

East Berkshire College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

East Berkshire College

South East Region

Inspected November 1999

East Berkshire College is a general further education college with four main centres in Langley, Windsor, Maidenhead and Heathrow. The college offers courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. The inspection covered six programme areas and led to eight grades being awarded. The college produced its second self-assessment report for this inspection. The self-assessment process was not sufficiently rigorous or comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although they identified additional strengths and weaknesses, some of which were significant. Inspectors awarded grades lower than the college in one curriculum area and three cross-college areas.

The college's recent reorganisation has created a management team which is beginning to focus attention on urgent issues. It was too early to assess the effectiveness of these new arrangements at the time of the inspection. The college has a wide variety of links with external partners and there is effective use of industry contacts to enhance courses. There is good provision in art and design, media and ESOL.

Student retention is good in IT and business courses. Students who wish to progress to higher education receive sound advice. Recent investment in reception areas and information centres has improved the college environment. Students have good access to IT. The college should address: the declining retention and achievement rates; the wide variation in the quality of teaching and learning; the weak management of some courses; and the lack of evaluation of student support services. It should also: review the approach to the tutorial curriculum; improve the monitoring of students' attendance; ensure that the quality assurance framework covers all college activities; continue to improve the quality and reliability of data; and extend the use of targets and benchmarking data. Governors should ensure that there is compliance with statutory requirements, that the monitoring of academic performance is more effective and that their own training needs are identified and met.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Information technology	3	Support for students	3
Engineering	3	General resources	3
Business administration	3	Quality assurance	4
Business management and professional studies	3	Governance	4
Health and social care	3	Management	3
Art and design	2		
Media and performing arts	3		
ESOL	2		

The College and its Mission

1 East Berkshire College was established in 1992 as a result of the merger of Langley College of Further Education with Windsor and Maidenhead College of Further Education. It is one of the largest colleges in the South East region. The college operates from four main sites in Langley, Windsor, Maidenhead and a training centre near Heathrow airport. The college also uses two centres in Slough, one at Slough Foyer and the other at Thomas Gray Centre, which offers information technology (IT) and other programmes to Asian community groups. Other community work is organised in 35 centres located throughout East Berkshire and West London.

2 The college serves a population of 108,000 in Slough, 136,000 in Windsor and Maidenhead, and the wider communities of South Buckinghamshire, Hillingdon and Heathrow airport. Of the population in Slough, 26% is black, compared with 5% in Windsor and Maidenhead. The college operates in a competitive environment. Within a 20-mile radius there are eight further education colleges, 27 schools with post-16 provision and numerous private training providers. Staying-on rates are high; in Berkshire 76% of 16 year olds continue to study full time compared with 70% for England.

3 The Eastern Thames Valley and West London is an area of economic prosperity, based on high technology industries. National and international companies have their headquarters in the region. Unemployment is low at 1.6%, but there are significant shortages of skilled workers in some areas. Pockets of high unemployment exist, such as in Slough.

4 The college offers courses in all 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). These include general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and general certificate of

secondary education (GCSE) courses and vocational programmes at levels 1 to 4. The college has recently established a strategic partnership with Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College to develop higher education provision. The college provides training sponsored by three training and enterprise councils (TECs) in Reading, West London and central London. The college also has contracts with two local authorities for adult and community education provision.

5 Following the failure of merger discussions with another college, a major reorganisation of the college took place during 1998-99. As a result of the introduction of a new strategic plan, two faculties were established with responsibility for the defined market segments of academic and vocational work, respectively, and a directorate for commercial and community development. The college employs 959 staff equal to 505 full-time equivalent. In 1998-99, the college enrolled 4,120 full-time and 10,174 part-time students. Full-time enrolments increased by 19% between 1996 and 1998.

6 The college's vision is: 'East Berkshire College will be a regional centre of excellence, working through partnerships to deliver lifelong learning in support of our local communities. We, the people who are East Berkshire College, will always aim to exceed our clients' expectations, establishing a national reputation in areas where we have exceptional skills'.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected in November 1999. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1999. These data could not be validated. The college subsequently agreed that the inspection would be based on individualised student record (ISR) data for the three years 1995 to 1998. However,

Context

many aspects of these data were unreliable. This hampered the effective assessment by inspectors of students' achievements. Where possible, inspectors used college-provided evidence to amplify aspects of the ISR data. These revised data are quoted only in the text of the report, and are not reproduced in data tables, as they were not formally validated. In some curriculum areas it was not possible to produce sufficient validated data to complete a table showing retention and achievement data.

8 The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 14 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 64 days. They observed 111 lessons, 13 of which were not graded but which contributed to an assessment of the quality of tutorials and work in community venues. Inspectors examined students' work and college documentation. Meetings were held with governors, managers, staff and students.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 55% were good or outstanding and 15% were less than satisfactory. This profile is well below the averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	3	2	1	0	7
GNVQ	0	11	6	5	0	22
Other vocational	6	24	17	6	0	53
Other	3	6	4	2	1	16
Total (No.)	10	44	29	14	1	98
Total (%)	10	45	30	14	1	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

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10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The highest average attendance was in media and performing arts at 93% and the lowest was in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) at 69%.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
East Berkshire College	11.3	80
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Information Technology

Grade 3

11 Inspectors observed 12 lessons and agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report. However, a number of the strengths were overstated and insufficient consideration was given to students' learning and achievements.

Key strengths

- effective teaching of theoretical concepts
- good schemes of work and course materials
- a supportive learning environment
- high retention rates

Weaknesses

- poor or declining achievement on some courses
- undemanding work in some practical lessons
- lack of materials to support independent learning
- lack of differentiation in practical tasks

12 A broad range of courses is offered across both college faculties and the directorate ranging from short introductory IT courses to specialist advanced courses in computer-aided design. A recent appointment has been made to co-ordinate provision between different centres of the college. This is bringing coherence to the overall provision and there are signs of an emerging team spirit among the staff involved. Courses are well planned and properly managed. There are detailed schemes of work and records of the regular systematic monitoring of students' progress in course tutors' files. Good workbooks written by staff support practical work. These strengths are recognised in the self-assessment report.

13 Most lessons are well planned with clear goals which are shared with the students. Only a small range of teaching methods was observed but all teachers frequently check that their students understand the material being covered. In a well-structured lecture on the conversion of sound to other wave forms for communication, a good range of demonstrations using telecommunications equipment and CD players maintained students' interest and involvement in the lesson. In a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) lesson on the creation of macros in wordprocessing software, good use was made of projection technology to demonstrate on the lecturer's computer the complete sequence of commands required to install the macro.

14 Work in practical lessons is supported by well-devised workbooks but there are no resources which enable students to explore the computer systems or investigate their mistakes on their own. In many cases, students lack confidence and depend heavily on the individual support provided by the teacher to complete practical assignments. Teachers do not provide different tasks which take account of students' varying abilities and, as a result, much of the work is undemanding. These issues were not identified in the self-assessment report.

15 As noted in the self-assessment report, student retention is high across the range of courses, with the exception of the GCE AS course. Attendance in the majority of lessons was very good and was 100% in over half the lessons observed. Students arrive promptly for lessons and there are good relationships between students and teachers. Students appreciate the supportive learning environment and enjoy their work in computing. Students' achievements are poor on the GNVQ programme, and on GCE A level programmes they have been declining over the past three years. Poor students' achievements in some areas were not identified in the self-assessment report. Achievement has been consistently good in the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G)

Curriculum Areas

certificate and diploma courses. The quality of many students' practical and assignment work is good.

16 There has been substantial recent investment in IT equipment to address weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. There is now adequate provision of computers of high specification with some very good provision for work in computer-aided design. The college communications network is still being developed. In two lessons, hardware and software problems adversely affected students' learning. Staff are suitably qualified with good technical skills. They are highly motivated and teach with confidence, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Most accommodation is satisfactory but some

computer rooms are too small and there is insufficient space beside computers for students' files and papers.

17 The college also offers IT training at a variety of venues in the community. All courses are oversubscribed. Flexible teaching practices include opportunities for open learning and short training sessions. Laptop computers are used at some venues. The hardware and software used meet the needs of learners and enable them to learn at their own level and pace. Students frequently progress through several levels of training at one venue. IT training is available on any weekday, on four evenings and on Saturday mornings. Progression routes from these courses to other college provision or to other opportunities are not clearly defined.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 7261 IT certificate	1	Number of starters	165	39	*
		Retention (%)	81	56	*
		Achievement (%)	80	60	*
C&G 7261 IT diploma	2	Number of starters	96	78	*
		Retention (%)	81	88	*
		Achievement (%)	94	96	*
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	48	73	*
		Retention (%)	83	82	*
		Achievement (%)	52	46	*
National diploma IT	3	Number of starters	48	35	*
		Retention (%)	81	86	*
		Achievement (%)	100	70	*
GCE A level computing (two year)	3	Number of starters	51	45	*
		Retention (%)	88	78	*
		Achievement (%)	87	60	*
GCE A level computing (one year)	3	Number of starters	33	15	*
		Retention (%)	88	73	*
		Achievement (%)	74	45	*
GCE AS computing	3	Number of starters	44	37	*
		Retention (%)	59	35	*
		Achievement (%)	61	54	*

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

18 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They generally agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report but considered that there were significant omissions. The self-assessment report did not give sufficient consideration to teaching and learning, resources or students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning in practical lessons
- well-prepared handouts
- effective tutor support for full-time students
- well-completed written assignments

Weaknesses

- lack of work placements for full-time students
- insufficient up-dating opportunities for teachers
- some areas in need of refurbishment
- too few meetings of full course teams

19 Engineering is based on each of the college's four main sites: Heathrow is used for heavy motor vehicle work; Windsor for light motor vehicle courses; Maidenhead for mechanical and electronic engineering courses; and Langley provides a small amount of electronic engineering. A range of courses and modes of study are offered, from basic training courses to national diplomas. Higher national certificate courses have been introduced this year in conjunction with Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College. Windsor is a major national centre for the training of apprentices for BMW (GB). A strategic review of engineering has begun.

20 In the majority of lessons the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better. The teaching in some lessons was vibrant and enthusiastic and held the interest of students. Teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching methods and had prepared well-presented handouts of good quality. In other lessons, some teachers remained seated for lengthy periods, dictating notes or reading from handouts and, as a result, failed to hold the interest of students. When they questioned students to find out whether they understood the work they often failed to direct their questions to individual students in an effective way. There was some good practical work which was well prepared and enjoyed by the students. For example, students learning welding each undertook different workshop tasks. They were well supervised and guided by an efficient and helpful lecturer. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Full-time students do not benefit from an appropriate programme of work experience. The curriculum area's strong links with local companies are not exploited to address this shortcoming.

21 The self-assessment report identified difficulties in accessing student data. In discussion with team leaders, inspectors found that the published ISR-derived data were unreliable for many courses. These data were amended during the inspection. Detailed analysis of a selection of 21 courses over the three-year period 1996 to 1998 showed that overall retention reduced from 65% in 1996 to 40% in 1998. There was a similar fall in achievement rates. In 1996, 80% of the courses had achievement rates above national averages but in 1997 this percentage fell to 71% and declined further to 55% in 1998. On the national certificate in electronic engineering course there were achievement rates of 100%, 94% and 90%, respectively, over the period, although retention rates were consistently below the national average. In contrast, the C&G 228 part 2 course had achievement rates of 85%,

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11% and 6%, respectively, over the three years but with retention rates above the national average. Students' written and practical work seen during the inspection was good.

22 Curriculum logs are comprehensive but course teams do not meet formally to monitor the effectiveness of courses or the progress of students. Course review and evaluation documents lack detail. There is no comparison of student retention and achievement rates with national averages and targets are not identified. As the self-assessment report states, there is no common development of course content and assessment when programmes are taught on more than one site. Part-time lecturers find it difficult to attend course team meetings.

23 Staff are well qualified professionally and as assessors and verifiers. However, in an area of rapid change more opportunities for technical updating are required. One member of staff recently spent three weeks in Qatar, sponsored by GEC, for updating in microwave technology. The physical resources available are adequate for the range of courses but the spread of engineering over four sites means that there is significant duplication of resources. Some accommodation requires considerable refurbishment.

24 Due to the unreliability of validated ISR data for 1997 and 1998, it is not possible to publish a curriculum table for engineering programmes. College data for 1999 could not be validated.

Curriculum Areas

Business Administration

Grade 3

25 Inspectors observed 13 lessons across the three main college sites. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses recognised in the self-assessment report but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching on full-time administration courses
- high retention rates on full-time programmes
- attractive and appropriate learning environments

Weaknesses

- weak management of business courses
- no systematic checking of students' learning
- students' punctuality not routinely and consistently addressed by teachers

26 Business and administration courses are managed across two college faculties. The teaching observed in two-thirds of business programmes was satisfactory or better. The teaching on full-time administration programmes is good. The majority of the lessons were well planned. This was referred to in the college's self-assessment report. In some good lessons, teachers provided students with a wide variety of different activities to develop their learning. In a GCE A level business studies lesson, students completed a worksheet on price elasticity, and were able to answer challenging questions on elasticity within changing markets before they moved into small group work to discuss a case study on the impact of Jaguar's car sales in the United States of America.

One-third of the lessons observed were unsatisfactory. These poorer lessons were all on the GNVQ advanced course.

27 Lesson plans were clear about teaching activities but failed to identify appropriate objectives in terms of what students would know as a result of the lesson. The failure of teachers to check systematically that learning was taking place showed their lack of understanding of the need to set clear learning objectives. Some of the resources produced by teachers were of high quality. They were imaginatively presented and commercially relevant. Some of the worst materials were poorly produced handouts dated 1991. Punctuality is not addressed consistently by teachers. Some students arriving late are questioned by teachers, others are ignored. Late students are not effectively brought into the work of the lesson. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Attendance at the lessons seen was poor, at 74%.

28 Some very good results have been achieved on level 4 administration programmes. GNVQ advanced business, the largest course inspected, has retention and achievement rates around the national average. College data suggest a decline in these results for 1998-99. Retention rates on business courses are good and above national averages. The retention rates overall on administration courses are less good. The analysis of results at course level is not sufficiently rigorous to pick up differences in the achievements of courses taught at different sites.

29 Management of business courses is weak. Timetables are poorly produced and lack detail. Changes to timetables are not communicated effectively. During the inspection, 39% of lessons observed were not in the room timetabled. Some scheduled lessons did not occur. Meetings to co-ordinate the activities of teams from across the three sites are now in place. These are intended to take forward college-wide issues more coherently. A college procedure for internal verification is in place. It is more effectively implemented in administration programmes than in business. Some assignment briefs lack detail of how key skills are to be included and how the work is to be assessed by tutors. This was recognised in

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the self-assessment report. In a minority of cases, students have not received any results from the formal assessments they have undertaken. Course reviews do not contribute significantly to the evidence base for self-assessment. Action plans and student data analyses do not appear in all curriculum logs for the academic year 1998-99. Students' work was adequately marked and teachers provided helpful comments to guide students to use other sources and to consider other issues.

30 Classrooms are well-lit and well furnished. Walls are brightly painted and there are effective displays of students' work. Teachers used few audiovisual aids other than the whiteboard and overhead projector. Good computer facilities are available to students. Learning centres are welcoming and reasonably

well equipped. The bookstock does not fully reflect the current content of the business curriculum. There is a large number of economics texts but relatively few for business studies. Teachers are appropriately qualified. A large number of sessional staff teach at the Windsor campus. The college has taken action to place their employment on a more permanent basis.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	118	93	*
		Retention (%)	80	80	*
		Achievement (%)	67	70	*
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	48	56	*
		Retention (%)	71	89	*
		Achievement (%)	76	100	*
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	157	157	*
		Retention (%)	87	75	*
		Achievement (%)	70	76	*
NVQ administration	3	Number of starters	74	81	*
		Retention (%)	74	*	*
		Achievement (%)	68	*	*
GCE A level business studies (two year)	3	Number of starters	71	117	*
		Retention (%)	86	80	*
		Achievement (%)	78	66	*
Higher diploma in administration procedures	4	Number of starters	28	36	*
		Retention (%)	*	94	*
		Achievement (%)	*	84	*

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Business Management and Professional Studies

Grade 3

31 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering accounting, marketing and management courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses. The report paid insufficient attention to the quality of teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- carefully planned introductions to new concepts
- good use made of students' own working experiences
- purposeful and businesslike working in lessons
- achievement rates and outstanding student retention in higher level accounting courses

Weaknesses

- lack of differentiated materials for classes containing students of mixed ability
- insufficient checking of students' learning
- failure to monitor part-time teachers closely
- poor retention on some courses
- some courses taught in unsuitable accommodation

32 Management and professional courses form part of the newly created vocational faculty. Programmes were formerly managed separately at different college sites; they are now all managed as a group. Recently appointed managers are still making this transition. Course logs are not well kept. Some are incomplete and others contain out-of-date material and information. Courses are run at various levels and mainly take place in the

evenings. The college is striving to extend modes of delivery to allow adults to study when and how it suits them. A large number of part-time staff teach on these courses. They are invited to attend meetings but their attendance is limited by their other professional commitments. Their contribution to courses is insufficiently monitored and very few have yet been observed in lessons. This is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

33 Inspectors agreed that there is some good teaching in management and professional studies. Teachers made good use of students' own working experiences to exemplify concepts and practices and students themselves were confident in making presentations to their peers. In a management lesson, students gave presentations to the class on their roles and responsibilities. They received immediate feedback and the carefully considered and constructive criticism from the teacher and fellow students helped them to improve their performance. In some lessons teachers promote a purposeful and businesslike atmosphere in the classroom. Some teachers are very effective in helping students to move from working with basic to more complex concepts. In some lessons teachers provided an appropriate variety of activities for students which were demanding and which maintained their interest. However, lesson planning is often weak and teachers give more attention to covering the syllabus than to planning how they can make students learn more effectively. In some poor lessons, teachers failed to vary the learning activities sufficiently to keep the interest of students and made few checks to see if students were understanding the work. They often put questions to the class as a whole rather than directing questions to individual students and repeatedly allowed the same students to answer. Some classes contained students of differing abilities, but teachers failed to use differentiated materials or methods to take this into account. This was not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

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34 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students' achievements in 1996 and 1997 were good. Data for 1998 and 1999 were unreliable. In 1996 and 1997 achievement rates were well above national averages in accounting courses at level 3 and marketing and management courses at level 4. Achievement rates overall at other levels and on short courses were around, or above, national averages. Retention rates were low on some accounting courses and the advanced certificate in marketing course in 1996 and 1997. This is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. However, college-provided data suggest that the retention rate on level 4 accounting has been consistently outstanding for three consecutive years at over 90%. Students' work is carefully logged and some of their files are particularly well organised and indexed, allowing ease of

reference for revision purposes. Marking by most teachers is fair. However, the internal verification of students' marked work often depends on too small a sample.

35 A large number of part-time teachers contribute to the professional and management courses. All have degrees or equivalent qualifications and some have assessor awards but not all have a teaching qualification. Some of the accommodation used for these courses is inappropriate; facilities in some rooms are in need of upgrading; some rooms cannot be rearranged for different activities; and a few adjacent rooms are not sufficiently insulated against extraneous noise. The absence of projection screens meant that whiteboards were used inappropriately with overhead projectors. These weaknesses are acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business management and professional studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ accounting	2	Number of starters	43	50	*
		Retention (%)	77	*	*
		Achievement (%)	76	*	*
NVQ accounting	3	Number of starters	69	62	*
		Retention (%)	72	*	*
		Achievement (%)	68	*	*
Certificate in management and marketing	3	Number of starters	57	64	*
		Retention (%)	68	*	*
		Achievement (%)	79	*	*
Other professional and management courses	3 and 4	Number of starters	20	45	*
		Retention (%)	65	84	*
		Achievement (%)	69	55	*
NVQ accounting	4	Number of starters	41	31	*
		Retention (%)	90	*	*
		Achievement (%)	49	*	*
Advanced certificate and diploma in management and marketing	4	Number of starters	26	*	*
		Retention (%)	42	*	*
		Achievement (%)	73	*	*

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

36 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in health and social care, childcare and counselling. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report overstated some strengths and inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- good support for students
- well-managed counselling courses
- effective use of work experience to support learning
- good retention on GNVQ foundation

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates on GNVQ intermediate and diploma in nursery nursing
- staff shortages in key posts
- underdeveloped course management and organisation on GNVQ and childcare courses
- little integration of key skills with course programmes

37 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses, including GNVQs in health and social care at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing and the certificate in childcare and education. Counselling courses are offered at various levels and many students progress from the certificate to the diploma course. There are also part-time childcare and first-aid courses. The courses are offered at the college's three main sites.

38 Course team management of health and social care and childcare courses is at an early stage of development. A new team of staff has been appointed recently. There are no permanent members of staff who were involved in the management of the courses in the previous year. There are vacancies for two further full-time posts including a co-ordinator who is to have responsibility for ensuring consistency of quality across the three sites. As noted in the self-assessment report, teachers are well qualified but inexperienced in the management of the course requirements for GNVQ and childcare programmes. This has resulted in course teams planning on a short-term basis rather than having long-term strategy for the curriculum. For example, there is no assessment plan for the academic year for GNVQ courses. Schemes of work and lesson plans lack detail. Counselling courses are well managed. There are regular, minuted meetings of teachers on these courses that clearly identify action points and responsibilities. Course documentation for counselling courses is thorough and there are detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. There are developing links with employers. The college is represented on three local early years development partnerships and is developing links with local hospitals and community health providers.

39 Teaching is good. Of 12 lessons observed, eight were good or better. Lessons have clear aims and objectives and include a variety of appropriate activities. Teachers give clear explanations of care principles and reinforce learning with illustrations from their own experiences of care settings. In one lesson on discrimination, the teacher, who was physically disabled, related her own experiences of difficulty in gaining access to some college buildings and what she did to overcome these difficulties. The teacher was supported effectively by a support worker who also provided the students with useful insights into working in the care professions.

Curriculum Areas

40 Most teachers use a variety of appropriate methods to check students' understanding and knowledge in lessons. In some less effective lessons teachers did not recognise that students were becoming bored with an activity and did not change the content or pace of the lesson accordingly. In many lessons, teachers differentiated the learning activities to take account of the wide range of abilities of the students in the class. There is little integration of key skills with GNVQ courses. There is no reference to key skills in schemes of work and lesson plans. Work experience is used to good effect in all courses, as identified in the self-assessment report. Tutorial support is good. Students value the support they receive as a result of effective regular reviews of their progress.

41 Pass rates are below the national average on GNVQ intermediate and diploma in nursery nursing courses. They are above the national average on the GNVQ advanced course and the certificate in counselling. The weaknesses in achievement rates were not identified in the self-assessment report. Retention rates are good on the GNVQ foundation course. Retention rates on all other courses are close to the national average but have declined slightly in the last two years. Students' work is of an appropriate standard. Some assignments are wordprocessed. Assignment briefs are clear. Teachers' written comments are supportive and help students to make progress in their learning.

42 Teaching accommodation is good. There are base rooms at all sites. Students' work is displayed to provide a stimulating learning environment. The library resources at the Langley site are adequate but at the Maidenhead site the bookstock is poor.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and social care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	Number of starters	5	27	*
		Retention (%)	100	81	*
		Achievement (%)	80	64	*
Lifesaver first aid	1	Number of starters	74	167	*
		Retention (%)	95	99	*
		Achievement (%)	96	96	*
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	23	23	*
		Retention (%)	*	83	*
		Achievement (%)	*	53	*
Certificate in counselling	2	Number of starters	68	56	*
		Retention (%)	*	*	*
		Achievement (%)	*	*	*
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	77	66	*
		Retention (%)	71	79	*
		Achievement (%)	57	70	*
GNVQ advanced in health and social care	3	Number of starters	20	35	*
		Retention (%)	*	60	*
		Achievement (%)	*	85	*

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

43 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in art and design. Overall, they agreed with the self-assessment report. However, they considered that some strengths were understated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good well-managed teaching
- effective support for students
- most achievements above national averages
- effective promotion of equal opportunities
- well-qualified teaching and support staff

Weaknesses

- little use of market information to plan new provision
- lack of standard attendance registers and monitoring of students' absence
- poor retention and achievement in a few areas

44 Courses in art and design are offered on all three of the college's main sites. There are full-time courses in GNVQ intermediate and advanced in art and design; national diplomas in two-dimensional and three-dimensional visual communication and foundation studies; British Display Society certificates and diploma; GCE A/AS level and GCSE courses; and a range of leisure and C&G classes for part-time students. Students' experience is enriched by additional activities and visits to exhibitions and galleries. The self-assessment report recognised as a strength students' opportunities for progression internally, to higher education courses, or to employment. There are small classes on some courses and three full-time courses listed in the 1999-2000 prospectus failed to recruit. There has been no evaluation of market opportunities in the area to guide curriculum planning.

Another art and design provider is moving provision out of the immediate locality and labour market information indicates that the art and design sector will expand significantly.

45 Students benefit from an effective induction programme. This allows them to review their choice of course and make changes, as necessary. Teachers provide schemes of work, project briefs and lesson plans, although there are no common formats for these or common criteria. Most project briefs are appropriate for the level of course and develop students' understanding through research, investigation and realisation. Equality of opportunity is promoted; classes contain a good mix of students, support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is provided where needed and project briefs include cross-cultural issues.

46 Most teaching was good or outstanding, which accords with the judgement in the self-assessment report. In one effective lesson, work was continued on previously installed window displays, requiring students to collect self-portraits, photographs, props and drawings as well as producing a wordprocessed description of the process they followed. In another lesson, the teacher carefully addressed the issue of time management with students in order to emphasise the importance of meeting deadlines. The assignments for some students are real commissions. Recent examples include the production of a banner for the college library, photographs to decorate a restaurant and full-sized model astronauts for use in a leukaemia research campaign. Assessment criteria are clearly described and students understand assessment requirements. Progress is carefully monitored through an effective personal tutor system, but because there are no standard registers of attendance or procedures for monitoring absence, some poor attendance and punctuality are not addressed. Student feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction with their courses and the support they receive.

Curriculum Areas

47 As recognised by the self-assessment report, retention and achievement rates are at, or above, national averages, notably on GNVQ advanced and national diploma courses. On a few courses, retention and achievement are below the national average. Whilst this has been acknowledged in the self-assessment report it is not detailed or addressed. C&G photography and ceramics courses have retention as low as 49% and achievements as low as 33%. Students' work reflects the standard required by the level of course and, in some cases, exceeds the standard. This is confirmed by external verifiers' reports and is also recognised by external professional bodies, but not celebrated in the self-assessment report.

48 Teachers and support staff are well qualified and committed to providing a high-quality experience for students. Facilities across the three sites are satisfactory with good, light studios and well-equipped workshops. Notable are the new studio for the GNVQ advanced course at Maidenhead, display studios at Windsor and a dedicated computer unit at Langley. Some students' work is displayed to good effect around the college.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 7900 part 1 creative studies	1	Number of starters	15	15	*
		Retention (%)	*	87	*
		Achievement (%)	*	33	*
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	32	20	*
		Retention (%)	*	90	*
		Achievement (%)	*	61	*
C&G 7900 part 2 creative studies	2	Number of starters	30	29	*
		Retention (%)	97	90	*
		Achievement (%)	94	100	*
GCSE fashion/textile, photography, design	2	Number of starters	27	25	*
		Retention (%)	81	72	*
		Achievement (%)	89	82	*
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	75	78	*
		Retention (%)	81	77	*
		Achievement (%)	88	87	*
National diplomas communication, display, retail display (two years)	3	Number of starters	20	34	*
		Retention (%)	85	94	*
		Achievement (%)	93	97	*
Diploma foundation studies (one year)	3	Number of starters	*	31	*
		Retention (%)	*	77	*
		Achievement (%)	*	86	*

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Media and Performing Arts

Grade 3

49 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering media and performing arts. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but considered that some weaknesses had been underestimated.

Key strengths

- good achievements in most areas
- integration of real world experiences with students' learning
- effective deployment of tutors
- good range of courses allowing for progression in college

Weaknesses

- no evidence of action-planning in performing arts
- low retention on several courses
- lack of formal registers and monitoring of absence
- some ineffective teaching in performing arts
- poor accommodation for performing arts

50 The college offers a range of courses from intermediate to pre-degree foundation level. In media, provision includes GNVQ intermediate and advanced, a range of GCE A levels and a foundation course in media. In performing arts, courses lead to first diploma, national diploma and GCE A level with additional units. In media, students are able to combine units from GNVQ with GCE A levels, anticipating the change to curriculum 2000. Many students progress through the levels available within the college. The pre-degree foundation in media has recruited well for two years and students progress to prestigious courses in higher education. All courses recruited successfully this year.

51 In both areas, there are good schemes of work and clearly structured assignments that develop students' skills and learning. Course documentation is well maintained, although some induction materials do not indicate clearly the demands of the course. Lesson plans are devised as part of overall schemes of work and provide a balance of practical and theoretical activities. In some good lessons, tutors share their expertise and specialist knowledge with students to enable them to undertake complex tasks. In one lesson, a tutor instructed the class in the professional techniques of editing a sound tape. To provide realistic contexts to promote students' learning, the college has established good links with external agencies. A very productive link with Legoland offers students the opportunity to engage in making an authentic media product for the company's in-house publication, 'Parklife'. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. In some weaker lessons teachers failed to set tasks which were sufficiently demanding for the level of the course, and, as a result, the pace of work was too slow and students lost interest.

52 Students' written and practical work is of an appropriate standard. Students' progress is monitored through regular reviews. Overall, achievement is good. The national diploma in performing arts consistently performs above the national average with pass rates at 97%, 86% and 95% for the last three years. In GCE A level, achievement is very good. Achievement rates in media studies GCE A level were 91% in 1997, and 100% in 1998 and 1999, with similarly consistent results in film studies and photography. In media, there are considerable problems with the data available. Courses have been amalgamated with other courses and incorrectly titled. The published data do not do justice to the successes achieved in this area. Retention has been poor on the national diploma in performing arts for the last three years. In theatre studies in 1999 only seven students out of a cohort of 20 achieved the qualification. On the GNVQ advanced media

Curriculum Areas

course retention has dropped, from 88% in 1997 to 77% in 1998 and 63% in 1999. This compares with a national average of 86%, and was recorded as a weakness in the self-assessment report. In order to address poor retention tutors are attempting to monitor attendance and punctuality. However, there are no formal registers of attendance or clear procedures to follow up students' absences.

53 All courses have designated managers who maintain the curriculum logs but not all maintain these to the same high standard. In all cases, the course review document was retrospective and reflective. The review process lacks targets and achievement is not compared with national averages. There is no clear link between the process of course review and forward planning. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

54 Staff are well qualified and many have relevant current professional experience. The media area is housed in a good suite of rooms. There are some very good specialist spaces, notably in photography and the radio studio which broadcasts into the canteen. The desktop publishing facilities are inadequate for the

number of students and video-editing equipment is in need of upgrading. Classrooms are well maintained but wall space could be used more effectively for the display of students' work. In performing arts, the main hall is equipped with good sound and lighting equipment. However, other spaces for teaching in this subject area are depressingly shabby and unsuitable.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in media and performing arts, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First diploma performing arts	2	Number of starters	22	44	*
		Retention (%)	77	68	*
		Achievement (%)	94	100	*
GCE A level theatre studies	3	Number of starters	9	*	*
		Retention (%)	78	*	*
		Achievement (%)	80	*	*
National diploma performing arts	3	Number of starters	63	*	*
		Retention (%)	63	*	*
		Achievement (%)	87	*	*

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

ESOL

Grade 2

55 Inspectors observed 12 lessons, including two in community venues in Slough and a further three in Southall. Inspectors agreed with the general findings of the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- predominantly lively and skilful teaching
- good levels of students' achievements
- wide range of good-quality learning materials
- provision responsive to students' needs
- imaginative strategies for celebrating students' achievements
- well-managed provision

Weaknesses

- inadequate lesson planning to meet varied individual needs
- narrow range of teaching methods in some community provision

56 The ESOL curriculum is well managed with a newly established team working consistently to improve the quality and range of provision and to bring previously franchised work within a common framework. Provision is expanding to meet changing needs. From September 1999, full-time courses have been offered for the first time in the Langley and Slough area. A course at Heathrow recruits local employees from the hotel, restaurant and airline companies. Part-time provision is well located in partnership with other agencies. Bilingual teachers working in the community have attracted a broader range of adults into learning. A class of Somali and Arab women are developing new sewing skills through the medium of English with bilingual support. However, ESOL provision is not fully established on all main sites.

57 Students are helped to meet some of the costs of books, childcare, travel and examination fees through the hardship fund. These costs were identified in the self-assessment report as preventing some adults from staying on programmes. Clear criteria are used to place students efficiently in an appropriate level of study. Class profiles record the diversity of students' previous educational and work experience, and set out short-term and medium-term goals. Further work is needed on the diagnostic assessment of students' individual language skills as a baseline for the future review of progress and individual target-setting. This was recognised in the self-assessment report.

58 Lessons are well planned with clear learning outcomes and a well-balanced sequence of activities. Teaching is lively and ensures that students are actively engaged and work together well. Teachers give clear instructions and check students' learning systematically. Learning materials include tape, video, dictionaries and a collated pack of resource materials for work on National Open College Network (NOCN) units. Care is taken to ensure that materials are culturally appropriate. Some teachers are using IT productively to develop visual prompts and colourful worksheets. On one course for young adults a teacher is developing a presentation using a computer package to extend project work based on *James Bond* films. All students use an appropriate coursebook. In some weaker lessons, teachers failed to alter the course-book activities sufficiently to take account of the abilities of the particular group of students. Teachers give insufficient attention to meeting the different levels of ability within a class. Several students required additional support or more time if they were to complete the tasks set. In a small number of community-based lessons the range of learning activities was too narrow. Students repeatedly practised uncontextualised grammatical patterns through written gap-filling exercises without appropriate support. For

Curriculum Areas

these classes schemes of work do not provide for roll-on/roll-off recruitment and teachers lack specialist training in ESOL methods.

59 As ISR-derived data on student success are unreliable and were not available in a disaggregated form until 1999, college-provided data for 1998-99 have been used to make an assessment of student retention and achievement in this curriculum area. The difficulties with data were acknowledged in the self-assessment report. External accreditation is appropriate. The standards achieved are high. In 1999, of the students who took Pitmans qualifications 79% were successful, and of those, 80% achieved high grades. The team understand that achievement is not solely recognised through external assessments and celebrate students' successes in other ways. Community awards ceremonies are well attended and students on a short summer school have circulated a magazine compilation of their writing in an attractive format with photographs. Retention is good in the context of a transient population with increasing numbers of asylum seekers. On major part-time programmes in 1999, average retention ranged from 76% to 97%. Provision has been restructured to enable students to progress through clearly defined levels. In September 1999, 73% of beginners from a 10 week summer school progressed into ESOL classes. Progression routes to vocational and academic college courses have not yet been planned. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

60 ISR validated data for 1997 and 1998 were presented in an aggregated form, or had significant numbers of data queries. They are therefore unreliable. College data for 1999 could not be validated prior to the inspection. There is, therefore, insufficient data to produce a curriculum table for this section.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

61 Inspectors considered that, while some strengths had been correctly identified in the college's self-assessment report, others were overstated and some significant weaknesses had not been identified or had been understated.

Key strengths

- outstanding personal tutor support
- effective guidance, enrolment and induction for full-time students
- wide range of learning support services and facilities

Weaknesses

- some poor arrangements for learning support
- inappropriate arrangements for accreditation of the tutorial curriculum
- inefficient enrolment processes for part-time students
- delay in processing financial aid applications

62 Management of support for students is shared between the college's new core curriculum unit and two faculties. Much of the college's policy on support for students is new and untested, and designed to eradicate inconsistencies in provision across the college. However, the management of information centres at each of the three main sites by different line managers conflicts with this objective.

63 Inspectors agreed that pre-entry advice and guidance is good. The college has well-established and effective links with local schools and the Education Business Partnership, and provides a wide range of services to enable students to receive impartial guidance on the

opportunities available. Publicity materials are good. They are available in a range of languages, and used effectively to support college promotional activities.

64 Inspectors agreed that admission and enrolment procedures for full-time students are good. These are managed by staff in the information centres who are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in guidance. However, their services for part-time students are adversely affected by the lack of detailed course information. Part-time students also experienced lengthy delays in enrolling and obtaining the college identity card, which provides access to some college services. The application process for financial support is complicated. This can result in significant delays in payment, in some cases up to seven weeks, for students who are experiencing hardship.

65 Induction policies and procedures are comprehensive and effective in helping all students to settle in to the college. Students receive handbooks, including a copy of the college charter, and are generally well informed of their rights and responsibilities.

66 There is a wide range of services and facilities to provide additional learning support for students. Additional support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Students who take up support opportunities speak highly of the help they receive.

67 The system for screening students for learning support needs was the subject of review and change in 1999. However, the new system is ineffective. The computer-based screening procedure does not produce reliable information on student support needs. There is not a common approach to the assessment of part-time students. While the aim of the learning support service is to integrate support with the curriculum, at present most is taught separately with insufficient links to course

Cross-college Provision

requirements. The college's self-assessment report did not identify this weakness. The level of take-up of learning support by those identified with a need is unsatisfactory in many areas across the college. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that the evaluation of learning support was poor.

68 All full-time students have a personal tutor and speak consistently highly of the support they receive. In many cases, the individual support provided by tutors is outstanding. Tutors undertake effective progress reviews with individual students. However, inspectors disagreed that the decision to seek accreditation for the tutorial curriculum for 1999-2000 was a strength. The tutorial curriculum consists of key skill units in working with others and improving own learning. The time allocation for this work is insufficient, and tutors had only just been provided with guidance and some materials in November 1999. Tutors monitor and attempt to deal with students' poor attendance in a variety of ways. There are no overall policies or procedures for registering attendance or monitoring the absence of students for the college as a whole.

69 Guidance on progression from the college is good for students applying for university entry; there is a wide range of facilities to support them. The number of students receiving individual careers guidance sessions with CfBT Thames Careers Guidance is high. Support and guidance for those progressing to employment is less well developed.

70 Information centres provide good information and advice for students on welfare matters. However, the provision of counselling services is poor. Restructuring of the service in 1998-99 reduced the time available for counselling from 56 to 12 hours across the three main sites. Students now experience delays in obtaining appointments and there is no evaluation of the service. There is a students' union which represents students at the three main sites.

General Resources

Grade 3

71 The college's self-assessment report identified none of the strengths or weaknesses identified by inspectors. The strengths identified by the college are no more than would be expected as normal practice. Action plans do not relate to the specific weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, nor do they address the weaknesses identified by inspectors.

Key strengths

- welcoming and popular community centres
- good access to IT facilities for staff and students
- well-planned reorganisation and refurbishment of communal facilities
- improved access to many buildings for people with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- utilisation of accommodation substantially below sector average
- inadequate strategies to address poor utilisation of accommodation
- much teaching accommodation in a poor decorative state
- out-of-date library stock

72 The three main college sites are at Langley, Windsor and Maidenhead. Langley is the largest site and contains a grade II listed building. There is also a training centre at Heathrow. The Foyer in central Slough contains a gym and IT facilities leased from the Beacon Housing Association. The college uses a number of community-based centres; those observed by inspectors are particularly well located and provide excellent facilities for learning. In the past year, the college has disposed of one site in Windsor and reinvested in the main Windsor site.

Cross-college Provision

73 The college accommodation strategy for the period 1997 to 2000 was updated in November 1998. It is not sufficiently based on a curriculum strategy. It recognises a poor utilisation rate, which was only 17% at the time of the inspection. Some measures have been introduced to address this. For example, six science laboratories have been reduced to two at the Windsor site and all three main sites have new learning resource centres as a result of classroom reorganisation. However, many classrooms on all sites are empty during the day, especially after mid-afternoon. At Heathrow, just one room out of six was occupied at the time of inspection. While the college aims to lose 1,000 square metres of space, there has, as yet, been no radical nor medium-term rationalisation programme. The college has recently commissioned a study to inform a new accommodation strategy.

74 Much of the general and teaching accommodation is in a poor decorative state with few wall displays. There are a number of good teaching and learning spaces, for example beauty salons and some engineering workshops, which are fit for purpose. The newly refurbished reception areas and information centres are bright and welcoming. There are few directional signs around the campuses, both either inside or outside buildings.

75 Until recently there was insufficient IT equipment and it was inappropriately managed. Intensive review and development in the last six months has brought about significant changes in the facilities available for staff and students. Electronic mail is widely used by staff as a communication tool. Enrolment was carried out on-line for the first time in September 1999. There is, as yet, little evidence of information and learning technology development and little use of computerised systems, for example, to aid timetabling. There is a team of committed IT technicians which provides effective operational support to users.

76 Learning resource centres on the three main sites have been refurbished. They are well constructed, combining IT and library facilities. Opening hours are satisfactory. Audiovisual materials are out of date and not well used. There is a broad and appropriate range of periodicals. The bookstock on all three sites is outdated. At the Maidenhead centre, some books are over 30 years old and have not been used for many years. Computer resources in the centres are good, if sparsely used at present. A little-used language centre at the Langley site was decommissioned prior to the beginning of the academic year and a new language facility is planned.

77 Student refectories on the Windsor and Maidenhead sites have been successfully refurbished to accommodate student preferences. They are bright and airy, food is moderately priced and they are well used. However, the service is often limited to vending machines in the afternoons and evenings. There are fitness centres at the Foyer and the Langley site. Students commented critically on the absence of common room facilities. Students with restricted mobility are able to access all sites and this is much improved since the last inspection. There is parking for people with disabilities and lifts on all main sites except Heathrow where there are some ramps. There is tactile flooring to aid hearing impaired students at Windsor, but there is still much to do to facilitate access across the whole college.

78 Staff are located in workrooms which are clean and tidy with adequate workspace. Most are equipped with a computer and printer. Parking space is adequate on all sites. The college is taking steps to improve its security arrangements. As yet, it is too early to judge their effectiveness.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

79 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered some strengths to be overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough internal inspection of curriculum areas
- detailed lesson observation scheme

Weaknesses

- failure of the quality framework to cover all aspects of the college's activities
- slow response to weaknesses identified at last inspection
- declining quality of teaching and learning
- insufficiently rigorous course reviews
- poor use of performance indicators and statistical evidence
- no coherent overview of compliance with quality assurance arrangements
- lack of impact of quality assurance on student retention and achievement

80 The college has made slow progress in addressing weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Course reviews were identified as lacking in rigour and this is still the case. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report. Most reviews do not monitor retention or achievement against national averages or refer to previous performance. Value-added analysis is not used. Course reviews are seen as separate from the self-assessment process.

81 Issues surrounding the reliability of data were identified during the last inspection. Only very recently has some progress been made. The college carried out a detailed analysis of retention and achievement against national

averages for 1998-99. Despite flaws in the base data, areas where performance is below average have been identified and action plans produced. It is still too early to assess whether this will lead to improvements. There is little evidence of quality assurance procedures improving student retention and achievement. Retention has declined to below national averages over the past three years since 1995-96, but college data show that there has been an improvement in 1998-99. Achievement is showing a gradual decline. For long courses at level 3 for 16 to 18 year olds this has now fallen below the national average.

82 Some aspects of quality assurance have improved since the last inspection. Self-assessment has been developed, lesson observations increased, internal inspections carried out, committees restructured, a quality handbook published, service level agreements introduced and links with strategic planning defined. External verifier reports are received centrally and actions are carefully monitored by the academic registrar.

83 A quality assurance co-ordinator effectively manages the self-assessment process and has introduced improvements in quality assurance procedures. Responsibility for target-setting and lesson observations has been delegated to line managers. Managers are accountable for quality in their areas, but the recently reviewed quality policy does not indicate who has the authority to ensure compliance with quality assurance procedures across the college. The quality assurance policy does not include support activities and has not been revised to reflect the new committee structure. Service level agreements are being implemented throughout the college. Many areas have still to draw up service standards. As yet, there is little evidence of monitoring against standards.

84 Inspectors agreed that the college's committees have been effectively restructured. Faculty boards inform the college council about

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curriculum matters. The college council, which has subsumed the academic board, is responsible for quality. Issues debated include the need for a college-wide internal verification system. This has been introduced, albeit inconsistently. It is still too early to assess the council's effectiveness. Minutes from the college council inform the management board, which in turn informs the standards committee of the corporation. Whilst governors have received reports on student retention and achievement, they have only recently begun to receive detailed evaluative analyses.

85 The college produced its second self-assessment report for inspection. A review of the first report resulted in some improvements, but it still lacks quantitative rigour and the use of evaluative language. All staff were involved and extensive guidance provided. An update of the action plan was produced for the inspection. A thorough internal inspection of five curriculum areas was carried out last year based on the FEFC inspection framework.

86 Inspectors agreed that the lesson observation scheme is detailed. Nearly all full-time staff have been observed, although recent staff changes have meant that new appointees have yet to be observed. The analysis of teaching and learning has informed judgements in the self-assessment report but has not been used to provide a statistical analysis. Although observers receive detailed training and guidance, lesson observation grades are generous compared with those awarded during the inspection. Inspectors judged 55% of lessons as good or outstanding compared with the college's own profile of 80%. The inspection profile is below the national average and below the figure in the last inspection of 63%.

87 Lesson observations have been used to inform personal development plans. This year, plans include demanding targets for all staff which indicate how each individual will

contribute to the raising of standards. Plans are monitored to assess training needs. At present there is no corporate staff training plan.

88 Surveys of students' views are completed twice yearly. There is inadequate use of these data to improve the quality of the students' experience. All students receive a copy of the student charter, which now requires updating. Performance against the charter is not monitored. The complaints procedure is clear and works well.

Governance

Grade 4

89 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses recorded in the college's self-assessment report. However, a number of the recorded strengths were overstated and inspectors identified some significant additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- constructive input of governors into the current strategic plan

Weaknesses

- lack of regular, systematic monitoring by governors of the strategic plan
- insufficient monitoring of student retention and achievement
- non-compliance with the instrument and articles of government
- non-compliance with some aspects of the Council's *Audit Code of Practice*
- lack of clarity in formally recording corporation business

Cross-college Provision

90 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The governing body does not conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

91 The corporation secretary administers the operation of corporation business. Agenda and supporting papers are prepared on a timely basis for corporation and committee meetings. Options papers have been provided to the corporation for the consideration of the impact made by the modified instrument and articles of government. The corporation has determined that the membership should be increased to 19. However, it is not clearly evident that the corporation has agreed the categories, and numbers in each category of membership, nor the procedures by which nominations should be sought. There have been other instances over the last 12 months where the operation of the corporation did not comply with the instrument and articles of government or the financial memorandum between the college and the FEFC.

92 The increase in determined membership, together with existing vacancies, resulted in seven vacancies on the corporation. Four had been filled by the time of the inspection and it is intended that the remaining vacancies will be filled shortly, thus ensuring a prompt transition to the new membership arrangements. There is an appropriate balance of skills within the governing body, although this has been achieved by appointment from particular constituencies. Governors determined the competencies required by the governing body. These competencies have been used in identifying new members. The skills which governors contribute have not been audited since 1996, since when there have been numerous changes. The search and review committee is trying to ensure that corporation membership reflects the

ethnic diversity and gender balance of the student body and local community. This committee includes two members, who are not governors, to represent the interests of the wider community.

93 The operation of the audit committee and internal audit arrangements do not comply with the Council's *Audit Code of Practice*. The audit committee is currently non-operational because of a shortage of members. The internal audit service did not undertake the bulk of its 1998-99 work within the year and has indicated that significant weaknesses existed within the college's internal control systems. These weaknesses were not noted in the self-assessment report.

94 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that governors have become significantly more involved in the planning of the new strategic direction of the college. A series of workshops, facilitated by an external consultant, helped governors identify and respond to strategic options for the college. Although individual governors have attended various training events, there is no overall plan of training needs. An induction programme has been introduced with each new governor allocated a mentor from both the governing body and senior management. The scheme was commented on positively by new members.

95 Governors' monitoring of the implementation of the strategic plan is insufficiently rigorous. They have not reviewed the extent to which targets have been achieved nor set revised actions and timescales where appropriate. This approach does not enable governors to ensure that the strategic direction of the college is maintained, particularly when there have been major changes in the college's management structure. As noted in the self-assessment report, governors have given only limited consideration to curriculum issues. They receive information on examination results but have only just begun to receive analyses of

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achievement trends. The use of indicators to measure the academic performance of the college is in its infancy, and has been hampered by a lack of accurate data. A standards committee has been recently created, and, in response to governors' requests for information, a timetable has been devised for providing reports to governors. Managers have recently begun to give presentations to governors on aspects of the curriculum.

96 There is a system of linking a governor to each area of the college, although following recent changes in structure and personnel this has partially lapsed. The scheme works well in engineering where the link governor discusses operational issues and students' achievements with managers who value his positive contribution. The self-assessment report indicates that staff have a limited understanding of the role of governors. All governors contributed to the governance section of the self-assessment report. Targets are not established to improve the performance of the governing body as a whole. The chair of the corporation undertakes an annual performance review of the principal against set targets.

97 There has been no monitoring by the corporation of equal opportunities or health and safety issues, or the implementation of college policies in these areas.

Management

Grade 3

98 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses but agreed with the college's overall assessment.

Key strengths

- clear new strategic aims and objectives
- productive external links
- comprehensive management accounts

Weaknesses

- inadequate management information data
- no equal opportunities monitoring procedures
- ineffectiveness of some aspects of the new management structure

99 The college has recently been through a period of considerable change and uncertainty following the failure of an attempted merger with another college in 1998. The college invested considerable time and energy preparing the merger proposals and, as a result, failed to make progress in other areas. In its self-assessment report the college recognises this weakness as a period of 'destabilisation of the staff given the investment of 12 months in the process'. Following the departure of several key managers, the management structure was reorganised and new managers appointed. Many of the college's structures and systems are new and it is too early to form a judgement about their effectiveness.

100 The senior management group, the management board, has seven members. The board, which meets every two weeks, has appropriate terms of reference, is informed by well-prepared papers and produces good minutes.

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101 The curriculum is organised into two faculties, academic and vocational education. The community and commercial directorate supports both faculties, provides commercial training and acts as the main link with local authorities and community groups with the intention of widening participation. Although the new organisational structure is seen as a strength by middle managers and staff, there are issues to be resolved. The links between the directorate and faculties are just developing, and there has been little analysis of participation rates to inform developments. Curriculum pathways to support progression from community-based to college-based provision are not yet well defined. Some courses are well managed but in others management is hampered by unfilled vacancies, part-time teachers with full-time teaching loads, a lack of regular team meetings and poor timetabling, weaknesses not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

102 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. During 1998-99, there were instances of non-compliance with the college's own financial regulations as well as poor monitoring of FEFC unit generation and related income. A recently appointed director of finance has started to address these and other significant weaknesses in the college's financial management systems. Comprehensive monthly management accounts now accord with current good practice, including the monitoring of targets set in the 1999 to 2002 financial forecast. The forecast also identifies risk factors that could adversely affect the college's financial position together with contingency plans to counter such risks should they arise. The financial regulations have been updated and reviewed by the policy and resources committee prior to approval by the corporation.

103 Attempts have been made to improve the quality of communication in the college. Following each management board meeting, information to be communicated to staff is agreed. Team briefings should then take place, but this process works better in some areas than others. Other methods of communication include whole-faculty briefings, newsletters and occasional publications. Managers recognise the need to improve communication and to be better informed about staff views, although this was not recorded in their self-assessment.

104 The college has good and extensive external links. A schools liaison team works effectively. The college contracts with the British Airports Authority, along with two other colleges, to train construction personnel for the three London airports. Community links are good. The college also has close links with Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College from which it franchises higher national certificate courses.

105 The college has recently adopted a new strategic plan for the period 1999 to 2002. The plan is informed by market research. It contains corporate aims with specific targets for growth. It also includes a target for student retention and achievement to be in the upper quartile of data published by the FEFC. Faculty business plans are derived from the strategic plan and contain specific targets. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that each member of the full-time staff has an effective individual work plan containing targets relating their job to the strategic plan.

106 The college has operated for some time without reliable management information, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. This has had a serious effect on the college's ability to effectively manage its provision in the past. In an attempt to improve the quality of data input and management reports, the college has entered into a contract with a leading computerised management

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information systems company to install new software and provide on-site support and training. Although a number of teething problems have been experienced, mechanisms are being established to provide enhanced information for managers and governors, and produce accurate data returns for the FEFC.

107 The college has an equal opportunities policy, written in 1997, and an equal opportunities in employment policy which is about to be updated. The college does not have an equal opportunities co-ordinator or monitoring committee. Information is not collated and reports are not produced for the principal or governors. The college has a health and safety policy. Health and safety committees at the college's four main sites meet termly and an annual audit is conducted. However, reports are not produced for college managers or the governing body as required by law. The college did not identify these weaknesses in its self-assessment.

109 However, inspectors were able to agree with many of the grades in the self-assessment report. They found additional strengths and weaknesses and identified that some weaknesses had been understated. Inspectors did not award the same grades as the college in one curriculum area and three cross-college areas, in each case awarding grades worse than those given in the self-assessment report.

110 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.

Conclusions

108 The college produced its second self-assessment report for this inspection. The self-assessment process was not sufficiently rigorous or comprehensive. The self-assessment report was not very helpful in planning or conducting the inspection. There was little indication of the size or scope of curriculum areas. There was no coherent approach to self-assessment; this was underlined by the different formats used throughout the report. The report did not draw effectively upon statistical evidence to support conclusions. Inspectors also considered that the report was not adequately supported by documentary evidence. There was scant attention given to the quality of teaching and learning and the language used was insufficiently evaluative.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	15
25+ years	66
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	23
Level 2 (intermediate)	20
Level 3 (advanced)	19
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	36
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	549	2,110	19
Agriculture	45	100	1
Construction	310	486	5
Engineering	206	688	6
Business	324	1,441	12
Hotel and catering	123	273	3
Health and community care	231	644	6
Art and design	397	836	9
Humanities	442	1,989	17
Basic education	1,493	1,607	22
Total	4,120	10,174	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 13% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	171	161	0	332
Supporting direct learning contact	33	10	0	43
Other support	130	0	0	130
Total	334	171	0	505

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£17,388,000	£17,413,000	£18,215,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.79*	£16.30*	£16.20*
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	69%	72%
Achievement of funding target	100%	99%	112%
Diversity of income	21%	21%	20%
Operating surplus	-£870,000	£211,000	-£1,380,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	201	528	377	1,574	3,361	1,511
	Retention (%)	85	75	76	81	76	71
	Achievement (%)	77	87	83	73	86	69
2	Number of starters	1,633	1,929	1,422	1,445	1,345	1,386
	Retention (%)	84	81	78	89	82	79
	Achievement (%)	81	84	78	85	78	77
3	Number of starters	1,928	2,111	2,337	1,349	1,254	1,247
	Retention (%)	89	82	79	82	82	77
	Achievement (%)	76	74	66	78	79	75
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	2	11	63	73	111
	Retention (%)	n/a	100	73	90	89	86
	Achievement (%)	n/a	100	83	53	56	70
Short courses	Number of starters	767	1,012	1,496	9,862	9,223	11,245
	Retention (%)	89	87	93	94	89	93
	Achievement (%)	66	79	73	73	56	44
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,550	1,746	1,489	1,634	2,623	2,316
	Retention (%)	89	75	86	84	72	89
	Achievement (%)	80	72	69	77	53	8

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

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