

Esher College

**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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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Esher College

South East Region

Inspected September 2000

Esher College is a sixth form college located in Thames Ditton, in the Borough of Elmbridge, Surrey. Inspectors planned the inspection using the college's self-assessment report for 1999-2000. The self-assessment process involved all teaching and non-teaching staff. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although they considered that some strengths had been overstated and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment had been addressed before the inspection.

The college has an open and consultative management style. Staff at all levels work hard to ensure continuous improvement. The quality of teaching is good. Almost a third of the lessons observed were outstanding.

Achievement rates are above the average for sixth form colleges and have improved steadily over the last three years. Retention rates are also above average. The standards of work in art and design, and English are outstanding. The college provides good pastoral and other support for students including excellent guidance on progression to higher education. The college has made considerable progress in the development of its IT facilities since the last inspection. It has a good library. A major redevelopment of the campus is at an advanced

planning stage. Governors have a good range of professional and business expertise, which they use to the benefit of the college. If the college is to improve further it should: reconsider its relationship with designated partner schools; improve the monitoring and reporting of equal opportunities issues; produce a college staff development plan that supports the college's strategic aims; improve the consistency and clarity of individual self-assessment reports; further develop quality standards for support services; improve the self-assessment procedures of the corporation; and improve the accessibility of its premises to people with restricted mobility.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	3	Support for students	1
Business studies	2	General resources	3
Art and design	1	Quality assurance	2
English	1	Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Esher College in Thames Ditton, Surrey, is a sixth form college which was established in 1974. It developed from the former Surbiton County Grammar School. The college is located on a single site about a mile from Esher town centre and a similar distance from the boundaries of the Royal Borough of Kingston and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

2 The Borough of Elmbridge, in which the college is located, is bounded by the river Thames to the north and the M25 to the south. It has a population of about 124,000. A number of international business and manufacturing companies have production, research or administration centres in the borough. Many of the local inhabitants travel to Central London or the neighbouring boroughs to work. Unemployment is low.

3 There is considerable choice of post-compulsory education in the area. There are four tertiary or further education colleges and 37 schools with sixth forms within 5 miles of the college. Good road and rail links help to attract students from Surrey and the south west London boroughs. Over half of the college's students travel from three London boroughs. Most are aged between 16 and 19 years and 96% are studying for advanced level qualifications. The college recruits its students from some 120 schools, some as far away as Central London. The proportion of students from independent schools has fallen over the last four years and was 16% in 1999. Enrolments have increased by more than one-third since 1993 and in 1999-2000 were 50 over target.

4 Three-quarters of the college's students are on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) programmes, 20% on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) programmes, and the remainder on GNVQ intermediate programmes. For many years all

full-time students have been entitled to an enrichment programme comprising general studies, information technology (IT), a tutorial programme and a wide range of complementary and recreational activity options. Recently, the college introduced a small number of part-time short courses, mainly in IT, for local employers and residents. More than 500 people were enrolled on these courses during 1999-2000.

5 The college's mission is 'to be the specialist provider of non-selective, open-access sixth form college education for South West London and North Surrey'.

The Inspection

6 Esher College was inspected during the week beginning 25 September 2000. Before the inspection, inspectors examined the college's self-assessment report and information from other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college provided data on students' achievements for 2000. Inspectors checked these data against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and found the data to be accurate. The college's data for 2000 and the individualised student record (ISR) data for 1998 and 1999 were used to compile the tables in the curriculum area sections of this report. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 37 days. They observed 50 lessons, examined students' work and scrutinised college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, staff and students.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 50 lessons inspected, 86% were judged to be good or outstanding and none was less than satisfactory. The proportion of outstanding lessons was 12% higher than the average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE A/AS level	13	18	1	0	0	32
GCSE	0	2	4	0	0	6
GNVQ/NVQ	1	9	2	0	0	12
Total (No)	14	29	7	0	0	50
Total (%)	28	58	14	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	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

average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Esher College	16.3	90
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	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

Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 12 mathematics lessons. They agreed with most strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but considered that weaknesses in

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- effective course organisation
- effective mathematics workshops and additional support lessons
- good retention and achievement rates on foundation level and GCE AS courses

Weaknesses

- underachievement on GCE A level mathematics courses
- underuse of IT as a teaching aid

retention and achievement rates were understated.

10 The college offers a range of mathematics courses from foundation to advanced level although most students study at GCE A or AS level. The mathematics teachers are well qualified and experienced. Team spirit is good and there is a shared commitment to collaborative working. The frequency of course team meetings has increased during the last year. The minutes of these meetings indicate an increasing attention to teaching, learning and students' progress. Recently, teachers have started to observe one another teaching. This has encouraged debate about the most effective teaching methods. This development was not identified in the college's assessment. Most teachers use their own course materials to supplement the information available in textbooks. Many are unaware of the materials held centrally. New teaching materials based on

good practice identified through lesson observations are now being developed.

11 Inspectors judged all the lessons they observed to be satisfactory or good. They agreed with the college's assessment that most lessons are well planned and that schemes of work are clearly written to reflect the demands of examining boards. In an effective GCE A level lesson, a teacher introduced the concept of radians by getting students to undertake an exercise using a length of string. Students, working in pairs, were able to deduce the relationship between the radian, and a radius and an arc of equal length. Students enjoyed the task and the exercise led to effective learning. Lessons were less effective when teachers used unnecessarily complex language. In one such general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) lesson, many students became bored and stopped listening. Teachers have been slow to make use of IT as a teaching tool. Two good software packages are available but are rarely used. All GCE A level students are tested at the start of the course and the weaker students are required to attend an additional mathematics lesson each week. Students value the mathematics clinics that are held during the lunch period.

12 City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numeracy and GCE AS results are good. Both GCE A level and GCSE pass rates have improved and are now similar to the national averages for sixth form colleges. However, the GCE A level pass rate has been improved by transferring some students from the GCE A level to the GCE AS programme midway through their second year. Over the last three years, GCE A level mathematics students have not, on average, achieved their target grades, and the number of students achieving high grade passes is below the average for sixth form colleges. Over the last three years, retention of students on the GCE A level further mathematics course, has declined to significantly below the national average. Inspectors agreed with the college's

Curriculum Areas

assessment that overall GCE A level achievements are a weakness.

13 Most mathematics classrooms and the mathematics base room are located close together. This facilitates good communication between staff and students. All classrooms have good displays of students' work and most provide a good learning environment. However, some rooms are too small for the groups using

them. Too few computers run mathematics software. The college's mathematics intranet site needs further work.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G numeracy	2	Number of starters	34	34	25
		Retention (%)	79	76	96
		Achievement (%)	93	96	88
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	168	135	131
		Retention (%)	54	68	81
		Achievement (%)	34	34	39
GCE AS mathematics	3	Number of starters	19	23	17
		Retention (%)	84	96	71
		Achievement (%)	77	41	83
GCE AS statistics	3	Number of starters	24	20	18
		Retention (%)	79	80	100
		Achievement (%)	42	60	39
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	141	137	111
		Retention (%)	79	72	75
		Achievement (%)	79	87	89
GCE A level further mathematics	3	Number of starters	7	17	10
		Retention (%)	100	70	60
		Achievement (%)	100	92	83

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

14 Inspectors observed 11 lessons, covering all business studies courses. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- readily available IT resources
- well-managed curriculum
- consistently good GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate achievement rates
- above average retention rates on GNVQ advanced and GCE AS courses
- good progression to higher education for GNVQ advanced students

Weaknesses

- declining retention rate on GCE A level
- poor achievement rates on GCE AS and national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses

15 The college offers business studies courses at GCE A/AS level, GNVQ advanced and intermediate levels and the NVQ level 2 in business administration. The GNVQ intermediate course did not recruit sufficient students to run this year. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the business studies department is well managed. The teachers work well together. In regular meetings, the decisions made, the actions agreed and those responsible for carrying them out are clearly recorded. Achievement and retention rates are monitored. Course structures are kept under review and changes are introduced when needed. Internal verification is rigorous.

16 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the teaching is good. All the

lessons observed by inspectors were good or outstanding. Most teaching is well planned, although in a minority of lessons teachers left too little time to summarise and provide a proper homework brief. Teachers explain the objectives of their lessons to students and follow their teaching plans. Teachers maintain students' interest and check their understanding regularly by asking appropriate questions. Most students are keen to take part in discussions and clearly enjoy their lessons. In an effective and enjoyable GNVQ advanced lesson, students were introduced to a case study on how a motor car manufacturer managed changes to production techniques. The teacher reviewed an earlier lesson, provided additional information, and then asked students to work in pairs to consider the impact of the changes. A short video provided further illustration. Students also consulted the manufacturer's Internet site. Students benefit from a wide range of supporting activities such as work experience, visits, conferences and participation in a successful Young Enterprise scheme.

17 Achievement rates on GCE A level business studies are consistently above the national average for sixth form colleges. However, the retention rate has declined from well above average in 1998, to a poor level in 2000. The college recognised this weakness. Business studies staff decided that contributory factors were the modular syllabus and the growing number of students choosing business studies as their third GCE A level who had little commitment to the subject. They changed to another examination board and paid more attention to student selection. Retention is now improving. In the current second-year group it is around 72%. Achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate have been consistently above the national average. Those for the GNVQ advanced were good in 1998 and excellent in 2000, but poor in 1999. The college identified some inappropriate progression of GNVQ intermediate students onto the advanced course as the main reason for this. Over 50% of GNVQ advanced

Curriculum Areas

students progress to higher education, which is higher than the national average. Retention rates on the GCE AS business and the NVQ administration courses are generally high, but achievement rates are below the national average. The NVQ course is taken mainly by students who have dropped one of their GCE A level subjects. Students' written work is of a good standard. Teachers provide useful, detailed comments including advice on how students might improve their work.

18 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced and they participate in a particularly wide range of development activities. Recognising that, in some cases, their

industrial and commercial experience is out of date, teachers have undertaken periods of industrial updating with local companies. There are plans for this to continue. Classrooms have good displays of relevant business materials and course information. Most are well equipped with modern networked computers and appropriate software. A few rooms are too small for the groups using them. The college provides students with textbooks. There are appropriate specialist texts and other resources in the library. The department puts assignments and study materials on the college intranet.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	25	11	19
		Retention (%)	92	91	79
		Achievement (%)	39	60	40
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	17	19	13
		Retention (%)	82	89	69
		Achievement (%)	86	82	78
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	30	22	23
		Retention (%)	80	82	74
		Achievement (%)	83	69	100
GCE AS business studies	3	Number of starters	18	12	12
		Retention (%)	89	92	100
		Achievement (%)	50	9	58
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	96	104	117
		Retention (%)	91	76	62
		Achievement (%)	93	99	95

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

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 1

19 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in art and design. They found the self-assessment report helpful and appropriately detailed. They agreed with its findings but judged that strengths in teaching and learning had been understated.

Key strengths

- outstanding teaching
- good course organisation and management
- well-designed and imaginative projects
- high standards of practical work in GCE A level art and fashion courses
- high pass rates and good added value
- high progression rate to further or higher education in art and design

Weaknesses

- cramped studios and workshops

20 The college offers GCE A levels in fine art and fashion, and GNVQ art and design at intermediate and advanced levels. It has built a strong reputation as a provider of art and design education for 16 to 18 year olds. Courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly to plan teaching programmes, develop schemes of work, and devise student project briefs and assessment materials. Teachers collaborate well and share their expertise to the benefit of students. Student study guides contain essential information on such matters as examination deadlines, grade descriptors, gallery guides and portfolio preparation.

21 The self-assessment report does not identify the strengths in teaching and learning. Most of the teaching observed was good or outstanding. Lessons were well structured and had clear aims and objectives. Students enjoyed their studies and showed good understanding of

what was expected of them. In one GCE A level class a lecturer enthralled his group by demonstrating how easily paint could be made by mixing soot, chalk and earth with egg yolk, rabbit skin glue and oil. He made interesting references to the historical use of pigments. The next day students brought in their own paint-making materials, which they used to great effect. In a first-year fashion lesson, a tutor gave an inspiring and confidence-building introduction to the design process. The creative ideas of each student were drawn out and valued. In a few lessons, opportunities to test and reinforce students' learning were lost through insufficient questioning and critical discussion.

22 A valuable feature of the GCE A level provision is the emphasis placed on working directly from still life. Projects are designed to encourage an adventurous and expressive use of media and to develop students' visual vocabulary. On the vocational courses, less use is made of teaching methods which encourage students to explore and develop their ideas.

23 Achievement rates on all courses are well above the national averages for sixth form colleges. GCE A level students achieve significantly higher grades than their GCSE results would predict. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that achievement rates are a strength. The retention rate on the GNVQ advanced course has increased to 22% above the national average. The standard of students' work is high, and demonstrates that they acquire all the essential skills. At GCE A level, the best work is both technically ambitious and thought provoking. Some of the most distinctive pieces of work were done as part of critical studies. These were well researched and were presented in imaginative and sensitive ways. GNVQ advanced students benefit from work experience and from participation in community projects. In one project, students collaborated with medical staff to design play furniture at a local clinic for children with severe disabilities.

Curriculum Areas

A high proportion of GCE A level and GNVQ students progress to further and higher education in art and design.

24 Teachers are well qualified and highly motivated. There is an effective induction programme for new staff and frequent opportunities for continuous professional development. The art studios are well lit but small. This creates cramped working conditions that limit the range of creative activity, a weakness identified by the college in its self-assessment. The workshop for three-

dimensional design is well equipped. Some of the design studios are poorly organised and lack adequate storage. Students have good access to IT for image manipulation, wordprocessing and use of the Internet. The range of art books and periodicals is adequate and art students make frequent use of the library. There are stimulating displays of artwork throughout the public spaces in the college. These serve to raise the profile of the visual arts as a valued part of college life.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	13	13	19
		Retention (%)	77	85	74
		Achievement (%)	100	91	100
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	43	36	33
		Retention (%)	88	92	97
		Achievement (%)	100	93	100
GCE A level fine art and fashion	3	Number of starters	117	130	114
		Retention (%)	87	87	78
		Achievement (%)	100	99	99

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

Curriculum Areas

English

Grade 1

25 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering GCE A level English literature, English language, GCE AS English and GCSE English. They agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- outstanding teaching
- excellent pass rates on GCE A level and GCE AS courses
- high standards of oral and written work
- wide range of opportunities for students to enrich their studies
- strong course management
- good accommodation and resources

Weaknesses

- a sharp decline in the GCSE English achievement rate in 2000

26 More than 550 students take GCE A/AS level courses in English and 45 are retaking GCSE English. It is college policy that students without a pass in English at grade C or above should retake the subject. English courses are well managed. Communication between staff is good and teachers work well in teams. They have compiled stimulating work packs on set texts and topics that are appreciated by students. Schemes of work are good. Teachers meet regularly to update their course planning documents, re-examine teaching methods, and share their expertise and good practice. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that policies on lesson planning, preparation and marking are well established.

27 Much of the teaching is outstanding. The teachers' enthusiasm for literature and language enlivens their teaching. They organise successful group and pair work, student presentations, debates and whole-class

discussions. Students' interest in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams was stimulated by reference to one of his short stories.

Enthusiastic students, working in groups, traced themes from the story as they developed in the play. In an outstanding lesson on Blake's *The Tiger*, the teacher used transparencies of Blake's own illuminated illustrations to focus students' attention on the poem's meaning. The teacher's own fascination with the poem was evident, and students were able to debate sensibly and critically the poem's qualities and meaning.

A whole-class discussion on correctness in the use of English language examined the term 'lady doctor' with insight and humour. The teacher handled a discussion and presentation on the use of taboo language with good humour. In most lessons, teachers challenged students preconceptions and made them think. Teachers readily help individual students, and monitor their progress carefully. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students are offered a wide range of opportunities to enrich their studies. Visits to theatres and study conferences are frequent. Each year the college has a visiting poet. Students can submit their own poetry or fiction for inclusion in the college magazine.

28 Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that GCE A/AS level pass rates are outstanding, having exceeded national averages for sixth form colleges in each of the last three years. The proportion of students who achieve high grades is also well above the national average. GCSE results in 1998 and 1999 were well above the national average but fell sharply in 2000. Some of these papers are being re-marked. Retention rates are at or above the national average in all subjects and well above in English literature. Students' oral work is of a very high standard. Students enjoy debate and argument and participate readily in class discussions. Research undertaken by language students into teachers' questioning of male and female students in history lessons led to a student presentation of a very high standard.

Curriculum Areas

Students' writing is often excellent. An investigation into the language of telephone calls was original and fascinating; an outstanding essay on the themes of power and resistance in *Schindler's Ark* and *The Handmaid's Tale* indicated a mature ability to express critical ideas. These pieces were typical of the work sampled by inspectors.

29 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Inspectors agreed with the

college's assessment that accommodation and resources for English are good. Lessons take place in six adjacent classrooms. There is some overcrowding when large groups are being taught. There is a well-equipped staff workroom. All rooms are pleasantly decorated with students' work and appropriate study aids and posters. IT is available in all of the classrooms and the base room.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	61	48	45
		Retention (%)	85	79	79
		Achievement (%)	69	84	46
GCE AS English	3	Number of starters	35	33	19
		Retention (%)	83	82	79
		Achievement (%)	96	94	100
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	168	157	172
		Retention (%)	91	89	88
		Achievement (%)	100	98	97
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	73	82	79
		Retention (%)	89	80	78
		Achievement (%)	98	94	95

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

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

30 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and judged that action had been taken to address some weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- impartial pre-entry guidance
- careful monitoring of students' progress
- excellent guidance on progression to higher education
- well-developed pastoral support
- wide range of other support services

Weaknesses

- the need to reconsider school partnership arrangements

31 The college provides a welcoming although crowded environment and students speak highly of the support they receive. Procedures for students' support are clearly documented and there are comprehensive guidance notes to help staff deliver the support services. Tutors take responsibility for the review of students' overall progress as well as the pastoral support of a group of students. Tutor team leaders have recently been appointed to strengthen the organisation of tutorial work.

32 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students benefit from well-developed procedures to provide impartial pre-entry guidance. Attractive publicity documents provide appropriate information about the college and its courses. When invited, the college marketing officer attends school careers evenings and makes presentations to pupils about the courses offered at the college. In September 2000, students were enrolled from 121 schools, of which only 15 provided more than 10 enrolments.

33 The college receives many more applications than it has places. It closes its application list in October of the year before enrolment. There is a waiting list which is also closed early. Only 60% of applicants are eventually enrolled. This situation reflects the wide choice of post-16 opportunities in the area, as well as the pressure for places at the college. Seven schools have a historic relationship with the college, which affords their pupils a marginal advantage by offering a quota of places, and extending slightly the period during which applications may be made. No more than 20% of the year 11 cohort from these schools join the college. Other schools account for larger numbers of students. The college's relationship with these traditional partners needs to be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances.

34 Open days and evenings are held from October onwards, when applications have already been made. All applicants are given an initial interview. Some attend introduction days in the summer with their parents. At a second interview, after the GCSE results are known, they confirm their subject choices. A significant number of late applicants are not able to enrol on all their first choice subjects, and changes in the early weeks of study are limited by class sizes. One-fifth of students surveyed by the college in the summer of 2000 expressed dissatisfaction with the course choice procedures. The extension of choices under the curriculum reforms implemented in the current term should partly address this problem.

35 The induction programme is good. It includes a rapid assessment of students' learning support needs. Those identified as needing support are interviewed, and some are tested further to obtain a more detailed picture of their abilities. Individual support is provided in lessons, by subject teachers, or in a small learning centre. The college records indicate that 500 students receive some support in this centre each year, including some highly able students. A team of four teachers in the centre

Cross-college Provision

works closely with subject teachers to design programmes of help. Students speak highly of the support they receive. Centre staff use test scores and grade predictions to identify students who are 'at risk'. The progress made by individual students is carefully monitored. There is no evaluation of the effect of the learning support arrangements on overall student achievement.

36 Students' attendance and progress are closely monitored. The college has rigorous procedures to report on students who give cause for concern. Subject teachers meet each student regularly to discuss progress. Students' performance in coursework is compared with the levels of achievement predicted by their GCSE scores. Tutors use subject reports and action plans to review students' overall performance. These reports are also referred to during discussions with parents at open evenings. Progress reports for one year are used as the basis for subsequent course decisions. These strengths in monitoring students' progress were not identified in the college's self-assessment. The recording of action plans and progress towards objectives are less effective than other aspects of the monitoring arrangements.

37 Pastoral support is provided through weekly group tutorials. The wide-ranging programme includes study skills, teamworking, and some health education. The tutors who deliver the programme are provided with a wide range of good-quality learning materials. Inspectors observed six tutorials, some of which were conducted very well. All were well attended.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that guidance on progression to higher education is effective. The work of the college's careers department has gained a careers excellence award from the Surrey Careers Service. Staff from this careers service supplement the work done by teachers. Students follow a comprehensive programme

that includes visiting speakers, work placement, preparation for interviews and guidance on university applications. The careers information room is well stocked and well equipped. The college organises a well-attended higher education convention at which universities are well represented. Of the college's students, 85% go on to higher education. According to a college survey, most students were satisfied with the careers education and guidance they received.

39 Inspectors agreed that the wide range of other support services for students are a strength. A confidential counselling service is provided by appropriately qualified staff who receive external supervision, and also train their colleagues. Financial assistance is provided to students where hardship has been identified. Appropriate support is provided for students who have a hearing or visual impairment, need language support or have mental health problems. The college's service to students who have dyslexia is highly regarded by these students. The student council is active in fund-raising for charity and organises social and leisure activities for students.

General Resources

Grade 3

40 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some strengths were underestimated and others overstated.

Key strengths

- well-planned accommodation strategy
- good outdoor sports facilities
- significant progress in the development and use of the IT network
- well-managed library and independent learning centre

Curriculum Areas

Weaknesses

- poor facilities for performing and visual arts and indoor sports
- some unsatisfactory classrooms
- overcrowded eating and social areas for students
- inaccessibility of some accommodation to students with mobility difficulties

41 The college occupies a pleasant site with well-maintained grounds planted with trees and shrubs. The original buildings, opened in 1965, accommodated a grammar school for boys. Various structural adaptations were made in 1975 when the school became a co-educational sixth form college. As student numbers increased, mobile classrooms were added. The college has little spare capacity during the day. Some adult education provision takes place during the evenings.

42 The college is aware of the limitations of its accommodation, and has a clear idea of how it intends to overcome them. After protracted efforts to secure planning permission, it is now pursuing an ambitious accommodation strategy. A major building programme has begun. Included in the development are a new sports and arts complex, the conversion and development of sports and drama facilities, and the creation of a new learning resource centre, refectory and social area. Work has begun and a third of the college's temporary classrooms have been removed. The college operates a 10-year planned maintenance programme that reflects the forthcoming changes.

43 Inspectors agreed the with college's assessment that it has poor specialist facilities for performing and visual arts and indoor sports. In addition to the remaining mobile classrooms, a number of other classrooms are not satisfactory, being either too small, of an awkward shape or accessible only through other rooms. Rooms and laboratories are suitably furnished and equipped. The careers room is

small, but well organised and well stocked. It has an area for confidential interviews. Learning support takes place in a carefully organised area within the independent learning centre. Workspaces for most teachers are adequate, but for some teachers and administrative staff they are cramped. To alleviate the situation, a study area equipped with nine computers has been created adjacent to the staff room.

44 Both internal and external signposting of college buildings is poor. It is not easy for people with mobility difficulties to move around the college. There are many heavy doors and only one lift. The cafeteria and social area for students are overcrowded during peak periods. The situation is worse during bad weather and when there are other demands on the space. These problems will be addressed through the building programme.

45 The college has good outdoor sporting facilities. There are good soccer, tennis and netball playing areas and there are plans to add basketball facilities. The college also has arrangements to use nearby sports pitches during current building work.

46 The college has made considerable progress with the development of its IT facilities since the last inspection. Its comprehensive information and learning technology strategy is being implemented enthusiastically. Investment in computers has increased since 1998 and there are now 218 computers of a high specification for the use of students, and 46 for staff use. All machines are networked and provide access to the Internet through the college intranet. The college has its own website. The content of the college's intranet site is underdeveloped. The college has concentrated on installing new equipment where it will have widest application and effect. It has, for example, installed a new modern language laboratory and an impressive 'smart board' suite for IT lessons in which an interactive whiteboard is linked to the

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computers. Students can use computers in classrooms for personal study when they are not needed for lessons.

47 The library and independent learning centre provide an effective service that is popular with students. Spending on these resources in 1999-2000 is high at £48 for each full-time student. There are 96 study spaces in the library, which serve as a quiet area, and 21 computers in the independent learning centre. The library holds over 16,000 books, an extensive range of commercial and taped videos, 88 CD-ROMs and a small range of journals. Use of the facilities is regularly monitored. Unused stock is withdrawn. Liaison between library staff and teachers is good. Library staff have good links with outside agencies which help them improve their service to staff and students. A small technical support team assists staff and students with reprographic work, and oversees the use of the college's audiovisual equipment.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

48 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, although some points of standard practice were noted as key strengths and inspectors identified an additional weakness. Some features were confusingly identified as being both strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- commitment to continuous improvement by staff at all levels
- good integration of self-assessment and operational planning
- effective use of value-added analysis and target-setting for individual students
- good overall achievement and retention rates

- good use of student feedback

Weaknesses

- some contributory self-assessment reports too descriptive
- lack of a comprehensive staff development plan
- inappropriate quality standards for some support services

49 All staff are involved in quality assurance and recognise the importance of critical self-evaluation. The quality assurance procedures operate in an atmosphere of trust. All staff are committed to maintaining and raising standards and their efforts are appreciated by senior managers who place high reliance on their professionalism. Quality assurance procedures that have evolved over five years are set out in a manual and are kept under review by the quality assurance committee. The procedures are clear without being over-prescriptive and aim to minimise bureaucracy.

50 Student attendance, achievement and retention rates are good and are carefully monitored. Overall achievement rates are consistently above national averages and have increased steadily in recent years. Procedures for monitoring retention rates are being strengthened. Where rates fluctuate, reasons are identified and action taken.

51 Self-assessment is based on detailed departmental reviews. A day is set aside in November for teachers to review evidence and identify strengths and weaknesses in their own programme areas. Although the college has produced four self-assessment reports, it does not normally allocate grades. Grades were allocated in the last cycle in preparation for inspection. A numerical approach was used to grade curriculum areas. Quality factors were weighted and assessment grades defined in terms of bands. The curriculum grades allocated through self-assessment matched those

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of inspectors. All reports contributing to the overall self-assessment report identify strengths and weaknesses but the clarity of these individual reports varies. Some identify clear key strengths and weaknesses and present clear comparisons with benchmarking and other data. Others are less precise, and are descriptive rather than evaluative. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that there is scope for achieving greater consistency in these contributory reports.

52 First drafts of self-assessment reports are completed in November. Conclusions are reviewed by each head of department and the appropriate senior manager before cross-faculty moderation and review by the management team. The college regards this review and debate as an important and integral part of the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed that the process is rigorous. The principal and deputy principal prepare the overall college self-assessment report. This is reviewed and endorsed by the senior management committees, the quality board and finally the corporation. Out of 28 teaching departments, 16 have been subject to external review over a four-year period. The self-assessment prepared for inspection was the first to be externally moderated.

53 Procedures for operational planning and self-assessment are closely aligned. The self-assessment action plan forms the college's operational plan. The self-assessment report and action plan are endorsed by the corporation during the Easter term along with college targets for achievement and retention. These targets then guide target-setting at departmental level. College targets are not an aggregation of subject targets. The formal monitoring of the self-assessment action plan is on an interim and year-end basis. Departmental and subject action plans are reviewed continuously.

54 Value-added analysis is used to help teachers set achievement targets for individual students and courses. Target minimum grades

are set for all GCE A level students which help to focus their attention on their personal performance. An internal team of trained observers has completed three rounds of lesson observations. Procedures have been reviewed and amended but lessons are not graded. The results of observations are analysed and taken into account during self-assessment. Some lesson observation reports are not sufficiently critical and do not comment sufficiently on whether students are learning effectively.

55 Service standards for support services are set out in the quality assurance manual. Some standards, such as those for careers and library services, do not adequately reflect the nature and importance of the services. The college charter clearly sets out the college's commitments. All students receive a copy when they request a prospectus. Charter commitments are monitored indirectly through student questionnaires and self-assessment.

56 There is no overall college staff development plan. Teachers' development requirements are identified in departmental self-assessment reports. Staff development is well managed at faculty level. Teachers are able to get the training they feel they need. The effectiveness of the training provided is evaluated. New teachers are effectively inducted and provided with an opportunity to meet their line manager each week. Additional support is provided for newly qualified teachers.

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Governance

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- effective use of governors' expertise
- good working relationship between governors and college managers
- clear and appropriate code of conduct

Weaknesses

- no systematic training programme for governors
- insufficient use of performance indicators in routine financial monitoring

58 Most governors live in the vicinity of the college. They have a wide range of professional and business expertise that is used to the benefit of the college, particularly in overseeing its new building works. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the working relationship between governors and managers is good and is based on a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities.

59 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has considered the requirements of the modified instrument of government and the corporation now comprises 20 members. There are two vacancies and 44% are women. There is provision for seven business, three co-opted,

two staff, one student, two local authority, two community, two parent governors and the principal. The inspection coincided with the appointment of several new governors and the retirement of some longstanding members.

60 The corporation's committees cover search, finance, policy, audit, estates, remuneration and there is one special committee that deals with student discipline. There is some overlap in the terms of reference of some committees.

Absences are systematically followed up by the clerk and brought to governors' attention, but an overall attendance target has not been set. Taking vacancies into account, the attendance at corporation meetings during 1999-2000 was 62%. The corporation agreed a schedule of 20 board and committee meetings for last year and identified when key items of business, such as approving the college's budget, were to be discussed. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that agendas, minutes and supporting papers are clear. The corporation has adopted a clear set of standing orders to guide the operation of its business and a code of conduct, which incorporates the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. There is a comprehensive register of interests, covering both governors and senior managers. Confirmation of governors' eligibility are sought and recorded. Both documents are updated annually.

61 A useful induction pack has been prepared for new governors. As part of a programme to improve the induction of new members, new and experienced governors are paired. The college acknowledges in its self-assessment that it is still too soon to gauge the effectiveness of this. Governors conduct a self-assessment of their own performance annually. They acknowledge that they need additional training to enable them to do this more effectively, and to evaluate self-assessment in other areas of the college. College managers provide briefings on specific areas of work at some board meetings. However, there is no formal training plan for governors and no systematic means of

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identifying individual governor training needs. For example, governors need further help in understanding different types of data on students' achievements. Some governors have established effective links with areas of the college but otherwise contact between governors and staff occurs only at an annual in-service training day or at college social events. This limited contact is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

62 The college's last full strategic plan covered the three-year period to 2000. An updated plan has been produced for the year 2000-01. Governors played a supportive role in the process that led to the college's development plan for 2000-01. This was developed through the self-assessment process. Governors recognise that mechanisms for monitoring interim progress against targets in the operational plan are insufficiently systematic. The policy committee monitors the annual academic performance of the college and contributes to the setting of internal targets for student pass rates based on Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) figures.

63 The finance committee considers the college's annual budget and three-year financial forecasts before recommending them to the corporation for approval. The committee also considers the management accounts. These contain good explanations of variances. The corporation has established some key financial policies and performance indicators. However, it does not yet make sufficient use of performance indicators as part of its routine financial monitoring. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Management

Grade 2

64 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but concluded that several

strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not acknowledged.

Key strengths

- effective, open and consultative management
- good communications
- purposeful management of estates development
- good overall financial management
- reliable management information about students and their achievements

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring and reporting on equal opportunities issues
- inadequate management accounts

65 The college is well managed. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is an open and consultative management style and that communication in the college is effective. As noted at the last inspection, teachers are kept informed through regular faculty, curricular and administrative departmental meetings, whole-college staff briefings, and a weekly bulletin. The minutes of all key meetings are posted on the staff noticeboard. The implementation of the ambitious accommodation strategy is being purposefully managed.

66 Since the last inspection, only minor changes have been made to the college's management structure although more responsibilities have been devolved to middle managers. Tutor team leaders have been added to each faculty to oversee pastoral care. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it is too soon to gauge their effectiveness. Teachers consider that the new arrangements help them deal with pastoral issues more consistently. The key policy and decision-making groups remain the management steering committee and the management policy

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committee. There are now nine advisory committees that monitor current practices or oversee new developments. All roles and responsibilities are clear and understood.

67 The college has recently reviewed its mission statement. Staff were consulted and inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a good level of understanding of the new mission and the college's strategic aims. The most recent three-year strategic plan ran to 2000. It was regarded as inappropriate to make major changes for the next three years because of the building programme, so the college has chosen to produce a one-year update to the plan for the year 2000-01. A college action plan was derived from the self-assessment action plans for the separate areas of the college. This serves as the college's operational plan. For some of the actions, there is no indication of what is to be achieved by the end of the academic year 2000-01. The plan contains targets for students' achievements, but these are derived differently from targets sent to the FEFC. There is no formalised market research, and the marketing director's main function is to liaise with schools. Nevertheless, about 500 adults have been recruited, mainly to courses in IT.

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has achieved an operational surplus in each of the three years prior to inspection and achieved this in the context of a below average level of funding. Over the same period the college has consistently met or exceeded its FEFC funding unit targets and its cash position has remained strong.

69 The deputy principal is the college's finance director. A qualified and experienced accountant assists him in this role. The accountant also manages the college's small finance team and attends senior management and finance committee meetings as necessary. The college has adopted clear and

comprehensive financial procedures. The management accounts are presented to senior managers and then members of the corporation finance committee, before being forwarded to the next meeting of the corporation. A narrative attached to the financial reports provides a clear commentary on the main issues affecting the finances of the college. However, the scope, frequency and content of the management accounts need to be enhanced.

70 Senior managers, heads of faculty and heads of department have delegated budgets. They understand the basis on which their budgets are allocated and receive regular financial reports on the status of their accounts. The college's computerised accounting system is old and budget holders are unable to access up-to-date account information. The college has plans to update the system. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the management information system provides reliable data about students and their achievements.

71 The college has maintained its good relationships with a range of external groups including the Surrey College Principals Group and the Surrey Sixth Form College Principals Group. It has forged relationships with the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership, the Elmbridge Lifelong Education Partnership, and the Surrey Post-compulsory Education Planning Group.

72 The college has reviewed and improved its equal opportunities policy. This policy has been approved by governors. Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that its implementation and monitoring needs strengthening. Training sessions have been planned for staff. An equal opportunities standing committee has been established and an equal opportunities co-ordinator has been recently appointed. Formal reports on equal opportunities matters have not been sent to the corporation but the college plans to do so in future. As identified in the self-assessment report, due attention is paid

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to health and safety. Staff undertake appropriate training and appropriate checks and risk assessments are carried out regularly. Governors are regularly informed of health and safety issues, but the reports they receive are not sufficiently systematic.

Conclusions

73 The self-assessment report provided an effective basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, although they considered some strengths had been overstated and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors considered that the college had overgraded one cross-college area. They agreed with all other curriculum and cross-college grades.

74 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 (June 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	100
19-24 years	0
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (June 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	4
Level 3 (advanced)	96
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Level not specified	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	262	7	21
Business	93	0	7
Hotel and catering	43	0	3
Health and community care	16	21	3
Art and design	266	0	20
Humanities	605	0	46
Total	1,285	28	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 6% 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 (June 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	72	1	0	73
Supporting direct learning contact	17	0	0	17
Other support	14	0	0	14
Total	103	1	0	104

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£3,311,000	£3,417,000	£3,672,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.25	£16.79	£16.89
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	74%	74%
Achievement of funding target	105%	111%	104%
Diversity of income	5%	5%	4%
Operating surplus	£97,000	£93,000	£1,533,000

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 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 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	n/a	468	457	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	95	100	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	0	42	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Number of starters	377	362	309	17	13	18
	Retention (%)	83	71	76	94	100	100
	Achievement (%)	92	92	91	94	100	100
3	Number of starters	2,021	2,044	2,654	25	7	3
	Retention (%)	83	85	72	100	100	33
	Achievement (%)	91	90	91	24	0	100
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	9	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	100	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	44	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	66	57	212	n/a	n/a	2
	Retention (%)	100	100	100	n/a	n/a	100
	Achievement (%)	89	68	74	n/a	n/a	50
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	286	912	932	1	3	1
	Retention (%)	88	91	94	100	100	100
	Achievement (%)	100	100	99	100	100	100

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

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