is well designed and effective.

41 There have been poor retention rates on some courses, particularly in hairdressing, but retention has improved in the last year. In NVQ level 2 hairdressing, retention has improved from 40% in 1998 to 83% in 1999. In NVQ level 3 hairdressing, retention has improved from 19% to 76%. There is good retention on most beauty therapy courses, with many short courses having 100% retention. There have been pass rates on NVQ level 2 in hairdressing below the national average but some high pass rates in beauty therapy. Beauty therapy achievement rates for levels 2 and 3 in 1999 were 94% and 100%, significantly above the national average. Pass rates on most part-time beauty therapy courses are high. In 1999, of the 18 part-time courses, 11 courses had an achievement rate of 100% and eight had 100% retention.

42 The practical accommodation for hairdressing and beauty therapy is of a high standard, reflecting good commercial practice. Equipment is up to date and sufficient for the needs of the students. Equipment identified as inappropriate in the self-assessment report has been replaced. However, there are no specialist theory rooms and practical rooms are adapted for this purpose. Students have to carry out work on their knees during long theory sessions and beauty students use the beds as desks. Teachers of hairdressing and beauty are well qualified and have appropriate commercial experience. In beauty therapy, most teachers update their knowledge by working in the industry. Teachers attend many courses in their specialist area to maintain their skills and to ensure that they keep up with industrial trends.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ in hairdressing	2	Number of starters	205	264	184
		Retention (%)	42	40	83
		Achievement (%)	62	65	60
NVQ in beauty therapy	2	Number of starters	36	53	156
		Retention (%)	83	59	66
		Achievement (%)	60	59	94
NVQ in hairdressing	3	Number of starters	24	27	30
		Retention (%)	33	19	76
		Achievement (%)	29	60	33
NVQ in beauty therapy	3	Number of starters	14	19	14
		Retention (%)	100	79	92
		Achievement (%)	29	53	100
NVQ in aromatherapy	3	Number of starters	*	29	18
		Retention (%)	*	100	100
		Achievement (%)	*	67	94

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

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 2

43 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that the report over-emphasised strengths in teaching and learning but gave insufficient credit for strengths in students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good standard of teaching and learning
- well-organised and monitored work experience
- achievement rates above the national average
- appropriate student destinations
- good student support through group and personal tutor systems
- a wide range of provision responsive to market needs
- good teaching accommodation, including the care workshop
- well-managed courses

Weaknesses

- some uninspiring teaching
- poor retention on Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education courses
- insufficient verifiers for the current numbers of NVQ candidates
- incomplete analysis of retention and achievement data

44 The wide range of provision at the college has developed in response to market needs, and, in particular, to offer courses at professional level for employed students. A foundation course was initiated this year to respond to the needs identified for this level of provision and to widen participation.

45 The standard of most teaching and learning is good. Many lessons are well planned, structured and well managed. In the most effective lessons, teachers used an appropriate variety of methods to stimulate students' learning and to keep them involved in the work. For example, in a well-planned lesson on special needs, the teacher led the students through a series of exercises that simulated sensory impairment. She gave the students unusual objects to help them explore memory, experience and use of the senses. In a few lessons, teaching was uninspiring. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that work experience is a significant resource. Teachers continually drew effectively in lessons on students' work experience. The good attendance observed in lessons indicated the progress made in meeting a weakness identified in the self-assessment.

46 Pass rates are above national averages. Inspectors noted that the self-assessment gave insufficient credit for the strengths in students' achievements. There are consistently high pass rates for the national diploma in childhood studies. In 1999, pass rates for the certificate in Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education, NVQ levels 2 and 3 early years, and childcare and education courses were also above the national average. Retention rates were mostly at or above the national average. The one-year childcare and education course continues to have a poor retention rate but improved in 1999. Students progress to appropriate further courses, some at higher education level, or employment. Students' work is at an appropriate standard. Many students take great care in the presentation and documenting of their work. Full-time students keep professional practice log books that illustrate their progress through work experience and record the skills that they have gained. These are linked to the care and vocational competences required for their particular programme.

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47 Courses are well managed. Course team leaders have been introduced but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. Managers have adopted a continuous improvement approach that is responsive to students' requests for change. There are effective systems for monitoring students' progress in college and on work experience. Well-documented tutorial systems provide early warnings for identifying problems relating to students' progress.

48 Teachers are well qualified and have appropriate vocational expertise. All have teaching qualifications and most have assessor qualifications. There are not enough members of staff trained as internal verifiers. Staff development proposals are in place to address this. Staff undertake vocational training and updating on a regular basis, for example, placements with local playgroups and schools. Teaching accommodation is of a good standard, pleasantly furnished and well decorated with appropriate wall displays. Many rooms have audiovisual aids but some require better blackout facilities. The care workshop is fully staffed by members of the team and is actively used by staff and students for formal lessons and individual study. However, its separate location from the remainder of the accommodation has led to a continuing problem of the loss of resource materials. There are plans to move the workshop closer to the childcare accommodation area in an attempt to prevent this.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education NVQ	2	Number of starters	101	60	58
		Retention (%)	87	91	86
		Achievement (%)	57	74	92
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters	41	28	37
		Retention (%)	88	65	70
		Achievement (%)	72	82	89
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education NVQ early years childcare and education	3	Number of starters	+	15	65
		Retention (%)	+	100	78
		Achievement (%)	+	87	79
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	126	122	75
		Retention (%)	59	57	82
		Achievement (%)	52	95	87
BTEC national diploma in childhood studies (nursery nursing)	3	Number of starters	47	47	25
		Retention (%)	70	74	56
		Achievement (%)	85	86	93
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education advanced diploma in childcare	3	Number of starters	24	35	21
		Retention (%)	71	69	86
		Achievement (%)	73	75	89

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
+course not offered

Curriculum Areas

English, History and Geography

Grade 4

49 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE A level English literature, history and geography, access to higher education classes in English and history, and a 'return-to-study' session. The self-assessment report identified the majority of the strengths but overstated some. Weaknesses in students' achievements were identified but not those in teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- lively teaching in lessons for adults and some GCE A level lessons
- well-prepared lessons

Weaknesses

- lack of students' involvement in learning in a number of lessons
- poor examination results at GCE A level
- very low retention across a range of courses
- low attendance on GCSE courses

50 The college provides GCE A level courses for adults in English, history and geography and second-year GCE A level English and history courses for students aged 16 to 19. First-year courses have been transferred to the new sixth form centre at Burslem. GCSE English courses are offered at both main college campuses. Access to higher education students take English and history as part of their course. Return-to-study courses which provide students with support before taking on GCSE English or access courses have recently been introduced.

51 In the more successful lessons, and particularly with adults, teaching is good. Lessons are well prepared and resourced and students' interest is sustained. Teachers use a

variety of successful teaching methods, including work in pairs and groups, lively question and answers sessions, and some lucid explanations by teachers of complex ideas. In a GCE A level geography lesson, the teacher cleverly built a model river basin with the students' bags, an old green mackintosh, and some blue crepe paper. Students enjoyed labelling its main features. Students on the return-to-study course gained confidence through reflecting on their own styles of learning using a cleverly constructed and amusing questionnaire. Teachers readily help students who need support with their work, and written work is effectively marked with helpful advice and criticism. In a number of lessons, teachers failed to involve students in the work and, at times, the material used was at an inappropriate level for the students involved. Teachers sometimes dominated discussion and made little attempt to vary their teaching methods appropriately. Some group work went on too long, so that students lost interest. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

52 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there had been some improvement in GCSE English results over the past three years. Pass rates at grades A to C improved from 45% in 1997 to 65% in 1999. Pass rates in GCSE history and geography have also improved. GCE A level results have been poor for three years and, although improving, remain so. The self-assessment report recognised that retention is low across the whole range of courses. Students' attendance in the lessons observed was 77% and in GCSE English lessons 73%. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' written work is effectively assessed and of a standard appropriate to the course level. Oral work in access and adult lessons was interesting and lively but, in some GCSE lessons, students aged 16 to 19 were reluctant to exchange ideas or participate in discussion. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

53 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that meetings at programme area level are effective and that communication between course teams has improved. Part-time teachers are encouraged to participate in meetings. Teachers are well qualified. As the self-assessment report indicates, English, history and geography are mainly taught in three adjacent well-furnished classrooms on the Cauldon main site. A few GCSE English lessons take place in other parts of the college, some of which are inappropriate. Accommodation at Cauldon is satisfactory. The library has a very good stock of appropriate books and video tapes for English, history and geography.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, history and geography, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	508	297	345
		Retention (%)	84	61	61
		Achievement (%)	45	50	65
GCSE history	2	Number of starters	58	18	17
		Retention (%)	79	39	59
		Achievement (%)	13	29	60
GCSE geography	2	Number of starters	10	29	18
		Retention (%)	70	48	72
		Achievement (%)	0	36	46
GCE A level English	3	Number of starters	285	81	84
		Retention (%)	63	69	63
		Achievement (%)	45	59	70
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	69	19	28
		Retention (%)	55	74	59
		Achievement (%)	29	50	13
GCE A level geography	3	Number of starters	33	15	19
		Retention (%)	79	73	47
		Achievement (%)	7	0	33

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

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

54 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in community venues. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the strengths were overstated and identified a further weakness.

Key strengths

- provision conveniently located for students
- effective teaching and classroom management
- individual learning programmes negotiated at initial assessment
- motivated students
- high retention rates on short courses

Weaknesses

- poor attendance rates on long courses
- inadequate record-keeping
- low retention rates on long courses
- lack of resources in community venues
- insufficient access to up-to-date data

55 Basic skills are offered at more than 30 sites including the Cauldon campus, the three neighbourhood colleges and a range of community venues. The curriculum is designed to be responsive to the needs of individual students while taking into account the requirements of local agencies and partners. English and mathematics courses are provided at three levels and allow students to learn in ways and at times to suit their personal circumstances. Short courses, including those for family literacy and parent volunteers, attract students who would not otherwise return to education. A range of courses was offered last summer. The main focus of accreditation, especially on short courses, is through the National Open College Network. Mathematics

students work towards C&G 3750 numeracy stages 1 to 4. There is some use of Wordpower. The students are mainly white, two-thirds are female and 75% are over 25.

56 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching and learning is a strength but the college did not identify weaknesses in the recording of assessment, achievement and tutorials. Teaching was effective. There was efficient management of mixed groups and of the teaching of mathematics and English in the same lesson. Students work to an individual learning plan which is negotiated at an initial assessment interview. Each lesson is then planned to match individual learning plans. Teaching is mainly on an individual basis. There is little use of group teaching and there are few opportunities for students to work together. Teachers give clear instructions when explaining tasks. There is clear evidence to show that learning takes place. Students in the lessons observed were busily engaged in a range of activities. Teachers had succeeded in creating a supportive learning environment. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that relationships between teachers and students are good. Students work in a relaxed but purposeful way. Students' work is marked or discussed soon after its completion and teachers give helpful and positive verbal feedback. However, there is little recording of students' progress or monitoring of their achievement. Teachers do not always check erratic attendance and poor punctuality. Planned reviews have not been carried out or have not been recorded.

57 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the availability, quality and use of resources varies according to the centre and tutor. There is a good range of resources on the Cauldon campus and at the three neighbourhood colleges. Most teaching rooms are clean, warm and bright. Access for students with restricted mobility to first-floor classrooms is difficult at all three neighbourhood colleges. The new base room at the Cauldon campus has

Curriculum Areas

wheelchair access through a rear entrance but no disabled toilet facilities for female students. The community venues do not have resource bases and teachers have to carry materials to lessons. The recent purchase of filing cabinets will improve this situation. Some tutors are not aware of the range of resources available but recommended resources are now listed on the new student learning plans. It is difficult for teachers in the community to photocopy their work. The quality of some photocopied worksheets was poor. There are few computers in the community provision. Teachers of basic education are experienced and have good communication skills. Most are appropriately qualified. A team of trained volunteers is well managed and used to support teachers.

58 The area lacks up-to-date, relevant data with which to review and plan its provision. Progression routes are not sufficiently coherent. The need to set measurable targets and ensure achievement has been recognised. Retention rates are high on short courses but below the national average on long courses. The self-assessment action plan has identified modularisation of the curriculum as a way to improve retention on long courses.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

59 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional weaknesses. The judgements in subsidiary self-assessment reports were generally carried forward clearly into the main self-assessment report. However, key weaknesses concerning the quality of additional learning support were not accurately reflected in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- sound careers education and guidance
- strong tutorial support for full-time students
- induction programmes for full-time students
- productive links with schools
- wide range of personal support for students
- good range of specialist support for students with sensory impairments and specific learning difficulties

Weaknesses

- less well-developed support for part-time students on evening and community-based courses
- low levels of take-up of additional learning support
- insufficient analysis of the effectiveness of learning support

60 Support arrangements for students are generally well co-ordinated. The teams that provide careers guidance, counselling, welfare advice, learning support and tutorials work well together. The college uses a variety of methods to inform prospective students about its courses. Prospectuses are informative and available in a

variety of formats. There are open days and other events for school-leavers and adults. The college has good links with schools, as noted in the self-assessment report. Nearly 600 school pupils attend the link courses in the college that are designed to encourage staying on beyond the age of 16. There is a programme of vocational courses for excluded school pupils. The college has extended its range of pre-entry and foundation courses as part of its commitment to inclusive learning. Recruitment activities and admissions procedures are well co-ordinated. Initial guidance helps to ensure that students are placed on appropriate courses. There are clear and supportive arrangements for students who wish to change their course.

61 All students receive a useful handbook that includes a diary and the college charter, which incorporates the college's disability statement. The charter is discussed with students during induction. Induction is centrally co-ordinated and provides a framework for faculty induction. Students complete a form to confirm that the induction programme has been covered. In 1998 and 1999, as part of their induction, over 600 students on full-time courses attended residential activities to foster teamwork and communication skills.

62 The college has welcoming 'customer centres' at its two main campuses, which are open Monday to Saturday. The targets and response times set to assess customer satisfaction are generally met. Inquiries are recorded and analysed. Resources provided by an external careers service are supplemented by two full-time careers advisers employed by the college. Careers advisers are linked to each faculty. Careers education forms a valuable part of the tutorial programme for full-time students.

63 The tutorials observed by inspectors were judged to be good. Good practice included systematic record-keeping, an appropriate concentration on action-planning, and the skilful use of questioning to draw out students. All

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students have a tutorial entitlement. Curriculum areas devise their own tutorials within the guidelines given in the tutorial handbook. Guidance is given on monitoring attendance, although the effectiveness of this has yet to be tested. A quarter of the college's curriculum areas' self-assessment reports identified concerns about students' attendance. Although all students on part-time courses have designated personal tutors, some do not receive formal structured tutorials. The self-assessment report acknowledged that support for part-time students on evening and community-based courses is less well developed. The college has sought to extend the effectiveness of its provision of support services to the neighbourhood colleges and the centres in the community. Planned measures include the development of early evening tutorial 'drop-in' sessions in two curriculum areas from November 1999. In spite of the progress made, the college has acknowledged the need for further development.

64 Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment that learning support for students is a major strength. They identified weaknesses in the implementation of learning support. At the time of the inspection, there had been delays in analysing initial assessments and organising provision for those identified as needing additional support. The college's target of offering support within 10 days had not been met. Not all full-time students are given diagnostic assessment in English and mathematics. A variety of standard assessment tools are used and a few have been made specifically vocationally relevant. Well-used and resourced key skills centres are open for 60 hours weekly on both main campuses to provide mathematics and English support. Support is offered within lessons, through workshops and on an individual basis, where necessary. In 1998-99, 30% of students failed to take up the learning support offered and overall patterns of attendance were below 50%. These weaknesses

were identified in the self-assessment report. Students on part-time courses are offered initial assessment but fewer than 1% took up this offer in 1998-99. There is no systematic analysis of the take-up of learning support in mathematics and English or of its impact in improving students' achievements.

65 Students with sensory impairments and specific learning difficulties are well supported by specialist staff, as identified in the self-assessment report. Over 220 students are currently receiving specialist individual support. Qualified individual support workers act as communicators or note-takers and materials are adapted so that they are appropriate to the needs of learners. For example, text is produced in an enlarged format by the college for the partially sighted. Students in receipt of individual support value highly the support they receive.

66 There is a broad range of personal support services for students that are particularly well used by full-time students. There is extensive childcare provision and this includes financial support to pay childminders. Welfare advice is highly valued by students. At the time of the inspection, 279 students were in receipt of the Educational Maintenance Allowance, the college being one of 15 involved in the pilot scheme. The counselling service is well used by both full-time and an increasing number of part-time students. There is a chaplaincy and a prayer room for Muslims. Staff working closely with the students' union have recently developed a number of sports activities.

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General Resources

Grade 3

67 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of its general resources, although some additional weaknesses were identified. In some aspects, the report did not match the inspection framework.

Key strengths

- high-quality teaching and general accommodation
- well-designed library and resource areas
- good specialist IT equipment for students with disabilities

Weaknesses

- under-utilised classrooms and workshops
- some poor access and an inadequate number of toilets for people with restricted mobility

68 The college is located on two main sites, Cauldon campus near the city centre and Burslem, 3 miles to the north. Three neighbourhood colleges are leased within the city. The college also offers courses in over 100 community centres across the city. The college has accommodation of a wide range and quality which has been built at various times during the last 50 years. Much of the teaching and general accommodation at Cauldon is of high quality though the Urquhart building needs extensive refurbishment. There is some good accommodation at the Cauldon and Burslem campuses, including careers, student support areas, such as the key skills centre, and the administration section. A small number of temporary buildings at Burslem are of poor quality.

69 The restaurant at Burslem is pleasant, but that at Cauldon needs renovation and better use of space. The fitness centre at Cauldon provides a wide range of sports facilities and is housed in good accommodation with satisfactory equipment. The changing rooms for both campus sports centres are of a poor standard. The entrance foyers on all sites are well located and welcoming. Some, including the new foyer at Burslem, are furnished to a high standard. There are some good displays of students' work throughout the college. Grounds are well maintained. Parking is inadequate at Cauldon but extensive at Burslem. The planned maintenance programme is comprehensive but the budget is well below that required. There is insufficient storage throughout the college.

70 Access for people with restricted mobility is poor in a number of buildings. There is ground floor access only to the Knapper, Urquhart and the General Building at Cauldon, and access is poor at the Longton and Willfield sites. A new lift has been installed at Burslem. There are not enough toilets for people with restricted mobility. Wheelchair users find entry to some areas difficult owing to the location of heavy doors.

71 The college's self-assessment recognised that the amount of available classroom and specialist workshops and laboratory space is significantly more than the college requires. For example, the 1998 room utilisation rates at Cauldon and Burslem were only 32% and 28%, respectively. The college has identified seven annexes surplus to requirements and has disposed of five to date. Surveys of most learning areas take place and there is some matching of rooms to student class sizes. Managers responsible for estates have clear and challenging targets to improve the utilisation of accommodation.

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72 The two main campuses have well-located libraries. The Cauldon library is well designed and well furnished. Inspectors agreed that the resource centres on the two main campuses are of a high standard. Opening times for the libraries and the resource centres are extensive and include Saturday opening. The well-used and resourced key skills centres are open for 60 hours weekly on both main campuses. The college has developed some useful links with other libraries. The benefits include improved learning support for students and improvements to the standard of learning materials. Staff are well qualified and experienced and staffing levels in the learning and library areas are high. There is an extensive range of photographic slides, especially in art and design. The libraries are of adequate size. The number of periodicals and the learning resources budget are satisfactory. The bookstock and the replacement budget are low for the size of the college. The library staff rooms are small and become crowded, and areas for cataloguing and storing learning materials are insufficient. The new computerised library management system is in the early stages of development. Liaison between the library staff and teachers in curriculum areas is effective in some areas, such as construction, but in others it needs to be improved. Target-setting for learning resources is in the early stages of development.

73 The provision of IT across the college is satisfactory. The number of computers for students' use is adequate, as are the software applications, although there is some incompatibility between the various applications. Provision of specialist computer equipment for people with disabilities is of high quality. The number and quality of computers for staff use is high. Students have access to a wide range of informative CD-ROMs. They can also use some interactive learning materials, some of which are available on the college intranet, which are designed to enable them to study on their own.

74 The college's network system is inadequate to meet all student and staff needs, and partially restricts students' access to the Internet and intranet. Students have difficulty in accessing computers in the open learning centres at busy times. The number of printers in the college is low. There are enough well-qualified technicians to maintain the IT provision.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

75 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified several additional weaknesses. The college has taken action to address some of the weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- culture of continuous improvement
- robust monitoring of quality assurance procedures
- thorough and effective arrangements to assure the quality of franchised provision
- effective use of customer feedback
- extensive professional development and training opportunities for all staff

Weaknesses

- lack of rigour in some course reviews
- ineffective use of target-setting in curriculum areas
- overgenerous assessment of the quality of teaching and learning
- incomplete actions to rectify identified issues relating to teaching and students' performance

76 The college has made significant improvements to its quality assurance arrangements. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is a firm commitment to quality assurance which is

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reflected in the college's strategic objectives. The clear quality policy is understood by staff. For example, staff have contributed to the revision of the quality assurance manual, which is now more closely focused on the curriculum and students' achievements. Issues about quality are regularly brought to staff's attention through newsletters. There is robust monitoring of quality assurance procedures. For example, the programme of monthly internal audits ensures the consistent application of procedures. Actions are discussed and agreed with managers and lead to identifiable improvements. There is effective internal verification of the assessment of students' work. The recommendations of external verifiers are speedily implemented.

77 The college makes effective use of customer feedback. The views of students, parents, employers and members of the local community are regularly sought. Surveys of students' views are carried out twice a year and the results analysed at various levels and fed back to managers. These are used constructively to make timely improvements to course planning and delivery. There is a clear and well-used complaints procedure. All complaints received are meticulously investigated and, where appropriate, remedied. There is a comprehensive analysis of complaints and regular reporting to senior management and the corporation.

78 The college charter clearly sets out the college's commitment to students, employers and the local community. It is regularly reviewed, widely distributed and available in various formats. Service standards developed in a wide range of support areas are regularly monitored and reviewed. A rigorous monitoring and reporting programme to test how far the college is meeting all the standards of service set out in the charter has been developed. It is too early to measure the success of this initiative.

79 The well-established system of course review enables curriculum areas to produce self-assessment reports. Reviews identify strengths and weaknesses, taking into account students' performance, teaching and learning observations and students' feedback. Some course reviews lack rigour and contain inadequate analysis of students' achievements and retention based upon the poor use of data. Course teams set annual targets for enrolment, retention, achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. These are often set at unrealistic or inappropriate levels and do not link to action plans for improvement. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The college has recently published curriculum action plans to improve retention and achievement. These are supported by the standards fund. Many practical strategies for improvement have been implemented this year but it is too early to measure their impact. The college's lesson observation scheme, introduced in 1997, is extensive and well supported by staff. Results and action plans are reported to senior management and the corporation. Outcomes inform self-assessments and have led to some sharing of good practice. The college acknowledges that its grading of lessons has been overgenerous. During 1998-99, over 400 observations resulted in 77% grades 1 or 2. This compared with the 57% of lessons judged to be of this standard during the inspection.

80 The self-assessment process is thorough and comprehensive. It has been part of the quality assurance system for four years and covers all areas of college activity. All staff are involved in the process. They receive relevant training and guidance notes. Senior managers, governors and external representatives have contributed to the moderation of findings. The action plans feed into the following year's operating statements. Most judgements made in individual reports are supported by relevant, detailed evidence. Some assessments of

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strengths and weaknesses are too general. The action plans clearly show how and when the college is going to address weaknesses, although the targets indicated have not always been met.

81 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that appraisal and staff development are a strength. All staff are appraised and this leads to individual development plans. Full-time and part-time staff take up their entitlement to staff development. Activities are closely aligned to college objectives. The budget for staff development has been reduced but the college has successfully bid for alternative sources of funding and has made increased use of college-run events in order to maintain the extensive range of opportunities. A partnership agreement with Staffordshire University allows staff to take courses there without charge. The college recognises that further activities are required to develop teaching and learning skills and has recently established a continuous professional development programme, to raise the quality of teaching. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1996 and was re-accredited in May 1999.

82 The effective arrangements to assure the quality of franchised provision include close and regular monitoring of the courses, observation of teaching and an evaluation of the effectiveness of induction. The clearly documented procedures are regularly reviewed. Training is given to providers on the college's requirements. This leads to good levels of understanding and efficient implementation of the procedures. Contracts have been terminated where the quality has been poor. Effective liaison between the college and its partners has led to several joint curriculum initiatives.

Governance

Grade 2

83 The self-assessment of governance involved all corporation members in a thorough appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the judgements made by the college. Inspectors and auditors identified an additional strength and an additional weakness that were not in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- exceptional commitment of the governors
- effective recruitment and induction of new governors
- strong and efficient clerking
- strategic direction provided by governors
- comprehensive procedures for openness and accountability

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory level of students' retention and achievements

84 The corporation responded to the first inspection report by directing the preparation of and approving a recovery plan which formed the basis of the college's strategic plan for 1997 to 2000. The period since has required considerable commitment from governors, particularly in view of the college's difficult financial situation and the need urgently to re-establish confidence in the college. The corporation has appointed a new principal, recruited governors with the necessary skills, drawn up a strategic plan, and approved new management and committee structures. It has overseen improvements in the college's financial position and achievement rates, although achievements are still considerably below sector averages and remain a major weakness.

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Retention rates have declined. Governors have fully implemented previous audit service recommendations.

85 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.

86 In response to the government's changes to corporation membership there is a determined membership of 20 governors. There are currently vacancies for a business and student governor. Governors bring a broad range of expertise to the corporation and have strong community links. Inspectors and auditors agreed that the search committee has been effective in identifying and recruiting governors with appropriate skills and experience. It has appropriately identified potential governors and has a list of those willing to act as governors when vacancies arise. The good use of members with specialist skills includes co-options to the audit and standards and the performance committees.

87 New governors undertake a comprehensive programme to introduce them to the college. The college has a specific budget for governor training. Most governors have completed a training needs analysis which the clerk uses to alert governors to appropriate training opportunities. There have been training events for the whole corporation.

88 The clerk to the corporation closely monitors governors' attendance and produces an annual report. Attendance rates at corporation and committee meetings are high. The corporation has used its powers to remove governors with poor attendance records. The minutes of the corporation demonstrate that careful consideration was given before the reappointment of governors and the appointment of the chair and vice-chair of the corporation.

89 Auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that the clerking of the college is a strength. The clerk to the corporation is a qualified solicitor and clerks all corporation and committee meetings. She also provides the college with legal advice. There are separate job descriptions and reporting lines for both roles. The governors recently gave detailed consideration to these arrangements and confirmed their support for them.

90 Corporation meetings are scheduled one year in advance. Corporation papers provide both specific and background information. Minutes are exceptionally clear and items are treated as confidential, when appropriate. The college makes good use of the intranet to publish minutes and college policies.

91 Auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors have established an effective committee structure. Committees operate within their terms of reference. As the self-assessment indicates, the corporation's contribution to the college's strategic direction is a strength. The strategic planning committee regularly receives reports on the progress made against targets set in the strategic plan and on issues that have an impact on the strategic direction of the college. The college's financial position is discussed at finance and resources and corporation meetings. All governors receive the monthly management accounts. The content of the management accounts has recently been improved. The corporation approved the annual budget for 1999-2000 but the budget papers did not include a forecast balance sheet. The audit committee closely monitors the effectiveness of the college's control systems.

92 The corporation's comprehensive procedures for openness and accountability were not identified as a strength in the self-assessment. The corporation holds an annual public meeting. A detailed and up-to-date governors' handbook provides guidance on duties and responsibilities. Review data have been set for each of the college policies. All governors and staff with significant

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financial responsibilities have completed a publicly available register of interests. Governors sign an annual declaration confirming their eligibility. The corporation has adopted a code of conduct for governors and a comprehensive set of standing orders. A 'whistleblowing' procedure exists to enable governors, staff, students and the public to raise concerns whilst protecting their confidentiality.

93 Governors monitor students' experience in college and aspects of student performance. They receive information about retention and achievement. In June 1999, governors agreed performance indicators relating to achievement and an improved system for receiving reports. They have approved a strategy designed to raise retention and achievement to the national average for all courses. This key strategic objective has yet to be achieved. Governors have useful and developing links with faculties across the college.

Management

Grade 3

94 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They found a few additional strengths and attached more weight to the weaknesses identified by the college. The college did not identify the important weakness of failure to secure significant improvements in student retention.

Key strengths

- staff's commitment to the college mission and strategic objectives
- effective leadership and focus on key strategic issues
- good communications and open style of management
- extensive links with external partners to widen participation
- prudent and effective management of college finances
- well-managed franchised provision

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped operational planning at faculty level
- ineffective management of some curriculum areas and learning support
- incomplete financial recovery
- underdeveloped use of management information
- failure to improve student retention

95 College management has made significant progress in addressing the severe management and financial problems identified at the previous inspection. Senior managers effectively identify key strategic issues. Inspectors found an additional strength in the effective leadership that provides staff with a clear sense of direction. The college has re-established its

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reputation as a valued provider of further education in the local area. Staff are committed to the college's mission and morale is much improved. Prudent management of college finances has enabled the college to repay a substantial proportion of its large debts. Inspectors could not agree with the self-assessment report that there is effective management in all areas of activity.

96 The college's mission and clearly defined strategic objectives, which include raising participation and increasing achievements, guide developments across the college. Strategies developed to achieve the college's key goal of improving students' achievements are beginning to be successful. Validated data provided to the FEFC on retention and achievement for 1997 and 1998 show a decline in overall retention rates. There is evidence that this decline has been arrested in 1999. Achievement rates, although improving significantly from a low base, are still below the national average for the sector.

97 The strategic plan for the period 1997 to 2000 was prepared by managers with some involvement of other staff. Strategic and financial plans are integrated. The targets set in the strategic plan are carefully monitored and reported on each year. The self-assessment report identified the lack of faculty operating plans as a weakness. Plans were prepared by September 1999, but it is too early for the college and inspectors to assess their effectiveness.

98 Inspectors agreed that the college has developed strong partnerships with other agencies, including higher education and employers, to widen participation and help to raise standards. The 'College in the Community', jointly managed with the LEA, provides an extensive range of provision in community-based venues across Stoke. The new sixth form centre at the Burslem campus, jointly managed with the City of Stoke-on-Trent

Sixth Form College, is designed to attract young people who might not otherwise study in further education. The college provides work-based courses in key skills for the ceramics industry. Relationships with the local TEC have strengthened since the last inspection and are positive. Marketing is effective and co-ordinated across the college. The marketing strategy and plan is well documented. Extensive labour market intelligence is used to inform new provision and external funding bids.

99 The senior management team comprises the heads of six faculties, four cross-college directorates and the principal. They work well together as a team. Senior management meetings are frequent, effective and well minuted. There is a regular and informative cycle of staff meetings at all levels in the college. Communications are good and have improved considerably since the last inspection. The style of management is open. Electronic mail is widely used and the staff newsletter is informative and valued by staff.

100 Following the last inspection, staffing was reorganised and a large number of staff made redundant, realising substantial cost savings. Staff understand the current structure and their roles and lines of accountability. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the role of programme manager includes too wide a range of responsibilities and a large volume of work. The college has recently appointed course team leaders in each faculty to address this problem. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements. The college does not have a cross-college strategy for the provision of basic skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and there is a lack of liaison between faculties offering this provision and basic skills learning support. Aspects of management in some areas of the college are not effective, for example, in learning support and in some curriculum areas. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. There are well-documented policies and

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procedures for franchised provision and excellent links with the franchise partners. This strength was not referred to in the self-assessment report. The academic board is effective.

101 The management of personnel issues is satisfactory. The deployment of staff resources is tightly controlled and well monitored. A staff database is being established. Payroll costs are low at 56%. Part-time staff are paid to attend key meetings and to participate in staff development.

102 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. At 31 July 1997, the college had accumulated debts due to the FEFC of £6.7 million. Large surpluses in each of the following two years have enabled the debt to be reduced to £3.2 million, more quickly than planned. The college's financial position, although considerably improved, remains a concern. The college derives significant income from franchised provision that will reduce as a result of changes to the basis of funding for franchised provision. Financial constraints continue to limit the capacity for capital investment.

103 A qualified accountant who is a senior postholder heads the finance team. The budget planning process is clear and appropriate. The preparation of management accounts is time consuming. They are prepared by re-entering data from the main accounting system. The content of the management accounts was recently revised and they now provide detailed historical and forecast financial information. Financial results of college companies are consolidated in the management accounts but a detailed report is only produced annually. The senior management team formally considers the monthly management accounts at its meetings. Expenditure and income levels and cashflows are closely scrutinised. Recently updated financial regulations are comprehensive and

widely distributed. The timeliness of returns to the FEFC has improved. A high level of resource is allocated to internal audit.

104 Management information is not used effectively at all levels. Some programme managers do not hold accurate data on retention and achievement and do not use management information effectively to plan and review provision. The lack of accurate data on retention and achievement until 1996-97, together with the incomplete data on students' destinations, prevents the college from monitoring trends in students' performance over several years. Inspectors could not agree with the strength relating to management information included in the self-assessment report, despite substantial improvements since the previous inspection.

105 The college has a clear policy on equal opportunities with effective procedures to ensure implementation and processes for monitoring and reporting to senior management and the corporation. There are no targets against which progress can be measured. The equal opportunities committee, reorganised in March 1999, is tackling a range of issues, for example, harassment. Equal opportunities training is included in induction for new staff and staff development programmes.

Conclusions

106 The inspection team found many of the judgements in the self-assessment report to be realistic. The report was a useful departure point for planning the inspection. It was the fruit of a comprehensive process, that involved all staff and corporation members. Strengths in teaching and learning were sometimes overstated, in part due to the college's grading of teaching observations being significantly higher than those of inspectors. There was also a tendency for the college to ascribe more weight to the undoubted progress made since the last inspection than to its actual retention and achievements. The inspection team found that the college had been overgenerous in its grading of some of the cross-college and curriculum areas.

107 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 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	13
19-24 years	14
25+ years	72
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	29
Level 2 (intermediate)	44
Level 3 (advanced)	20
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Non-schedule 2	2
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	927	5,816	24
Agriculture	87	127	1
Construction	306	2,353	9
Engineering	352	2,579	10
Business	289	3,550	13
Hotel and catering	184	987	4
Health and community care	894	3,321	15
Art and design	255	1,114	5
Humanities	452	3,516	14
Basic education	244	1,253	5
Total	3,990	24,616	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 24% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	403	26	33	462
Supporting direct learning contact	41	1	0	42
Other support	282	44	0	326
Total	726	71	33	830

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£25,671,000	£24,494,000	£25,090,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.68	£17.28	£16.92
Payroll as a proportion of income	66%	54%	56%
Achievement of funding target	84%	93%	102%
Diversity of income	23%	26%	28%
Operating surplus	-£800,000	£2,297,000	£1,288,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	1,024	1,309	1,763	4,245	5,357	4,263
	Retention (%)	81	85	75	82	94	81
	Achievement (%)	36	41	45	34	33	60
2	Number of starters	1,827	2,432	2,136	4,308	4,079	5,719
	Retention (%)	78	75	63	83	80	78
	Achievement (%)	51	32	53	60	52	67
3	Number of starters	1,825	1,945	1,094	3,125	3,120	2,773
	Retention (%)	82	64	62	80	78	72
	Achievement (%)	49	42	55	55	46	57
4 or 5	Number of starters	70	104	27	527	644	549
	Retention (%)	91	65	78	90	61	65
	Achievement (%)	72	77	76	53	62	63
Short courses	Number of starters	855	810	1,466	8,157	8,982	9,328
	Retention (%)	91	91	89	94	96	95
	Achievement (%)	45	38	33	56	37	53
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	597	502	499	8,017	6,518	3,601
	Retention (%)	84	83	80	86	89	85
	Achievement (%)	49	40	44	59	41	48

Source: ISR

FEFC Inspection Report 19/00

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
Website www.fefc.ac.uk
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