

Darlington College of Technology

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

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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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	7

Curriculum areas

Mathematics and information technology	10
Engineering	16
Business and management	23
Leisure and tourism	29
Health and social care	34
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	39
Basic skills	45

Cross-college provision

Support for students	51
General resources	59
Quality assurance	64
Governance	71
Management	79
Conclusions	86

College statistics

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 1998-99: 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

Darlington College of Technology

Northern Region

Inspected January 2001

Darlington College of Technology is a large general further education college. All staff and governors took part in the college's comprehensive self-assessment process, which made use of a well-established programme of lesson observations. The self-assessment report is clear and evaluative and provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. It was updated in preparation for the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses which had been identified in the self-assessment report but found that the report failed to note weaknesses in teaching and learning. They also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with three of the curriculum grades and four of the cross-college grades awarded by the college. Where they differed from the college, inspectors' grades were one grade lower, except for one curriculum area which was one grade higher.

The college offers provision in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. The

inspection covered six of these areas and work on basic skills. The college is well managed. Teamwork is effective. The college has sound partnerships with a wide range of organisations. There are clear lines of communication in the college. Arrangements to provide advice and guidance to students are effective. Good support services are available to students. There are attractive and well-equipped learning centres. The telematics centre at Catterick is outstanding. The college has a framework for quality assurance activities which incorporates all aspects of its work. Staff value the appraisal and staff development systems. Governors and senior managers work closely together to determine the strategic priorities of the college. The proportion of lessons judged by inspectors to be good or outstanding was below the average for colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Some retention and achievement rates are poor. The college should improve: the quality of its teaching and learning; student retention rates; the level of student achievement; some tutorial provision; the quality of students' action plans; access for people with restricted mobility; and aspects of the corporation's business.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Business and management	3	Quality assurance	2
Leisure and tourism	3	Governance	2
Health and social care	3	Management	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3		
Basic skills	2		

The College and its Mission

1 The college is a large general further education college in the town of Darlington. It is situated close to the boundaries of County Durham, Tees Valley and North Yorkshire and draws its students from a population of around 150,000 people. In 1997, Darlington, which had until then been part of County Durham, became a unitary authority, one of five in the Tees Valley. As a consequence the college transferred from the County Durham and Darlington Training Enterprise Council (TEC) to the Tees Valley TEC. The college has three centres in Darlington and also operates a network of community centres. It has invested heavily in new technologies to support students' learning. Through a longstanding partnership with the army the college has recently constructed a telematics and childcare centre at the Catterick Garrison.

2 In 1999, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' index of local conditions ranked 13 wards in Darlington in the bottom 25% of the most deprived areas in the country; 17 wards had a rate of unemployment higher than the national rate. Overall, the unemployment rate in Darlington is 5.2% compared with 4.1% nationally and 8.6% in the Tees Valley. Since 1998 there has been a serious decline in employment opportunities in the electronics, steel and manufacturing industries. Since 1984 the proportion of workers employed in manufacturing has fallen from 32% to 11.7%. The service sector now accounts for 83% of employment in the region.

3 Within Darlington, in addition to the college there is a sixth form college and a school for pupils aged 11 to 18 that provide a range of full-time academic and vocational programmes. Within the Tees Valley there are five further education colleges, a specialist college of art and design and five sixth form colleges. In North Yorkshire there are three schools for pupils who are aged 11 to 18 and one school for pupils

aged 11 to 16 years. In 1999, the staying on rate for young people in Darlington over the age of 16 was 66% compared with 71% nationally. In 2000, the percentage of 16-year-old pupils in Darlington gaining five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or above was 45%, lower than the national average of 49.2%. Of school-leavers going into jobs 17% have no formal education or training qualifications compared with 12% nationally.

4 The college offers provision in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the exception being agriculture. Courses are offered from entry to advanced level. They include pre-vocational, GCSE, general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), general national vocational qualification (GNVQ), advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) and a wide range of vocational and professional programmes. In 1999-2000 the college recruited approximately 1,500 full-time students and 9,000 part-time students. Of these students 77% were over 19 years of age and 5% were recruited onto higher education courses. In 1998-99, the college recruited 47% of its students from Darlington, 5% from Tees Valley and 48% from North Yorkshire and County Durham.

5 The college employs the full-time equivalent of 403 staff. The executive board comprises the principal and a team of six executive directors. Cross-college and curriculum managers have operational responsibilities.

6 The college's mission is to 'provide the best learning opportunities for the community we serve'. The college has well-established links with a wide range of local partners, and works closely with the Darlington Partnership Limited and the Darlington Employers' Forum. The college has become a key partner with the borough council in pursuing economic developments.

Context

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected in January 2001. The inspection team had previously evaluated the self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 2000. These data were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and awarding body pass lists and found to be reliable. Data for 1998 and 1999 were taken from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR). The inspection was carried out by 13

inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 55 days. Inspectors observed 88 lessons and examined students' work and college documents. Meetings were held with students, governors, managers, staff and members of the local community.

8 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 and 8% were less than satisfactory. This profile compares with the national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	2	1	0	0	3
GCSE	2	0	0	0	0	2
GNVQ	1	6	13	1	1	22
NVQ	2	8	5	1	0	16
Other vocational	0	7	2	2	0	11
Other*	6	17	9	2	0	34
Total (No.)	11	40	30	6	1	88
Total (%)	13	45	34	7	1	99
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

*includes tutorials

Context

9 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 (%)
Darlington College of Technology	10.3	77
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

Mathematics and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the effective use of learning resources in mathematics
- the extensive range of IT courses
- good pass rate in GCSE mathematics in 2000

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates and achievement rates on IT courses
- some inadequate feedback to students on their IT assignments
- insufficient involvement of students in some lessons

11 The college offers a good range of IT courses. These include GNVQ at foundation and intermediate level and the new AVCE award for information and communications technology. Part-time IT courses include the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7261 IT certificate, the European computer driving licence certificate, and IT courses provided through the University for Industry (Ufi). Students can progress to higher awards through part-time study. There is community-based provision. Full-cost courses are provided for employers. The mathematics provision includes GCSE and GCE A level mathematics, Associated Examining Board (AEB) achievement tests and application of number. GCSE mathematics and application of number are available through the use of on-line learning materials. This extensive choice and the flexible arrangements for study are identified in the college's self-assessment report.

12 All students, including those enrolling late, receive an effective induction into the college. During the induction, all full-time students undertake a diagnostic assessment to determine the level of their competence in key skills and their additional support needs. All full-time students have the opportunity to develop their key skills in application of number and IT. In some mathematics lessons model answers are given to help students with future revision. There are also files of model answers available in the learning centre. Engineering students used the key skills workshop material to improve their understanding of mathematics topics and other students used the centre in the evenings. All mathematics students have individual progress records.

13 Most teaching is at least satisfactory and much is good. Courses are well organised. Schemes of work and lesson plans are appropriately detailed. In the most effective lessons, teachers gave clear instructions and used a suitable variety of teaching methods. Students clearly understood the aims of their course and what was expected of them during assignments. Students on GNVQ information and communications technology courses work on projects for local industry. For example, one team of students produced a database to monitor milk yield on a farm and another team prepared a database for a kitchen design company. In the less effective lessons, the tasks set for the students failed to match their differing levels of ability. Teachers frequently talked for too long and did not involve students in discussion or encourage them to ask questions. All students are regularly set homework or assignments, which develop their skills and knowledge. This work is carefully marked and both verbal and written feedback given. However, the standard of written feedback given to IT students, is uneven. As a consequence students are unsure of what they need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum Areas

14 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the retention rate is poor on IT courses. The college also recognises that there is poor achievement on IT courses at levels 1 and 2. Policies aiming to improve rates of retention and achievement include: more thorough application of entry criteria; closer links with parents of students aged 16 to 18; and improvements to the tutoring system. The pass rate in GCE A level mathematics has improved in 2000 and matches the national average for further education colleges. In GCSE mathematics and some other mathematics courses pass rates are good. The number of students enrolling on AEB mathematics courses has increased, which compensates for the

reduction among students choosing GCSE courses.

15 Staff are well qualified and experienced. Many teachers of computing have recent industrial and commercial IT experience. There has also been some recent updating of the IT skills of the full-time staff. The college recognises in its self-assessment report, that there are good resources for students in mathematics and on IT courses which help them to work independently, either at home or in college. Students can download learning materials from the college IT network, to assist them with their work. They also make good use of the Internet. Graphical calculators are available to mathematics students.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and information technology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
IT provision (including NVQ and C&G IT certificate)	1	Number of starters	51	106	61
		Retention (%)	88	71	74
		Achievement (%)	24	12	13
IT provision (including NVQ and C&G IT diploma and GNVQ intermediate)	2	Number of starters	37	62	138
		Retention (%)	62	65	75
		Achievement (%)	76	28	39
GCSE mathematics (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	340	350	179
		Retention (%)	79	72	66
		Achievement (%)	17	26	43
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	33	43	32
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	38	24	74
IT provision (including NVQ, GCE A level computing and GNVQ advanced)	3	Number of starters	41	78	95
		Retention (%)	71	55	53
		Achievement (%)	69	49	64

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the report did not identify some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the wide range of provision
- good assessment practices
- excellent facilities for computer-aided engineering
- a good student response to practical work
- good pass rates on most courses

Weaknesses

- some unimaginative teaching
- poor pass rates on mechanical craft courses

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the school of engineering offers a wide range of courses from foundation to higher levels. These provide good opportunities for students to progress and to study full time or part time. Links with industry are strong. A group of employers meets regularly with school managers and has contributed to the development and review of courses, and to the self-assessment report. The school is responsive to the needs of industry. Teaching and assessments are undertaken in college and on employers' premises. Full-time students benefit from a wide range of opportunities to enhance their main study programme, including additional qualifications, work experience, the German work placement programme, and residential courses. There are some close links with local schools. Short 'taster' courses are provided for school pupils in a range of subjects.

18 Course teams meet regularly. Some schemes of work and lesson plans contain insufficient detail. The school recognises the uneven quality of planning and has recently introduced subject leaders whose task it is to review and standardise teaching and learning materials. An increase in the time given to students to prepare portfolios together with improved individual tutorial arrangements, have helped to raise the achievement rates on several courses. However, students' action planning is poor. Reviews of individual students' progress are not always completed regularly, a weakness not recognised in the self-assessment report.

19 Most teaching is good. The more effective lessons included practical activities. They are often based in the engineering workshops. In technical drawing lessons students were required to complete theoretical worksheets. Good teaching was carefully planned, provided a good range of appropriate learning materials, and led to high levels of purposeful student activity. The technicians provide good support to students in the workshops. Several teachers made good use of the overhead projector and well-prepared notes. In the less effective lessons, teachers failed to sustain students' interest in developing their knowledge of the subject. A few lessons merely required students to copy notes. The self-assessment report did not recognise these weaknesses in teaching.

20 As the self-assessment report recognises, assessments are good; they are set at the appropriate standard. There are suitable systems for internal verification. Assessments are scheduled throughout the year in a way that provides students with an even workload. Some assignments do not state clearly what students are required to achieve to attain a merit or distinction grade. Attendance is carefully monitored and during the inspection week was above the national average for engineering inspections. Suitably detailed reports are provided termly to employers and, where appropriate, to parents.

Curriculum Areas

21 Retention rates have improved during the last three years and on most courses are now at or above national averages for the sector. Some retention rates are good. For example, the advanced mechanical craft courses have achieved good retention rates in each of the last three years. Some achievement rates have also improved during the same period. Most courses ending in 2000 have achievement rates that are well above the national average. Only the mechanical craft courses had poor achievement rates in 1999-2000. The self-assessment report recognises the strengths and weaknesses relating to students' retention and achievement rates. Most written and practical work from students is of an appropriate standard.

22 The school has a wide range of specialist equipment for teaching. The excellent advanced manufacturing facility contains several state of the art, industry standard machine tools as well as a modern computer-aided design suite. Much of the general mechanical and motor vehicle engineering equipment is old but adequate. There is a good range of electronic equipment. Access to computers and engineering software is good. The general workshops are fit for purpose. Teachers hold appropriate vocational qualifications; many have teaching and assessment qualifications.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ motor vehicle	1	Number of starters	82	37	22
		Retention (%)	*	70	77
		Achievement (%)	11	19	100
NVQ motor vehicle and manufacture	2	Number of starters	106	73	82
		Retention (%)	*	68	52
		Achievement (%)	50	24	91
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Number of starters	15	18	12
		Retention (%)	53	67	83
		Achievement (%)	63	67	90
Engineering crafts - mechanical and fabrication and welding	2	Number of starters	74	73	96
		Retention (%)	77	74	73
		Achievement (%)	56	56	44
National certificates engineering and electrical/electronic	3	Number of starters	127	102	126
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	85	84	81
National diploma engineering	3	Number of starters	10	30	26
		Retention (%)	*	*	54
		Achievement (%)	66	87	93
NVQ motor vehicle	3	Number of starters	49	31	30
		Retention (%)	*	61	57
		Achievement (%)	45	10	88
Engineering crafts - mechanical and fabrication and welding	3	Number of starters	24	51	25
		Retention (%)	96	94	96
		Achievement (%)	52	54	46

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Business and Management

Grade 3

23 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses and considered that some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- good pass rates on some accounting and management courses
- effective use of college intranet and Internet
- extensive portfolio of management and professional courses
- good learning facilities for management and professional students

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses
- poor pass rates on GNVQ advanced business and some professional courses
- failure to share good practice in teaching

24 The business school at the Morton Park centre offers a wide range of popular part-time management and professional courses. Courses include national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in accounting, and management and professional studies. The college undertakes a variety of employer-sponsored management training which has encouraged some employers to participate in a business school task group. Provision for full-time students, located at the Larchfield centre, is confined to the AVCE and GNVQ advanced business course. Recruitment to full-time business courses is declining.

25 Most courses are well planned and well managed. Course teams meet regularly. Schemes of work and course documentation are thorough. However, lesson plans are insufficiently detailed, as they do not specify the length of time allocated to activities or the

expected learning outcomes. Although, the self-assessment report identified teaching and learning as a strength, inspectors found that it varied in quality. In the more effective lessons, teachers review the previous lesson and clearly explain the aims and objectives of the new lesson. Many teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods to develop students' interest. The best teaching was observed in lessons on management and professional courses. In one lesson, students were encouraged to participate in discussion of management concepts based on their own work experience. Students in a marketing lesson were encouraged to identify concepts by analysing a range of goods which the teacher brought into the classroom. In less effective lessons, teaching is unimaginative. Teachers in the school do not share good practice, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. In some lessons, teachers fail to make sure that their students are understanding the work.

26 Teachers provide good support for students. Students' progress is monitored carefully through subject tutorials. Assignment work is of an appropriate standard and is carefully marked. In assignment tasks good use is made of students' work experience. There are some outstanding on-line learning materials. Students make effective use of the resources which are provided on the college's intranet, and have been developed specifically for management courses. Students can also study courses without attending college. A range of good learning materials and assignment work is available to students attending college or studying at home or at work. Tutorial support for students is also provided on-line by their teachers.

27 Achievement rates vary considerably. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that achievement rates are good on some management and accounting courses, including the National Examining

Curriculum Areas

Board for Supervisory Management certificate, the Institute of Management diploma in management and the NVQ level 4 award in accounting. There are also good achievement rates in individual subjects in the external tests on NVQ accounting levels 2 and 3. A number of courses have pass rates at the national average for the sector, for example NVQ level 4 management, postgraduate certificate in management and Institute of Management certificate in management. Achievement rates are poor for GNVQ advanced business and some professional courses. There were no passes in 2000 on the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants stage 4. The retention rate is generally poor and continuing to fall year on year on a number of courses. For example, rates are below national averages on the certificate, advanced certificate and diploma in

marketing, the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants stages 2 and 3 and NVQ level 2 accounting. The retention rate on GNVQ advanced business is significantly below national averages.

28 Teachers are well qualified and appropriately experienced. Teachers on the general business course lack recent commercial experience. A sufficient number of teachers are qualified as internal verifiers. Specialist learning facilities for students on management and professional courses are excellent. The business school uses a modern suite of rooms which simulates an effective business environment. Students in this school enjoy good access to modern computers and specialist software materials. Full-time students based at the Larchfield centre have insufficient specialist facilities for business.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ accounting	2	Number of starters	27	38	36
		Retention (%)	74	97	75
		Achievement (%)	50	33	67
NVQ accounting	3	Number of starters	38	45	53
		Retention (%)	95	100	79
		Achievement (%)	17	*	36
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	15	16	20
		Retention (%)	73	44	60
		Achievement (%)	*	57	73
NVQ management	4	Number of starters	66	43	63
		Retention (%)	97	86	83
		Achievement (%)	91	84	68
Diploma in management	4	Number of starters	44	47	45
		Retention (%)	91	89	91
		Achievement (%)	100	79	100

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

29 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report. However, inspectors identified additional weaknesses and considered some strengths to be overstated.

Key strengths

- good use of teachers' vocational experience
- a good proportion of higher grades
- the imaginative development of short vocational courses

Weaknesses

- retention rates below national averages
- some unsatisfactory teaching methods
- failure to meet the range of student ability

30 The school offers: intermediate and advanced GNVQ and AVCE provision; a range of specialist qualifications, including the travel agents certificate; curriculum enrichment activities; and work experience opportunities. Students can also take short vocational qualifications in sports coaching and leadership, which they value. The work with the English Ski Council is particularly imaginative. Students gain valuable experience as couriers working abroad through planned college ski trips and have the possibility of accreditation as alpine ski leaders, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. Programmes are largely based at the college's Larchfield centre.

31 Most teaching is well planned. Comprehensive course files are maintained. In the more effective lessons, teachers devise learning activities that engage and stimulate students. Lessons are supported by good learning materials and assignment briefs. In some lessons, teachers used their industrial

experience to add realism and motivate students. For example, in one lesson the teacher illustrated the concept of the risk management of outdoor activities by using effective practical examples. In another lesson, the teacher drew on examples of practical experience to give sound guidance to students preparing for their AVCE examinations. However, in most lessons, students were often bored and did not respond to the teaching. In less effective lessons, opportunities to develop evaluative skills were missed. Sometimes students who had completed their learning tasks were left with nothing to do and had to wait for the rest of the class to finish. The self-assessment report did not include these weaknesses in teaching and learning.

32 Retention rates are generally below national averages for the sector on GNVQ and the Association of British Travel Agents certificate programmes and, with the exception of the advanced GNVQ, are showing a continuing downward trend. Achievement rates are generally at or below national averages for GNVQ programmes. The proportion of higher grades achieved on all programmes is at or above national averages. For example, student grades for the Association of British Travel Agents certificate were 49% above the national average. Retention and achievement rates are reviewed in the self-assessment report but insufficient weighting was given to weaknesses in retention and achievement. Students are expected to have achieved minimum entry qualifications at GCSE or equivalent before joining college courses. To encourage non-traditional students to join their courses programme leaders exercise some flexibility over entry criteria. There are some entrants who do not have the minimum entry requirements. Programme managers in their evaluation reports routinely assess performance against national averages. Attendance is good and above the national average. Student progression from intermediate to advanced programmes is good.

Curriculum Areas

33 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that there are a number of specialist sporting resources at the Larchfield centre. The centre is well used by students and in the evening by the local community. Students complain about insufficient access to computers. There are no leisure-oriented electronic learning resources for

leisure studies on the student intranet. Travel students are taught to use industry standard software and systems during their work experience in the travel shop on the college's main campus. Managers at the school of sport and leisure are taking action to improve development and use of information and learning technology by teachers and students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	28	45	47
		Retention (%)	75	69	65
		Achievement (%)	67	61	74
Association of British Travel Agents certificate primary	2	Number of starters	41	43	41
		Retention (%)	90	77	71
		Achievement (%)	49	61	79
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	Number of starters	35	21	27
		Retention (%)	63	57	70
		Achievement (%)	59	92	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

34 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- some good achievement rates
- effective links between theory and practice
- the good standard of students' work
- an effective and well-established work experience programme

Weaknesses

- the weak programme leadership of two full-time courses
- insufficient demands on students in some lessons
- restricted access to, and use of, the information and learning technology centre
- insufficiently detailed schemes of work

35 The college offers a wide range of provision in health care, childcare and counselling, from entry to diploma and higher national certificate level. Since the previous inspection, improved links with employers have increased enrolments in NVQ provision. Most courses are well managed. Student feedback on courses is obtained through surveys and focus groups. Changes of staff and poor curriculum management on two full-time courses have disrupted the teaching of students. For example, on the national diploma in childhood studies course there have been four changes of programme leader since September 2000. Course files and student records have not always been maintained or passed onto replacement tutors. The college is aware of this area of weakness.

36 Most teaching and learning is good although the college in its self-assessment report omitted some weaknesses and overstated strengths. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject. They often draw on their own vocational experiences to illustrate key points. Students are encouraged to study and reflect in the context of their own experiences at work. This approach often results in relevant and realistic links being made between classroom learning and vocational practices. For example, in one lesson, the teacher focused on the use of discipline within a childcare setting. Through the use of role-play, differences were highlighted between passive, aggressive and assertive forms of discipline. This was a lively activity which motivated students. Key learning points were then summarised and considered against students' experiences. In some lessons, tasks were insufficiently demanding for students in the context of their ability and capacity to understand. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. In some other lessons, teachers failed to clarify key learning objectives. Many schemes of work do not identify the teaching and learning activities that are to be pursued. There is a good range of work placements for students on care and childcare courses. Work experience opportunities are available on all full-time courses and are effectively monitored. Students' progress is regularly reviewed in tutorials on placement and in college. Work placement experience is effectively integrated with course work. The self-assessment report recognised the strength of the work placement programme.

37 Students' work is well presented, of a good standard, and displays an appropriate level of understanding and application of practical knowledge. Students' achievements are considered as a strength in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. There are good achievement rates on the GNVQ foundation course in health and social care, diploma in nursery nursing and on counselling

Curriculum Areas

courses. These rates are around or exceed national averages for the sector. Over the past three years on the GNVQ intermediate course in health and social care there has been an improvement in the retention and achievement rates. These now exceed the national average. There is a poor rate of retention and achievement on the GNVQ advanced course in health and social care and also on the national diploma in childhood studies.

38 All staff are suitably qualified and most are appropriately experienced. Nine full-time members of staff have recently undertaken short

vocational placements. All staff have assessor awards or are working towards achieving them. Displays of students' work in classrooms are good and help to provide a stimulating environment. There are insufficient health and care books in the information and learning technology centre. Specialist journals and information sources are available on the college's intranet. However, access to and use of this facility within the information and learning technology centre is restricted due to overcrowding, a weakness recognised in the college's self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and social care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation health and social care (one-year course)	1	Number of starters	29	32	27
		Retention (%)	66	81	70
		Achievement (%)	84	73	95
GNVQ intermediate health and social care (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	27	23	27
		Retention (%)	52	65	81
		Achievement (%)	79	80	82
Certificate in basic counselling skills (short course)	2	Number of starters	178	152	109
		Retention (%)	93	91	91
		Achievement (%)	96	94	85
GNVQ advanced health and social care (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	28	20	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	38
		Achievement (%)	6	50	0
National diploma childhood studies (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	38	28	19
		Retention (%)	89	79	63
		Achievement (%)	93	76	75
National diploma nursery nursing (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	38	33	39
		Retention (%)	*	76	87
		Achievement (%)	100	80	87

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 3

39 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They found that some strengths had been overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good course documentation
- a broad range of courses
- some good achievement rates
- effective training in key skills

Weaknesses

- declining rates of retention and enrolment on some courses
- some unimaginative teaching
- insufficient resources to support students' learning
- lack of clients for practical lessons

40 The college offers a range of courses that provides progression opportunities for students and meets employers' needs. The self-assessment report identified this strength. There are flexible arrangements which can often be adjusted to meet students' circumstances. The curriculum is reviewed regularly. Students have the opportunity to work towards a range of additional qualifications to enhance their studies. For example, there are awards in sports massage, nail art and health and hygiene. Some good links have been established with employers.

41 Teachers of hairdressing and beauty therapy work well together. They have developed thorough and well-planned documentation that is used by all course

leaders. Students receive a termly assessment schedule and teaching plan. Individual targets and goals are negotiated with each student and progress is regularly monitored and reviewed. Tutorials have been extended in 2000-01 to provide more support for students. Students speak highly of the support and help which they receive from teachers. The college offers training to full-time students in all six key skill areas. The training has been well integrated with practical and theory lessons. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Assignment briefs are clear and appropriate. However, many students do not use IT in the presentation of their work.

42 The college's self-assessment report exaggerated the quality of teaching and learning. Of the 11 lessons observed only six were good or outstanding. This profile is below the average for the programme area in the sector. Teachers demonstrate a good knowledge of their subject. In the better lessons, teaching was effectively linked to commercial practice. For example, in a science lesson on health and safety, the teacher effectively underlined the importance of adhering to current legislation by using a newspaper report of a client who had successfully sued a hairdressing company over malpractice. In another lesson on client care, students were encouraged to discuss their own experience as customers of customer care. The teacher involved all students and enthusiastically explained the benefits of good professional practice to them in terms of their own career progression. In contrast, in the less effective lessons, the range of activities for students was narrow and the progress of the work too slow. During the inspection there were too few clients in some practical lessons which restricted the opportunity for assessment of the students' practical skills in a professional training situation. Students were often unclear on what work should be completed during this time and on occasions were left undirected by the teacher.

Curriculum Areas

43 Students' written work is of a good standard and portfolios are well organised. Some teachers provide appropriately detailed and helpful comments on students' work. However, too many commentaries provide insufficient detail to enable students to know how to improve their work. This weakness was not recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Retention and recruitment rates are declining on NVQ level 1 in hairdressing and on holistic therapy courses. Achievement rates are good on NVQ level 2 in hairdressing, and NVQ level 3 in beauty therapy and complementary therapies. Achievement rates are below the national average on NVQ level 2 in beauty therapy and the Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene certificate in hairdressing and beauty therapy; the self-assessment report understated this area of weakness. In 1999, a hairdressing

student received the C&G silver medal award and a beauty therapy student was highly commended.

44 Learning resources are insufficient. All students receive a textbook; there is too much reliance on this resource. Students have difficulty in locating information and studying for their assignments, as the library bookstock is inadequate and out of date. There are no copies of relevant videos for students to borrow.

Accommodation for hairdressing and beauty is satisfactory but in need of upgrading. For example, the reception area lacks sufficient retail products and has no computerised booking facility. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers are well qualified and most have assessor and internal verifier awards.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ hairdressing	1	Number of starters	†	37	23
		Retention (%)	†	84	55
		Achievement (%)	†	90	92
NVQ hairdressing	2	Number of starters	64	76	46
		Retention (%)	*	*	89
		Achievement (%)	*	*	90
NVQ beauty therapy	2	Number of starters	17	20	64
		Retention (%)	94	55	81
		Achievement (%)	75	80	69
NVQ beauty therapy	3	Number of starters	20	13	10
		Retention (%)	90	92	90
		Achievement (%)	78	75	89
NVQ hairdressing	3	Number of starters	18	14	12
		Retention (%)	72	57	75
		Achievement (%)	46	71	78
Diploma in holistic therapies	3	Number of starters	30	18	13
		Retention (%)	87	78	54
		Achievement (%)	62	*	100

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

†course not running

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

45 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in basic skills. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong and effective management of basic skills provision
- good teaching
- improving rates of retention and achievement
- effective widening of participation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped software resources
- uneven deployment of additional support

46 The curriculum services and development unit of the college manages the provision of basic skills across the college. Basic skills classes are provided in the college as discrete provision, in learning centres and in the community. Inspectors agreed with the strength noted in the college's self-assessment report that the community-based basic skills provision is attracting students who would not normally attend at the college. Enrolments are increasing in line with the college's strategic objectives. There are effective links with community groups and the army. Basic skills classes are available at the main college centres and in several other centres, including the Catterick Garrison. Provision has also been made available on employers' premises. The college has the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) quality mark and applies its standards consistently and effectively across the provision.

47 A major strength of the provision is the management of basic skills across the college, a

strength not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Middle managers are experienced and approachable. Lines of communication are clear and effective. The provision of English, mathematics, basic skills, key skills, additional support and entry level vocational programmes are co-ordinated by a single manager. There are strong links with vocational schools. Team meetings are held regularly and are well attended. Action points are followed up quickly. Course documentation is of a good standard and completed thoroughly. Staff use management information, which is easily available, for course review and evaluation. Learning support assistants are well trained and well supervised. In some classes the allocation of support is generous, while in others, insufficient staff result in students not achieving their learning goals.

48 Most teaching is good. Out of the 10 lessons observed six were judged to be good and one outstanding. Lessons are well planned and are organised to ensure that students play a full part. All students have a negotiated individual learning plan which includes achievable short and longer-term goals. In the most effective lessons, planned learning activities take account of the interests and experiences of students. Teachers check progress and give feedback to students frequently and thoroughly during lessons. Reviews are conducted at regularly agreed intervals. Teachers have established an excellent rapport with students. Good supporting documentation is used to monitor students' work, track progress and plan future learning. In a few lessons, extension work was not provided to stretch and challenge the best students.

49 Achievement and retention rates are improving. Achievement rates show that more students year-on-year are achieving their personal learning goals. Students are progressing through the various levels within basic skills. Many also progress onto other programmes including vocational courses and

Curriculum Areas

GCSE, particularly in English and mathematics. Half of the current family literacy students intend to enrol as classroom assistants on completion of their basic skills course. One adult student, who enrolled for C&G Wordpower in 1998, achieved four GCSEs at high grades and, in 1999, completed the first year of a GCE A level mathematics course. In addition, he has recently achieved the C&G 9281 initial certificate for teaching basic skills. Many adult basic education students also attend computer literacy courses. Most students are well informed about progression opportunities. Attendance is sometimes poor in adult basic education lessons; in other lessons it is better. A table of retention and achievement data has not been included because of the changes in the qualifications taken by students.

50 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teachers and support staff are well qualified and experienced. They have good professional and teaching qualifications in addition to specialist qualifications in basic skills. Staff development opportunities are available for vocational staff who wish to acquire initial qualifications in basic skills. Worksheets are well designed to engage students' interests. Commercially produced worksheets are also available and books are up to date and appropriate for basic skills students. Computer-based software to support the acquisition of basic numeracy skills is available but needs further development to support pre-entry students.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

51 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment had been addressed before the inspection. However, inspectors identified further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- extensive, good-quality information and pre-entry guidance
- coherent student support services
- a comprehensive and well co-ordinated student activities programme
- thorough counselling, welfare and financial support
- excellent arrangements for childcare at the Catterick site

Weaknesses

- some inadequate group tutorials
- unsatisfactory aspects of additional learning support
- some poor individual student action plans

52 From September 2000 the college simplified and improved cross-college arrangements for supporting students. These changes relate well to the priorities of curriculum 2000 and the inclusive learning initiative, which recognises individual students' needs. There is now greater coherence in the college's arrangements for promoting opportunities for potential students, for supporting them when attending college and in providing additional learning support.

53 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that it provides an extensive and well-organised range of events and other liaison activities with local schools, including special

schools. These promote college opportunities effectively and include 'open' events for pupils in years 9, 10 and 11 to sample what the college has to offer. The 'after school' evening programme, which has been operating effectively for some years, provides additional studies for GCSE pupils. This scheme has been extended to provide whole day vocational activities in the college and in local schools in consultation with the schools and the careers services.

54 Students helped to develop the well-designed and informative 2001-02 school-leavers' guide. A wide range of other attractive guides offer clear information on the extensive range of support services provided by the college. Staff involved in recruitment and admissions activities are friendly and work well together. Students are complimentary about the impartial advice and guidance which they provide. Most study programmes chosen by students match their expectations. There are good procedures to change their courses if necessary. Guidance on student welfare and the provision of financial support to those in need is thorough; funding is distributed fairly. The college has extended the provision of guidance, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. It has a small information and guidance shop in the Cornmill shopping centre, provided additional guidance in the community bus and other community-based centres, and at the Catterick centre.

55 Students are introduced to the college and its courses through a well-organised induction process. The charter is circulated to all students; most find it useful. Full-time students are allocated a student adviser and entitled to tutorial support to assist their personal development. However, tutorial arrangements for part-time students are less clear and not all part-time students receive regular tutorials, a weakness identified in the previous inspection report. A comprehensive and useful handbook guides student advisers, known until recently as

Cross-college Provision

personal tutors. The guide has not yet been updated to take account of the changed roles and titles, and many staff refer to the old terminology which can be confusing to students. While many students find group tutorials helpful, some tutorials are poorly delivered, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Student advisers help students to complete individual action plans that set goals for personal achievement and record their progress. Some plans are not completed effectively.

56 The curriculum services and development team has recently taken responsibility for all aspects of additional support for students across the college. Much support is well managed. Links with curriculum areas have been strengthened. Representatives from curriculum areas meet each month to improve communications and share good practice. The college has made sound progress in reducing the barriers that had previously restricted the development of work on basic skills, key skills and additional learning support. According to college data, of the 793 students identified as needing additional support with their learning, nearly 80% are taking up that support. However, student attendance in the additional support sessions inspected was poor. Some student advisers do not respond effectively to requests to improve the rate of attendance of students for whom they are responsible. Consequently some students are not making the progress of which they are judged to be capable.

57 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college offers students a wide range of enrichment activities to develop their personal and key skills. For example, international exchanges, skydiving, potholing and sports activities are all popular. An activities manager, who also manages the student association, has developed a 'student zone' close to the main entrance and to other student facilities which promotes the full range of activities. Students find the new

arrangements helpful and informative. The students' council is taking a more proactive role in the life of the college after a lengthy period of inactivity. However, its links with the students' liaison committee, which reports to the corporation, are not clear to those students involved.

58 The college has good links with the County Durham and North Yorkshire careers services. It also offers an extensive range of careers information in the student services area. New job search advisers have made good progress in finding part-time employment for full-time students. The student services manager, who is qualified as a counsellor, provides a confidential counselling service. Some students are not aware of the service. The support arrangements and facilities for childcare at the Catterick centre are excellent. The enthusiastic staff provide support for parents with children aged six weeks to 14 years. Since the start of the academic year 2000-01, the childcare centre has provided care for the children of 90 students and staff.

General Resources

Grade 2

59 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the college self-assessment report. They identified further strengths and weaknesses. The college had remedied some of the weaknesses before the inspection.

Key strengths

- the well-designed telematics centre at Catterick
- excellent provision of IT to support learning
- good awareness of environmental and energy conservation issues
- attractive and well-equipped learning centres

Cross-college Provision

Weaknesses

- inadequate access for people with restricted mobility
- insufficient IT equipment at the Larchfield centre

60 Since the previous inspection the college has changed its estate significantly and reduced the number of centres. The main college centre is situated in a pleasant residential area near the centre of Darlington. There are three other centres in Darlington: the Larchfield centre, a Victorian building; the Archer Street sports centre, which the college plans to sell this year; and Morton Park business centre which is leased from a charitable trust and located above a busy shopping complex. The Firthmoor community centre and a number of centres in the community are also used. A purpose-designed new telematics and childcare centre at Catterick opened in September 1999. The project was well managed and opened on time. It is well designed, well furnished and equipped to a high specification. The centre provides an outstanding resource for computer-based learning for students from the local community, for army personnel and students from abroad. Large numbers of students use the centre. The spacious reception area at the main college has a shop and student travel agency in the foyer. Reception staff at all college centres are welcoming and helpful. Access for people with restricted mobility has been improved since the previous inspection by adaptations to doorways, lift refurbishments and tactile signage. As the self-assessment report recognises, parts of the main site remain inaccessible, particularly the hair and beauty salons, some areas used by health and care students and the electronics workshop. Access is also poor at the Larchfield centre where IT facilities are situated on the first floor.

61 Environmental awareness and the college's approach to the conservation of energy are good, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. The college is working towards achieving the ISO 14001 award in environmental standards. Over the last two years many improvements have been carried out, which include fitting high frequency lighting to reduce power consumption. The accommodation strategy is linked effectively to college strategic objectives, has clear targets and is monitored regularly. However, the college has not made use of a recent room survey in the context of strategic planning. In order to make more effective use of space, managers are set targets for raising income through hiring out rooms to business and community groups. General classrooms are clean, well furnished and decorated. Some community centres are less well equipped with inappropriate furniture.

62 The development of on-line learning is a strategic priority and the college has made a considerable investment in the development of IT. The college IT network has been upgraded to provide an intranet and fast Internet link. The college has significant involvement in two regional Ufi hubs and is the lead partner in the national hub for the army. The main college learning centres combine information and learning technology resources and library and student services facilities. A learning centre for the teaching of key skills and basic skills is attractive and well furnished. The college has developed effective computer-based learning materials. Technician support is good. The Internet is used widely. Currently the ratio of modern computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:6. Students' access to IT is good at all centres except the Larchfield centre. The range of resources includes CD-ROMs, video and periodicals. Students studying at the Morton Park and the Larchfield centres have difficulty in obtaining books at the main college centre. The systems for sharing resources across the college are underdeveloped. The weaknesses in

Cross-college Provision

availability of resources were not fully identified in the self-assessment report.

63 The school of catering's students at the main college provide a range of catering services for staff and students in a college restaurant, bistro and refectory. The services are popular and have generated an income surplus for 1999-2000. The refectory has been refurbished and is well used by students.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

64 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but found that some strengths had been overstated.

Key strengths

- a strong and effective commitment to quality assurance activities
- comprehensive and accessible procedures
- the effective setting and review of standards for all college support services
- good staff development and appraisal systems

Weaknesses

- some poor student retention rates
- a decline in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection

65 The college has improved the good quality assurance practice identified in the 1996 inspection report. An annual review cycle brings together quality assurance, staff development, appraisal and planning. Staff are provided with clear guidance. Extensive quality assurance procedures cover all aspects of the college's activity. Procedures are updated regularly and thorough organisation ensures that only up-to-date versions are in use. They are available on the intranet that is accessible

by all staff. There is a clear committee structure that links all quality assurance functions. A number of quality assurance groups oversee key college activities and report directly to the executive board. A number of external quality standards have been achieved, for example, the college has ISO 9001/2 status for some of its activities and has achieved Investor in People and the Charter Mark twice. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that all staff are involved in quality assurance activities.

66 Course review and evaluation is based upon a well-designed 'qualification report', which is used by all teams. During the year teams collect evidence for the report from external and internal verifiers, attendance reports, retention and achievement data and student questionnaires. Targets are set at the beginning of each course for enrolments, retention, achievement and students' destinations. The setting of these targets is not well developed on some courses. There is also a set of more general college targets. These have little impact on the teaching of courses. As stated in the self-assessment report students' retention and achievement data are compared routinely with national benchmarks. College performance data show that the retention rate has been maintained at a level comparable with the national average for further education colleges over the past two years. They also indicate that achievement has improved by 11 percentage points over the same period. However, when three-year trends are considered the retention rate is falling across almost all categories of course and age of student. The college has identified courses where rates of retention, and/or achievement are low. Although there have been a number of training events for teachers and managers aimed at improving the retention rate, the procedures implemented have not led to a measurable improvement. Action-planning at the end of qualification reports sometimes lacks measurable outcomes.

Cross-college Provision

67 All support areas have well-documented service standards. These are used when evaluating and monitoring performance. There are also extensive auditing arrangements to ensure compliance with procedures and a thorough approach. For example, the contents of course files are listed on a checklist and these are regularly audited. Internal and external verification is well managed. External verifier reports are carefully reviewed and analysed and action plans are formulated. The college is clear about its commitments to its students. Members of the corporation review the charter on an annual basis.

68 Self-assessment is thorough and integral to the quality assurance process. All staff participate in self-assessment. They comment positively about their opportunity to contribute. Action plans are generally well written although some of the actions are not easily monitored or evaluated. Inspectors considered that the report identified most strengths and weaknesses, and was appropriately analytical and detailed. However, there was a tendency to overstate strengths in the context of teaching. Inspectors also identified additional weaknesses.

69 The college operates a well-established teaching observation procedure. Managers have been self-critical of some lesson observation judgements and have made changes to the system since September 2000. Of the lessons observed by college staff before this date 73% were good or outstanding. An analysis of the 75 observations carried out by the college since September shows 60% in this category which is similar to the inspection finding of 58%. The monitoring, analysis and management of the lesson observation arrangements are good. There has been a deterioration in the quality of teaching since the inspection in 1996 when 67% of lessons were considered good or outstanding. In some programme areas the deterioration is significant. For example, in mathematics and IT, leisure and tourism, and hairdressing and beauty therapy there has been at least a decline

of 25 percentage points in the proportion of good and outstanding lessons since the last inspection.

70 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development are good. There is a single appraisal scheme for all staff that is linked to remuneration. All staff receive an annual appraisal interview and a half-yearly review. Managers consider the performance of staff against objectives and targets. Staff development needs identified from these interviews together with those identified from school and college plans are used to formulate the staff development programme. Evaluation of the staff development undertaken is systematic.

Governance

Grade 2

71 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths of governance identified in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good use of governors' expertise
- effective induction and training
- close attention to the setting and monitoring of strategic objectives
- effective development of performance indicators for governance

Weaknesses

- failure to follow some appropriate procedures
- insufficient monitoring of academic performance

72 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The

Cross-college Provision

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.

73 The corporation has 18 members against a determination of 20. At the time of the inspection there was a vacancy for a community governor. The corporation has not formally appointed one of the current governors. As the self-assessment report notes, members' skills have been mapped against the needs of the corporation and its committees, and new governors have been recruited to fill any identified gaps. For example, a senior member of Teesside University joined the corporation in 1999 to provide additional expertise on educational matters. Governors with legal and estates expertise contributed significantly to the Catterick development. Newly appointed governors receive a comprehensive induction programme supported by an appropriately detailed handbook. Governors benefit from a varied annual training programme which includes a residential component, evening development sessions, and regional events supported by the FEFC standards fund.

74 The corporation has met six times in the last 12 months. Clerking arrangements have not been in accordance with best practice as described by the FEFC, largely because the executive director for finance in the college has undertaken them. In addition, the audit committee has been clerked by an external co-opted member of the committee. An independent clerk took up post immediately before the inspection. Overall average attendance at corporation and committee meetings over the past year is 69%, partly explained by the long-term absence of two governors for medical reasons. Some committee meetings have been inquorate, including the remuneration committee meeting at which the principal's base salary for 1999-2000 was agreed. A helpful list of action points is appended to corporation and committee minutes where appropriate.

75 The finance and employment committee meets six times a year. It receives the most recent college management accounts, together with reports on income generation. The management accounts are also presented at corporation meetings and all governors receive copies of the accounts between meetings. The committee did not, however, review the three-year financial forecast 2000 to 2003 before its presentation to the corporation. The audit committee has two members with relevant financial and audit expertise. It closely monitors the implementation of internal audit recommendations. It has yet to extend this monitoring as recommended to the external auditors. Similarly, whilst the performance of the internal auditors is reviewed against a number of different criteria, no such criteria have been determined for external audit. The minutes do not record the committee's consideration of either the 1999-2000 or 2000-01 internal audit plans. Some of these weaknesses relating to the conduct of corporation and committee business were not included in the self-assessment report. The terms of reference of all committees are appropriate and are subject to annual review.

76 Corporation minutes and papers, excluding confidential items such as management accounts, are made available to the public in the local library. Confidentiality criteria have not been formally determined. The register of interests covers governors and all staff with significant financial responsibilities and is updated annually. The college holds an annual public meeting to which customers and stakeholders are invited. The meeting is also attended by students. Measures to improve attendance at this meeting are currently under discussion. The corporation has recently approved a revised code of conduct, incorporating the Nolan committee recommendations of standards in public life.

77 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors are active in setting and

Cross-college Provision

monitoring the college mission and strategic plan. At their annual residential meeting each November, governors review the mission and key objectives for the college. The corporation's committees comment in more detail about relevant aspects of the emerging plan and the board discusses a final draft. However, the minutes do not record the formal approval of the 2000 to 2003 plan, or the supporting three-year financial forecasts. The annual plan is monitored on a quarterly basis with the executive director for finance reporting on progress towards achieving targets to the full corporation. Formal links between governors and the curriculum areas of the college exist in engineering and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Other links are more informal and include attendance at curriculum briefings by heads of school and regular visits to Catterick and other centres.

78 Monitoring of the college's academic performance through the standards group has only recently been formalised. The first meeting of the group took place in April 2000. It has held one further meeting since then. At its first meeting, it determined what information on students' achievements might be appropriate for the full corporation to consider and how frequently. The self-assessment report outlines a number of measures the corporation intends to use to monitor its own performance. A number of these measures are already well developed, for example the setting of an attendance target, and involvement in strategic planning, induction and training. The self-appraisal of corporation members is undertaken using a standard proforma, although currently there is no provision for recording personal development targets.

Management

Grade 2

79 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They identified an additional strength.

Key strengths

- an effective team of senior managers
- a systematic planning process
- clear lines of communication and accountability
- the efficient deployment of staff
- an extensive range of effective partnerships
- good use of management information
- effective marketing

Weaknesses

- some measurable decline in overall performance
- insufficient progress in promoting equal opportunities issues

80 The principal and executive directors work effectively as a team. They have a clear view of the action needed to respond to key strategic issues. Appropriate annual objectives form the basis of the operating plan. Staff are consulted on the objectives through team meetings, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. There are regular quarterly reviews of performance against targets and progress reports are incorporated into operating plan updates. Other areas of the college complete separate operational plans. Some of the curriculum school operational plans are insufficiently specific in their interpretation of college objectives. The action plans are not always updated to incorporate information on underperforming courses. The college has recently consolidated its policies into an index of 14 titles covering all aspects of its work. A number of the revised policies, for example the learning policy, are at an early stage of dissemination to staff. Since the previous inspection, progress has been slow in the promotion of equal opportunities issues across the college. A strategy group was formed in 1998 but the corporation has only recently received a report on its activities. In 2000-01,

Cross-college Provision

equal opportunities issues are being given more prominence.

81 The college has met its FEFC funding and student growth targets up to 1998-99 after which full-time student numbers have shown a decline. Growth in part-time numbers has been more consistent and overall, since the previous inspection, FEFC-funded enrolments have grown by 18%. In-year retention figures have been consistently high although the course retention rate has been more inconsistent. The proportion of students achieving their qualification aim fell to 62% and 58% in 1997-98 and 1998-99, respectively. This figure improved significantly in 1999-2000 to 69%.

82 The management structure is kept under review and adapted as priorities change, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Managers promote effective lines of communication and accountability. For example, the monthly college 'team brief' is produced by the executive team and shared with all staff and the corporation. Staff are encouraged to feed back comments on its contents to the executive through their own line managers. Regular meetings are scheduled for all operational areas. There is a standard approach to minuting meetings. All staff have electronic mail accounts, through which minutes and memoranda are distributed. Inspectors confirmed that staff are effectively and efficiently deployed. Most part-time staff have permanent fractional contracts. The executive board monitors teaching hours and pay costs on a monthly basis.

83 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. During 1999-2000, the college made an operating deficit of £1.25 million. This deficit is covered by reserves. Over £700,000 of this deficit was planned and related to the development of the Catterick centre. The unplanned element resulted from shortfalls in various categories of

income including European social funding and greater than expected fee remission. Measures have been introduced to stabilise the situation, including a voluntary staff severance scheme and careful control of expenditure. The annual estimates of income and expenditure for 2000-01 were not finalised in a timely manner, due to uncertainties over payroll budgets arising from the implementation of the staff severance scheme. The latest forecast for 2000-01 indicates a small operating deficit of £45,000. Comprehensive monthly management accounts include separate reports for the Catterick centre and the college company. Separate reports are produced on performance against various funding agreements. Financial regulations are largely comprehensive. The reports of internal and external auditors indicate that the college has sound systems of internal control.

84 Good use is made of management information, which enables the college to monitor performance thoroughly. This strength was identified in the college's self-assessment report. Recent computerised systems have been introduced for personnel. A wide range of software is available to heads of school and programme managers. For example, weekly reports on funding units are produced to assist the monitoring of achievement against target. The college undertakes a thorough needs analysis based on a wide range of labour market information and research to identify its potential clients. The marketing plan, based on the college plan, contains specific actions to promote college activities. The effectiveness of marketing was not identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

85 The self-assessment report appropriately highlights the extensive range of effective business and community partnerships in which the college is involved. The college is an active member of over 30 partnerships, which include three TECs, the University of Teesside, the Tees Valley and North Yorkshire Learning Partnerships and the Darlington Partnership,

Cross-college Provision

which is a forum for major employers in the town. It is also a partner in a successful IT project supporting the development of new learning centres and a learning intranet targeted at widening participation in Darlington. The college is currently undertaking an evaluation of its partnership activities to address a weakness identified in the self-assessment report that feedback from partnership meetings is not always consistently provided.

Conclusions

86 The college's self-assessment report was comprehensive and clearly presented. The report was compiled using the framework specified in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* and the guidance in Council Circular 97/13, *Self-Assessment and Inspection*. The report served as a useful basis for planning

and conducting the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. The college in its self-assessment report overestimated the quality of its teaching. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded by the college in three of the curriculum areas. In three other curriculum areas the grades awarded by inspectors were one grade lower and in one area, one grade higher, than those awarded by the college. In the cross-college areas, inspectors agreed with four of the grades and in one area awarded a grade lower than the college.

87 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 (December 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	17
25+ years	58
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (December 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	35
Level 2 (intermediate)	32
Level 3 (advanced)	19
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Level not specified	0
Non-schedule 2	9
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	224	1,065	17
Construction	73	404	7
Engineering	105	637	10
Business	57	923	13
Hotel and catering	232	373	8
Health and community care	307	667	13
Art and design	221	293	7
Humanities	128	1,319	20
Basic education	6	361	5
Total	1,353	6,042	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 16% 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 (December 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	203	3	5	211
Supporting direct learning contact	76	3	11	90
Other support	93	7	2	102
Total	372	13	18	403

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£11,625,000	£12,392,000	£12,518,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£15.92	£16.20	£16.60
Payroll as a proportion of income	65%	64%	68%
Achievement of funding target	97%	100%	97%
Diversity of income	27%	30%	31%
Operating surplus	£121,000	-£187,000	-£1,255,000

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)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	696	1,254	1,076	899	1,405	862
	Retention (%)	91	92	83	90	93	73
	Achievement (%)	72	39	43	78	53	35
2	Number of starters	1,160	1,398	1,417	1,258	1,448	1,281
	Retention (%)	86	81	76	88	86	74
	Achievement (%)	72	58	55	72	56	57
3	Number of starters	849	876	859	1,310	1,664	1,574
	Retention (%)	82	85	78	86	91	86
	Achievement (%)	62	73	61	61	60	52
4 or 5	Number of starters	27	64	45	584	776	729
	Retention (%)	81	100	91	88	91	87
	Achievement (%)	93	51	71	71	68	60
Short courses	Number of starters	1,235	1,272	1,620	4,063	4,832	5,554
	Retention (%)	87	98	94	92	97	95
	Achievement (%)	88	53	59	84	64	64
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	479	615	1,151	563	735	613
	Retention (%)	97	92	85	96	89	82
	Achievement (%)	98	66	63	92	71	56

Source: ISR

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