

Capel Manor College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

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 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 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

Capel Manor College

Greater London Region

Inspected December 2000

Capel Manor College is a specialist college of agriculture. The main campus is located in the London Borough of Enfield and there are two additional centres in west and east London. The college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report, but felt some of the strengths were overstated. They identified some additional strengths and weaknesses which the college had not identified.

The inspection covered provision in equine studies and animal care, floristry, and horticulture, together with aspects of cross-college provision. There is outstanding provision in floristry. There are effective links between curriculum areas and industry. Teaching is vocationally relevant. Courses are well managed. The college's estate benefits both students and visitors. Prospective students are given good advice and guidance on their choice of courses. Students receive an effective induction and good support throughout their courses. Students' achievements are high on many courses, and the overall rate of attendance is above average for the sector. Specialist resources are good in most curriculum areas and the general accommodation is of a high standard and well maintained. The college's quality assurance procedures lead to measurable improvements in provision and there are

effective arrangements for staff development. Senior managers work effectively with external agencies. Their financial management is sound. Governors are closely involved in strategic planning. They are strongly committed to the well-being of the college and use their wide range of skills and experience to good effect. The college should improve: the standard of provision in equine studies and animal care; some unsatisfactory teaching; low rates of student retention and achievement on some courses; poor computer facilities and student support services at the centres away from the main college; some inadequate records of tutorials; the provision of computers for teaching staff; and the inadequate monitoring and evaluation of some college procedures and services.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Equine studies and animal care	4	Support for students	3
Floristry	1	General resources	2
Horticulture	2	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	2
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Capel Manor College is a specialist college of agriculture situated in the London Borough of Enfield. There are additional centres at Gunnersbury Park in the London Borough of Ealing, and Upminster Court in the London Borough of Havering. There is also some provision run in partnership with other local colleges, at the Edmonton Green centre. The college has the tenancy of Forty Hall Farm. The main campus, set in its own estate and gardens of 12.5 hectares, includes a grade II listed Georgian house. The gardens are open to the public throughout the year and attract up to 80,000 visitors a year. The college has strong links with employers and benefits from extensive patronage and sponsorship. Major horticultural companies sponsor many of the gardens and the practical trials that take place in them.

2 Some 250 full-time and 1,239 part-time students enrolled in 2000-01. Approximately three-quarters of the students are over 25 years of age. About one-third are resident in and around the Borough of Enfield; many students travel long distances daily to attend the college.

3 Courses are offered in: horticulture, including landscaping; floristry; balloon display; garden design; countryside studies; arboriculture; animal care and equine studies. Saddlery and related courses, previously based at Cordwainers College, have been offered since September 2000. Most courses are offered from entry level to advanced level and can be studied part time or full time. Some higher level courses are offered, together with a range of short course provision for industry and the local community. A number of courses are designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

4 At the time of the inspection there were 88 full-time equivalent staff. The senior management team comprises the principal and chief executive, the deputy chief executive, the

finance manager, the director of estates and buildings and the personnel manager. Senior managers hold operational responsibility for cross-college areas.

5 The college's mission is 'to promote the understanding and enjoyment of plants, flowers and animals for career, business and leisure purposes'. The strategic aims of the college are:

- 'raising the knowledge and skill levels amongst those working with, or interested in, flowers, plants and animals and responsible for (or associated with) the use of the countryside, parks, gardens and open spaces
- using Capel's resources for increasing participation, income generation and awareness raising
- seeking to provide a learning centre of excellence for the land-based and associated industries
- pursuing and promoting appropriate strategic alliances to provide a comprehensive regional service across Greater London
- encouraging and supporting lifelong learning
- promoting equality of access and opportunity
- investing in staff to enable them to achieve the college's aims and goals'.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in December 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. Inspectors checked the college's own data on students' achievements for 2000 against

Context

primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Nine inspectors and an auditor worked for a total of 39 days to carry out the inspection.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons observed, 58% were judged to be good or outstanding, compared with the national average of 62%. The percentage of less than satisfactory lessons was 12%, compared with the national average of 6%.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
NVQ	0	3	2	0	0	5
Other vocational	6	11	8	5	0	30
Tutorials	1	2	2	0	0	5
Total (No.)	7	16	12	5	0	40
Total (%)	18	40	30	12	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Capel Manor College	11.1	81
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Equine Studies and Animal Care

Grade 4

9 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the key strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but considered that strengths in teaching were overestimated. Inspectors identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective course management
- curriculum enrichment through effective participation in shows and events

Weaknesses

- a poor rate of achievement on most courses
- a low rate of retention on some courses
- poorly planned practical teaching
- some inadequate specialist resources

10 The college offers full-time courses in equine studies and animal care from level 1 to level 3. British Horse Society awards are offered at level 2 on a part-time basis. The college has recently gained approval as a centre for national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 in animal care. Saddlery provision was transferred from another college and commenced in September 2000. The integration and development of these courses have been well managed. Staff and students transferring to the college value the high level of support which they receive. There is effective course organisation and management. Teachers and support staff work well together as a team. Clear schemes of work are shared with students. Teachers have established good informal links with employers for work experience placements. They visit each placement to check on its

suitability. The students gain valuable vocational experience from the placements. The self-assessment report notes that there is scope for the further development of formal links with industry.

11 There is some good teaching in theory lessons. The range of learning activities is appropriate. Lessons are well planned and teachers make use of realistic examples. In a lesson for national diploma animal care students, the teacher gave clear examples of animal adaptations to extreme temperatures. Learning materials are good. However, many of the practical lessons observed were poorly planned. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Students carrying out duties in the equine yard and animal unit were not all involved in constructive learning activities. There were few links to strengthen the connection between theory and practical work. Many lessons were not brought to an effective conclusion that helped students to consolidate their learning. In some lessons insufficient attention was given to meeting the learning needs of all the students.

12 The college has a heavy horse team and students exhibit at a number of national shows and events. In the summer of 2000, students participated in the Queen Mother's 100th birthday celebration at Horse Guards Parade, London. Tutors give considerable support and guidance to students, who clearly respect the technical expertise of the staff. Tutorials are held regularly. Tutors systematically monitor the progress of students, but some keep poor records. Assignment briefs are clearly written. Students produce work of an appropriate standard, in some cases making effective use of computers. Teachers give constructive feedback when marking students' work.

13 The college identified in the self-assessment report the poor overall record of students which was revealed in both the rates of retention and achievement. For example, the

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retention rate on the national diploma in animal care course has been poor for the past two years. Although the retention rate has improved on the national certificate course in the management of horses over the last three years, it is still below the national average for the sector. Changes in the course content of the first diploma in animal care have led to improvements in retention and achievement rates. However, achievement rates on most courses are poor and in many cases they are significantly below the national averages. None of the students on the stage 2 horse knowledge and care course of the British Horse Society achieved the award last year.

14 The college has a small, well-managed equine yard in which students are able to gain competence in driving light and heavy horses. However, the small size of the yard restricts the range of practical skills that students are able to develop. The college recognises this shortcoming and has developed a training agreement with a large commercial riding centre approved by the British Horse Society, where equitation, stable management and lunging (a horse-training technique) are taught. The students are transported to this centre by minibus, but the time spent travelling sometimes disrupts their attendance at other lessons. The college is planning to establish a new equine centre. There are insufficient numbers of small animals to offer students enough opportunities to develop competent handling skills. A refurbished animal care unit, housing a range of small animals including rodents and fish, was opened one month before the inspection but there were problems with the efficient functioning of ventilation, drainage and storage facilities of this unit. Sufficient resources to support courses in saddlery have been developed.

15 Library resources to support equine and saddlery courses are good. There are insufficient texts and periodicals to support teaching in animal care. This same weakness

had been identified during the previous inspection.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in equine studies and animal care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
First diploma horse studies (with animal care)	2	Number of starters	11	11	*
		Retention (%)	91	70	*
		Achievement (%)	50	43	*
First diploma animal care	2	Number of starters	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	94
		Achievement (%)	*	*	75
National certificate management of horses	2	Number of starters	9	12	13
		Retention (%)	56	67	75
		Achievement (%)	40	50	44
British Horse Society stage 2 horse knowledge and care	2	Number of starters	*	*	10
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	0
National certificate animal care	2	Number of starters	18	18	21
		Retention (%)	78	89	86
		Achievement (%)	64	69	61
National diploma horse studies	3	Number of starters	11	11	5
		Retention (%)	45	64	80
		Achievement (%)	100	86	50
National diploma animal care	3	Number of starters	*	17	18
		Retention (%)	*	41	44
		Achievement (%)	*	83	63

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Floristry

Grade 1

16 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- very good retention and achievement rates on all courses
- very good teaching
- the good standard of students' practical work
- good teaching resources
- well-managed courses
- strong links with industry

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of students' key skills and study skills

17 The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in floristry, flower arranging and balloon display. An access to further education course aims to encourage disaffected school pupils to continue studying. Non-vocational courses are run at the Edmonton Green centre. Modes of attendance are planned carefully to suit the needs of students, many of whom have family or employment commitments. There has been an expansion of student numbers from 210 in 1996-97 to 349 in 2000-01. Staff have strong links with industry, as noted in the self-assessment report. All NVQ and national certificate students undertake a work experience placement, and teachers visit them at work to review their progress and carry out practical assessments. A recent open evening, featuring a demonstration by a well-known speaker, attracted many local employers to the college.

18 Courses are well planned. Schemes of work and lesson plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain effective and up to date. Regular staff meetings ensure that all teachers are well informed about developments. All students are interviewed when applying to join the college and receive guidance on their choice of course. Students' induction is effective; care is taken to ensure that any late starters receive all the required information. Students are tested to assess their level of competence in basic skills and the college provides additional learning support where appropriate. Students benefit from regular tutorials and speak highly of the personal support offered by teachers. However, tutorial records sometimes lack appropriate detail.

19 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is a significant strength. The most effective lessons are delivered with flair and enthusiasm. At entry level, teachers ensure that students develop basic vocational skills. Advanced courses hone these skills whilst encouraging creativity and innovation. For example, first-year students used guidelines from the Society of Floristry to create corsages, whilst final-year students had a more open brief to create table decorations from a range of materials. In both cases the students' work was of a high standard. Teachers' professional activities include involvement in floristry training and trade organisations. This experience helps to ensure that their teaching in the college reflects the latest fashions and trends in the industry. In their courses a strong emphasis is given to costing, sales promotion and marketing in both practical and theory classes, thus recognising the needs of students working in a small business.

20 Practical work is often well taught in a commercial context. For example, national certificate students provided floral decorations for a wedding. They visited the church and discussed with the client what type of decoration was required, before preparing designs and

Curriculum Areas

submitting quotations. A balloon display lesson developed students' design and problem-solving skills during a project to build life-size balloon sculptures of Santa Claus. Much of the practical work develops students' skills in communication and the use of numbers, but there is no formal development or recording of key skills. In some lessons, insufficient attention is paid to the varying level of students' study skills.

21 As noted in the college's self-assessment, there is a consistently high rate of student retention and achievement on almost all courses. Both retention and achievement rates are significantly above the national averages for the sector. Staff respond quickly to students' absence from college by telephoning to offer help. This approach contributes to the achievement of high retention rates. There was a high attendance rate in lessons during the inspection. A high proportion of students progress to further courses or employment.

Student portfolios are comprehensive and well organised. Students and staff have won awards in many national and regional competitions, including the Society of Floristry's spring event and the International Balloon Arts competition.

22 Floristry courses benefit from good accommodation and appropriate equipment and resources. Commercial sponsorship, secured by staff, provides a wide range of materials for use in practical work, especially for balloon display courses. Students obtain realistic practical experience on flower conditioning and display skills by working in the college's floristry shop. The stock of library books for floristry is inadequate. Some classes made use of books which were the personal property of teachers to overcome this weakness. Staff are appropriately qualified and most have recent commercial experience. Annual staff development training sessions ensure that they are up to date with good practice in the industry.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in floristry, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
First steps in creative crafts	1	Number of starters	*	77	90
		Retention (%)	*	100	99
		Achievement (%)	*	90	88
NVQ floristry	2	Number of starters	89	114	77
		Retention (%)	92	82	78
		Achievement (%)	96	83	97
Balloon display	2	Number of starters	82	78	87
		Retention (%)	97	96	83
		Achievement (%)	87	89	96
Floral arts advanced	3	Number of starters	*	*	34
		Retention (%)	*	*	94
		Achievement (%)	*	*	88
National certificate in professional floristry	4	Number of starters	39	33	40
		Retention (%)	97	82	93
		Achievement (%)	89	74	92

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Horticulture

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the broad range of courses
- the strong link between theory and practical teaching
- high pass rates on most courses
- effective links with industry
- good specialist resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention in some lessons to the learning needs of all students
- low retention rates on some courses

24 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the broad range of provision caters for the needs of students and local industry. There are courses from foundation to advanced level and many of the qualifications can be studied either full time or part time. A foundation course has started for students with additional learning needs. Enrolments are low on some courses and students from different groups are combined for lessons. Helpful literature is provided for students and staff, including information on the organisation and structure of courses, assessment schedules and guidelines on compiling portfolios. There are effective links with industry. Companies sponsor many of the horticultural practical facilities. Industrial visits and work experience for students effectively complement the teaching.

25 Much of the teaching is good. In the most effective lessons, teachers use their in-depth knowledge of industry skilfully. They use

well-chosen examples to illustrate the links between practical work and theory. Students develop their knowledge and skills by working on assignments that are vocationally relevant. During a lesson on organic horticulture, students were asked to determine the advantages of either digging or not digging. There was a lively discussion and questions from the teacher encouraged further debate. A list was compiled of the advantages and disadvantages of both techniques. In some lessons insufficient account is taken of the learning needs of all students in the class, with questions mainly directed to the more able students. Teachers do not always make sure that all students are undertaking the work. Sometimes teachers talk too much, causing some students to lose interest in the topic. In a number of lessons the late arrival of students caused some disruption.

26 Assignments provide good opportunities for the development and assessment of key skills. However, insufficient attention is given to the development of these skills in lessons. Some national certificate students produce good assignments, which are well researched and clearly presented. Written feedback to students on their work is clear and helpful. The college's self-assessment identified the effective arrangements that exist for tutorial support. Individual and group tutorials are held regularly, and provide good opportunities for students to seek assistance with their work. Records of individual tutorials are not always thorough. Some include an appropriately detailed progress review for each student; others fail to list any agreed action points or timescales.

27 The pass rate on most courses in 2000 was good and showed improvement over the previous year. Pass rates have been consistently high for students on NVQ level 2 decorative horticulture and hard landscape. Students' achievements on the national certificate in horticulture have been good for the last two years. The pass rate in 1999 was 94%, which is

Curriculum Areas

significantly higher than the national average. In 2000 there was a marked improvement over the previous year in the pass rate on NVQ level 1 amenity horticulture and Royal Horticulture Society general certificate courses. Achievement and retention rates for the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) phase 2 hard landscape and crop production courses are good. A high proportion of NVQ level 2 students complete their studies successfully. However, the retention rate for some courses is low. Part-time students on the national certificate in horticulture course have a poor retention rate. Similarly, student retention on courses leading to Royal Horticultural Society qualifications is relatively low, particularly for those students on

two-year programmes. The self-assessment report understates the weaknesses in student retention and insufficient analysis is carried out by the college on the reasons for poor performance in this area.

28 The college's self-assessment acknowledges the good specialist resources in horticulture. There is an extensive collection of plants, both protected and outdoor, from a wide range of habitats. These resources enable realistic work to be carried out in practical lessons, demonstrations and projects. There is good provision of covered areas for practical work when weather conditions are unfavourable.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in horticulture, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ amenity horticulture	1	Number of starters	93	96	70
		Retention (%)	62	84	79
		Achievement (%)	88	78	88
NVQ amenity horticulture	2	Number of starters	92	64	71
		Retention (%)	67	75	85
		Achievement (%)	79	81	91
National certificate horticulture	2	Number of starters	34	25	35
		Retention (%)	79	88	60
		Achievement (%)	68	95	94
Amenity horticulture phase 2	2	Number of starters	*	*	89
		Retention (%)	*	*	83
		Achievement (%)	*	*	78
Royal Horticultural Society general certificate	2	Number of starters	234	142	142
		Retention (%)	54	63	54
		Achievement (%)	59	48	79
Royal Horticultural Society diploma	3	Number of starters	34	36	34
		Retention (%)	38	36	59
		Achievement (%)	8	33	†

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*course not running

†data unavailable

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Support for Students

Grade 3

29 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, they found that some strengths had been overemphasised and they identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry advice and guidance
- effective induction of students
- good personal support for students

Weaknesses

- inadequate evaluation of student support services
- insufficient detail in some tutorial records
- inadequate student support services at centres

30 All applicants have access to appropriately detailed advice and guidance about their planned programme of study. Staff attend a variety of events to promote the college's courses, which are also publicised through the local and specialist press. There are good links with local schools. The college produces a wide range of promotional literature, including newsletters targeted at local industry. There are regular advice evenings and open days. Students applying for a course discuss their application with a specialist teacher prior to enrolment. Students speak positively about the advice and guidance which they receive. However, some of the arrangements for advice and enrolment need improving. For example, there is sometimes a delay in arranging specialist interviews for full-time applicants.

31 The induction programme for both full-time and part-time students is effective.

Full-time students follow a common induction programme during the first week of their course. In 2000 it included icebreaker activities, an introduction to support services, tours of the college's gardens and a visit for some students to the Millennium Dome. An informative students' handbook provides the focus for the induction of part-time students. All students receive a useful student diary.

32 The number of students receiving additional learning support has grown steadily since the previous inspection and a wider range of needs is now being addressed. All students complete an initial diagnostic test to assess their literacy and numeracy skills. Those students identified as requiring additional learning support meet with specialist staff to discuss their needs. Students may attend open access or scheduled sessions. These are well run by appropriately qualified staff. Much of the support gives students general assistance with their assignment work. There is insufficient monitoring and evaluating of some students' progress. Students' attendance at sessions is monitored and tutors follow up any absence. Tutors receive general feedback on the progress of students each term. As recognised in the college's self-assessment, the amount of additional learning support available away from the college at its centres is inadequate. There are only a few instances of support for small groups of students. There are no specialist learning support tutors at these centres and provision for one-to-one help is only available through arrangements for distance learning, which are not effective for some students.

33 Student feedback reveals a high level of satisfaction with the support provided by teachers, both informally and through tutorials. Students value the willingness of teachers to give advice and support outside classes and to respond to their individual needs. There are group and individual tutorials. College guidelines specify the content of tutorials and staff shape sessions to meet the specific needs of

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their students. However, action plans from individual tutorials are often not taken into account in planning or monitoring students' subsequent work. Weaknesses in action-planning were not identified in the self-assessment report. Records of varying quality are kept on tutorials. Some are too brief and contain little evidence of effective action-planning.

34 Teachers provide most of the guidance on progression, on gaining jobs and making applications for higher education. The progression of students to other courses within the college is high, but few students apply to go to university. Course teams arrange visits from employers or representatives of specific organisations to tell students about opportunities within industry. There is an annual careers fair. The college has a contract with the local careers company for the provision of careers advice and guidance, but take-up of individual careers interviews is low.

35 The college's enrichment programme for full-time 16 to 19 year olds is restricted. Some students are given the opportunity to develop their key skills and to study for qualifications that are additional to their main programme. Many students are involved in work experience and participate in a range of course-related visits and events such as trade shows. There are few social and recreational activities. Provision of financial support is available for full-time and some part-time students. The criteria for eligibility are clear. Awards are made relatively promptly. The continuation of support depends upon the student maintaining satisfactory levels of attendance and achievement.

36 The college has set performance targets for its student support services. There are insufficient systems for monitoring the effectiveness of these services or evaluating their impact. The college recognises this shortcoming

and has drawn up plans to establish monitoring systems.

General Resources

Grade 2

37 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report and identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective use of the estate for students and visitors
- good classroom accommodation
- a good learning resource centre
- effective refectory provision
- effective property maintenance

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of Forty Hall Farm
- insufficient computing facilities for some teaching staff and in the centres
- insufficient social areas

38 The main college campus is set within the grounds of Capel Manor house, a grade II-listed Georgian mansion. Adjacent buildings include a listed Victorian stable block and a range of smaller buildings that are used mainly for specialist curriculum provision. There are themed demonstration and trial gardens, sponsored by a specialist journal and major horticultural companies. These gardens are open to the public throughout the year and attract approximately 80,000 visitors a year. The use of the estate by students and visitors is mutually beneficial. The gardens provide an excellent practical teaching resource for the students, whilst visitors enjoy seeing the results of students' work in the gardens. The visitors also provide the college with additional income

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from admission charges. As noted in the self-assessment report, the recent opening of the £2.3 million Duchess of Devonshire pavilion has substantially enhanced the college's accommodation. The pavilion includes a new learning resource centre, classrooms, a lecture theatre, staff offices, a reception area and a shop. Overall, the college's accommodation strategy has responded to changes in the curriculum and to many of the issues raised in the previous inspection report.

39 The college has two main additional centres, which provide opportunities for practical work. Both are close to underground stations. Gunnersbury Park centre is in West London and is used for horticulture, garden design and floristry. It comprises a house, walled garden, classrooms, glasshouse, and polytunnel. It is well maintained and well furnished to the same high standard as the main campus. Upminster Court centre is in east London. It offers provision in horticulture and floristry in part of an old stable block. Although less well maintained than the Gunnersbury Park centre, its classrooms are furnished to a good standard. The college shares the use of the Edmonton Green centre with other local colleges.

40 The college has the tenancy of Forty Hall Farm, a 73-hectare property situated 1 mile from the main campus. Financial assistance from heritage lottery funds has enabled restoration of the buildings to begin; it is planned to complete the work in 2001. Currently, little use is made of the buildings as is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The farm carries a flock of approximately 35 sheep and produces hay. It is used by students for countryside practical work.

41 With the exception of a few of the older rooms, most classroom accommodation is of a high standard, well furnished and well equipped. There are attractive displays of students' work throughout the college. Most

areas of the college, except part of the Upminster Court centre, are accessible to people with restricted mobility. All the buildings and grounds are maintained to a high standard. A detailed condition survey of all buildings was made in 2000 and will be used in future maintenance schedules.

42 The learning resource centre at the main campus is attractively furnished. Areas are set aside for individual and group study. Computers with modern specifications provide free access to the Internet. There are sufficient computers to meet the current demand from students at the main campus, but the centres have insufficient computing facilities. Computer provision for most administration staff is good but it is inadequate for many teaching staff. The college recognises these limitations in the self-assessment report and plans to improve the situation.

43 There is no common room or social area on the main campus. This situation is less of a problem during the summer, when the gardens are pleasant for students to use during breaks. In the winter students often have to remain within classrooms or the refectory. There are small common rooms at the two centres. Following complaints from visitors and students, the refectory at the main campus was relocated. It is now an attractive facility in which friendly staff provide a good service for both students and visitors. There are no sports or recreational facilities in the college. Arrangements have been made for students to use the sports facilities at a local school on Wednesday afternoons, but uptake has been low. Students aged over 18 years old may use the facilities of the student union at Middlesex University on production of their student identity card.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

44 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report, but considered that some strengths had been overstated. They found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective impact of quality assurance procedures
- comprehensive guidance on procedures
- a thorough system of internal verification
- effective arrangements for staff development

Weaknesses

- some poor course reviews and self-assessment
- insufficient analysis of students' performance data
- inadequate use of service standards for support services
- inadequate oversight of staff appraisal

45 Since the previous inspection, the college has developed a comprehensive quality assurance manual, which provides helpful guidance for staff on the implementation of quality assurance procedures. These procedures include self-assessment, course review, staff appraisal and development, lesson observation, service standards for support services, and frequent surveys of the views of students. As noted in the self-assessment report, quality assurance arrangements have contributed to measurable improvements in some aspects of provision. For example, in response to the views of students, the presentation and content of some course materials have been improved, and beneficial changes have been made to the

content of some courses. There have been some improvements in the overall retention and achievement rates of students, particularly at level 2. Actions taken to improve students' records of attendance are having a positive effect.

46 The college has revised some of the arrangements for the oversight of quality assurance activities. Issues relating to quality assurance are considered during the monthly meetings of managers, which are chaired by the principal. Additionally, there are frequent and effective meetings between the deputy principal and curriculum managers to review the standard of their courses. The results of these meetings are reported to the academic board. However, the revised arrangements do not always ensure that quality assurance procedures are applied consistently and thoroughly. For example, some college service areas do not assess their work using the performance standards specified in the quality assurance manual. Some achievement and retention data which are produced by the college are unreliable. Some course teams and managers fail to scrutinise the data to identify inaccuracies and under-performing areas.

47 As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, there are thorough internal systems for monitoring the standard of assessment. An internal verification steering group thoroughly reviews the reports received from external verifiers. The group closely monitors the progress being made by course teams in responding to the issues raised. The college has an established lesson observation scheme. Teachers are observed annually. The group oversees the process and reviews the results effectively. The group identified that some grades awarded to lessons were overgenerous. It has now amended the criteria and the procedures used for observation, although it is too early to assess the impact of these changes on the standard of teaching.

Cross-college Provision

48 All course teams undertake reviews of their courses. Reviews are carried out each term and the end-of-year review culminates in a report. The reports are considered by curriculum managers and are used in developing the annual self-assessment report. Some course reviews are poor. They are not thorough in the analysis of student performance and in action-planning. Targets are set for rates of student retention and achievement, but the actions specified to achieve these targets are sometimes inadequate. This weakness is recognised by the college. The views of students are gained through questionnaires set each term. Course managers develop action plans to address areas of concern and progress is monitored carefully by senior managers. An independent external agency sets one of the questionnaires and summarises the results.

49 Section managers produce annual self-assessment reports. These reports are validated by the deputy principal and reviewed by the governors' curriculum and quality committee. Where appropriate, the reports draw upon the results of lesson observations, students' views, course review reports and staff appraisal. However, some reports are insufficiently self-critical and some action plans are inadequate. There are links between the outcomes of self-assessment and strategic and operational planning, but weaknesses identified in annual business plans are not always reflected in the self-assessment report. The college's self-assessment report is sent to three other similar colleges for comment.

50 Students are familiar with the charter and the complaint procedure, which they receive in a college diary that also contains other useful information. The charter provides clear statements of entitlements. Complaints that are brought to the attention of staff, managers and senior managers are dealt with effectively. However, managers do not produce a summary report for governors.

51 Arrangements for staff development are effective. Staff are aware of their individual entitlement to training and development and speak highly of the opportunities. Staff training needs are identified through annual appraisal and are linked to the achievement of strategic objectives. Activities have included continuing professional development, assessor and verifier training and updating staff on the use of computers. As noted by the college, the staff development forum oversees the development of an annual training plan and its implementation effectively. There are comprehensive evaluations of all development activities undertaken. There are established procedures for the annual appraisal of staff, but monitoring of the process is not thorough. Targets set during appraisal are often insufficiently demanding. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Governance

Grade 2

52 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the commitment of governors to the college
- governors' wide range of skills, expertise and experience
- the close attention to strategic planning
- the good oversight of college finances
- a thorough approach to the self-assessment of governance

Weaknesses

- an inadequate training programme

Cross-college Provision

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

54 The corporation has a membership of 19: seven business governors, three co-opted governors, one staff governor, one student governor, three local authority nominees, three community governors and the principal. At the time of inspection there were vacancies for one business and one community governor. The governing body meets three times a year. The average level of attendance at board meetings was 77% in 1999-2000. The corporation has established committees for audit, search, finance and general purposes, personnel, health and safety, curriculum and quality, and remuneration. Each has clear terms of reference and is chaired by an experienced governor.

55 Following changes to the instrument of governance, six governors were appointed. Recent appointments reflect the board's perceived need for more community and academic expertise. A recent skills audit will be used by the search committee when making recommendations for future appointments. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that there is a good balance of relevant business, professional and academic skills which are used effectively to support the college.

56 The standard of clerkship is good and the clerk is well regarded by governors. The governing body receives full committee reports, together with papers from senior managers. Meetings are well managed. Agenda, minutes and supporting papers are well presented and reflect an effective ordering of business. Minutes of meetings contain regular reviews of

action plans. The clerk maintains a comprehensive register of interests for senior members of staff as well as governors; this register is updated annually. However, the clerk is also the college's personnel manager and a member of the senior management team. This arrangement carries the potential for a conflict of interest.

57 Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the well-being of the college. They have strong business and financial links and use them to support the college's strategic aims and estate development. The governors were deeply involved in planning and raising funds for the Duchess of Devonshire pavilion. They take a leading role in setting the college's strategic direction and attend annual strategic development events with college managers to review the progress made against the previous year's operating plan. Governors set key objectives and targets for the coming year. As the self-assessment report indicates, they need to improve their monitoring against targets for rates of student retention and achievement. To achieve this objective, the presentation of data has been improved. In addition, the terms of reference of the curriculum and quality committee have been revised to include responsibility for monitoring the targets.

58 The board effectively oversees the college's financial performance. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. The board has set financial objectives with the intention of ensuring that the college's financial position remains strong. The finance and general purposes committee scrutinises the management accounts and other financial information thoroughly, prior to making recommendations to the board. All governors also receive management accounts quarterly.

59 Governors carry out the self-assessment process thoroughly. Each of the board's committees carries out a self-assessment of its own performance, and identifies priorities for

Cross-college Provision

action. The final self-assessment report on governance is collated from these self-assessments. All members also complete a comprehensive questionnaire on the board's performance. The clerk analyses the results of this questionnaire and refers action points back to the board.

60 A training needs analysis has been completed to develop a training programme for governors. Induction arrangements for new governors have been improved. Training sessions covering a broad range of issues are held for two hours before governing body meetings. However, no record is kept of the training completed by each governor and there is no training programme that is tailored to meet the needs of individual governors. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governor training needs further development.

61 Individual governors are not well known to staff, with the exception of the chair. Governors attend college functions and some governors take an interest in particular curricular areas, but informal contacts are rare. Governors are not listed in the staff handbook.

Management

Grade 3

62 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the college overestimated the significance of some strengths. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a clear framework for strategic planning
- effective links with external agencies
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- an inappropriate committee structure
- insufficient monitoring of some key college procedures
- slow progress in implementing the IT strategy

63 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment that senior and middle managers work well as a team. The recent transfer of some courses and staff from another college to Capel Manor College was managed effectively. There is a well-developed framework for strategic planning. Clear and appropriate strategic priorities and associated objectives are set. Strategic targets and the college mission are reviewed thoroughly each year. Each curriculum section conducts a needs analysis and produces a business plan, taking account of the college's strategic objectives. However, these plans vary in the effectiveness of their analysis. Some provide full and useful information on rates of student retention and achievement, together with comparisons with previous years. Others place insufficient emphasis on retention and achievement rates.

64 The committee structure of the college is overcomplicated; some staff do not fully understand the roles of different committees. As a consequence there can be different interpretations of monitoring and reporting procedures. This shortcoming has been recognised by the college and a simpler committee structure is being implemented. There is insufficient monitoring of the implementation of some key college procedures. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. The three-year cycle for reviewing policies identifies objectives and targets, but some reviews remain incomplete. The monitoring of equal opportunities takes place separately for students and staff which can lead to a lack of co-ordination and oversight of

Cross-college Provision

the issues that may arise. At the time of inspection, the equal opportunities charter was under review and the target date for completion had not been met.

65 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that it has extensive and effective partnerships with external agencies. The college enjoys significant sponsorship from the horticultural industry. College events and conferences are well organised and successful. Industrial partners speak highly of the college. There are active industrial advisory boards in some curriculum sections. The college is an associate college of Middlesex University and has strong links with Birkbeck College, University of London. The improvements to facilities that have resulted from these links provide a clear benefit to students and visitors to the college.

66 There is systematic use of market research to help the college to assess the relevance of existing provision. The college works closely with the land-based industries which it serves, liaising directly with employers and consulting with the relevant national training organisation and other professional bodies. The information which the college gathers is used effectively to identify new opportunities and develop courses that meet the needs of industry.

67 The college is committed to establishing a strong IT support network, and installed a new computerised management information system in 2000. However, there has been slow progress in improving IT provision and support for curriculum staff. A new IT link between the two main buildings on the college campus was not in operation at the time of inspection. Problems in collecting data reduce the availability to staff of accurate statistics on rates of student retention and achievement.

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has achieved operational surpluses in each of the

last three years, whilst managing the reduction of its average level of funding from £29.78 in 1995-96 to £16.60 currently. Over this period the college has met its annual FEFC funding unit targets and its cash position has remained strong.

69 The college's finance manager, who is a qualified and experienced accountant and a member of the senior management team, attends all meetings of the corporation, and its audit and finance committees. The college has clear financial regulations. The financial reports contain detailed narratives, which are scrutinised by the finance committee, prior to being considered by the corporation. Comprehensive management accounts are produced, which are considered each month by the senior management team. However, they contain insufficient information on departmental performance. Inadequate use is made of performance indicators.

Conclusions

70 The college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report, but felt some of the strengths were overstated. They also found strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified. Inspectors disagreed with one of the three curriculum area grades given by the college, and with one of the five grades for cross-college provision. In both instances, inspectors concluded that the college had been overgenerous in its grading.

71 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 (November 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	10
19-24 years	13
25+ years	75
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	9
Level 2 (intermediate)	54
Level 3 (advanced)	13
Level 4/5 (higher)	3
Level not specified	21
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 2000)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full-time</i>	<i>Part-time</i>	<i>Total provision (%)</i>
Agriculture	220	976	80
Construction	12	0	1
Engineering	5	0	0
Health and community care	0	162	11
Art and design	11	101	8
Basic education	2	0	0
Total	250	1,239	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 34% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	22	6	2	30
Supporting direct learning contact	13	5	0	18
Other support	32	2	6	40
Total	67	13	8	88

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£2,953,000	£3,032,944	£3,311,450
Average level of funding (ALF)	£15.49	£16.20*	£16.60
Payroll as a proportion of income	56%	57%	62%
Achievement of funding target	100%	99%	†
Diversity of income	42%	36%	30%
Operating surplus	£191,000	£137,229	£243,255

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1998-99 (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

*provisional data

†data not available

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
1	Number of starters	27	34	33	155	148	165
	Retention (%)	52	85	85	84	91	80
	Achievement (%)	64	55	74	93	90	94
2	Number of starters	87	75	86	694	559	573
	Retention (%)	83	77	80	70	77	76
	Achievement (%)	61	53	74	79	82	86
3	Number of starters	28	49	28	106	208	123
	Retention (%)	61	61	54	66	77	77
	Achievement (%)	75	59	47	43	33	*
4 or 5	Number of starters	5	3	6	35	30	34
	Retention (%)	100	67	83	97	83	94
	Achievement (%)	40	0	100	97	80	94
Short courses	Number of starters	10	55	139	204	392	1,187
	Retention (%)	90	100	99	92	97	98
	Achievement (%)	78	89	96	74	82	94
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	0	4	6	19	20	71
	Retention (%)	n/a	100	100	95	90	90
	Achievement (%)	n/a	100	100	100	83	80

Source: college

*data not available

n/a not applicable

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