

Filton College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100
Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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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 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

Filton College

South West Region

Inspected October 1998

Filton College, Bristol, is a medium-sized general further education college serving South Gloucestershire and north Bristol. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and evaluative. It included external views and evidence from over 200 lesson observations across most of the college's teaching areas. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report, but judged that progress had been slower in some areas than the college had estimated. The self-assessment report recognises that the college has overestimated the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed with three of the curriculum grades and two of the cross-college grades that were awarded in the self-assessment report.

The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Prospective students are well informed about the range of courses and opportunities available. Governors make a positive contribution to strategic planning. Senior managers have an open and consultative approach. Students benefit from much good teaching, particularly in art and design and adult basic education. Pass rates in examinations in several subjects consistently exceed national averages. Good support is provided for students wishing to progress to higher education. The college has improved its accommodation since the last inspection.

The college should: resolve significant difficulties regarding the management information system; ensure effective monitoring of student performance in all parts of the college; extend and make more systematic the provision of learning support; improve the quality of some tutorial support; address some low attendance and retention rates; assess more accurately the quality of teaching and learning and address weaknesses identified; and develop quality assurance further.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	2	Support for students	3
Health and social care	3	General resources	2
Art and design	2	Quality assurance	3
Humanities	2	Governance	2
Adult basic education	2	Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Filton College, established in 1960, is located on two sites. The main campus is in Filton on the northern edge of the city of Bristol within the recently established local authority of South Gloucestershire. Much of the art and design provision is based at the school of art and design which occupies part of the Royal West of England Academy near the centre of Bristol. There are a number of basic education courses which take place at centres in the community. From January 1999, the college will increase its prison education provision by assuming responsibility for education at Eastwood Park as well as its existing work in Leyhill and Gloucester prisons.

2 The unitary authorities of South Gloucestershire and Bristol have populations of 220,000 and 376,000, respectively. There has been a significant increase in the population of Bradley Stoke, an area close to the college, from 5,924 in 1991 to 12,454 in 1996. The population is planned to increase further to 17,410 by 2001. The area around the Filton campus is an area of rapid commercial growth and investment. Close to the college are two major commercial sites and the industrial area next to the motorway interchange continues to attract new multinational companies. Recently, two more corporations established major new offices. Unemployment levels in Bristol and South Gloucestershire at the time of inspection were 4% and 1.6%, respectively.

3 In 1997-98, 1,904 full-time and 5,972 part-time students enrolled on college courses; 80% were aged 19 years or over. The college has exceeded its funding targets since incorporation. The college recruits students from schools in Bristol, South Gloucestershire and the surrounding areas. Many local schools have sixth forms so there is competition for students. There are three other general education colleges and a Roman Catholic sixth form college in the Bristol and South

Gloucestershire area. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) is currently considering a merger proposal from Filton College and the College of Care and Early Education.

4 The college employs 289 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 171 are teachers and a further 28 directly support learning. The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, three curriculum directors and directors of finance and information, marketing and business development, and personnel. Courses are managed by the three curriculum directors assisted by seven curriculum managers. Student support and estates are the responsibility of the vice-principal. Other cross-college functions are the responsibility of the other directors.

5 The college's mission is summarised as 'quality, access and opportunity'. Its key targets include:

- the improvement of students' retention and achievements
- widening participation
- major growth in work with companies and international students
- setting targets for resource efficiency and investment
- achieving Investor in People status.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 12 October 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and studied information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for 46 days in the college. They observed 86 lessons, examined students' work and inspected college documents. They met college governors, managers, staff and students. The college's data regarding its students' achievements were

Context

checked by two inspectors working in the college for two days. The individualised student record (ISR) data were found to be unreliable for the purposes of inspection and are therefore not included in this report. Consequently, the report contains incomplete tables of students' achievements. Inspectors based their judgements on data held by the college's programme managers. This was more reliable than the data held centrally by the college, but there were still some inaccuracies across different programmes.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 66% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% were judged to be less than satisfactory. These figures are similar to the national averages for all lessons inspected in the year 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	9	7	1	0	21
GCSE	2	1	3	1	0	7
GNVQ	1	5	1	2	0	9
NVQ	2	5	5	0	0	12
Other vocational	5	11	5	0	0	21
Other	2	10	4	0	0	16
Total (No)	16	41	25	4	0	86
Total (%)	19	47	29	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

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8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Soon after the start of their courses, almost a quarter of the students were not attending lessons.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Filton College	12.7	76
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering the full range of provision in mathematics. They generally agreed with the self-assessment report evaluation of the quality of provision, but considered it gave insufficient attention to some weaknesses and overemphasised some strengths in teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- much good teaching on well-planned courses
- high-quality learning materials
- high pass rates on full-time general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) mathematics course
- good achievements on general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and numeracy courses for students who complete their course
- wide variety of courses and methods of study

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention and achievement on GCSE courses, courses run for GNVQ students and part-time GCE A level courses
- poor access to, and little use of, information technology (IT) in lessons
- low levels of attendance in some lessons

10 Teachers use detailed schemes of work for planning lessons and regularly review students' progress. The self-assessment report recognised the quality of teaching as a strength. Teachers are skilful in developing students' expertise by breaking down complex tasks into a series of simple steps and by using interesting and appropriate examples. They emphasise the use of correct notation and the development of

logical solutions to problems in order to help students understand basic mathematical principles. Most students experience a broad range of activities, but teachers sometimes failed to maintain the interest and involvement of all students. In a few lessons, some students completed their work quickly and were left with nothing to do. On part-time courses, students work at their own pace with the support of a tutor. Mathematics teachers work closely with staff teaching on adult foundation programmes to promote progression to GCSE mathematics courses. They provide much valued support for part-time GCSE students. Students' attendance in some observed lessons was low. In a few lessons, learning was interrupted by the late arrival of students.

11 Most students show good levels of skill and understanding. There is some high-quality work, especially in GCE A level, where students demonstrate good mathematical modelling skills. Students' marked work is returned to them promptly and teachers provide helpful written comments on how they might improve their performance. Teachers do not always use the same grading systems when working on written assignments and students are not clear what their marks mean. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that pass rates and retention rates on full-time GCE A level mathematics courses are very high. Pass rates have been significantly above national averages for students in general further education colleges for the past three years with over 70% of students achieving grades A to C in each year. Whilst students' achievements in GCSE mathematics are generally above the national average, the college acknowledges that there were significant weaknesses in the attendance, retention and achievement rates on GCSE courses run for general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) students. Students taking a numeracy qualification as an alternative to GCSE mathematics achieve well with 82% gaining a level 2 certificate in 1998, and 100% being successful at level 3. The low retention

Curriculum Areas

and achievement rates on part-time GCE A level courses are recognised in the self-assessment report.

12 The mathematics provision is well planned. Part-time courses are offered at appropriate times and are taught in ways that suit the needs of adult learners. There has been an increase in the numbers of students studying part time and on GCSE courses. Staff assess their own performance regularly and seek ways to improve their teaching. However, arrangements for the collection and analysis of information about students' performance in mathematics are underdeveloped. Staff make little use of target-setting. Course reviews lack rigorous analysis of all aspects of student performance. This weakness was not identified in the self-

assessment report. Staff plan to extend the current use of value-added data so that students can assess their own progress.

13 Teachers are well qualified and committed to helping students succeed. They work effectively as a team. The high-quality, paper-based learning resources for mathematics are justifiably recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. They are used effectively to encourage students to learn on their own. In contrast, the use of IT as a mathematical tool is hampered by the lack of suitable computing facilities for demonstration or for individual IT work in lessons. Most teaching takes place in dedicated mathematics classrooms which provide pleasant working environments.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in mathematics, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE (full time and part time)	2	Expected completions	*	*	273
		Retention (%)	*	*	43
		Achievement (%)	*	*	47
GCE A level (full time and part time, one or two years)	3	Expected completions	*	*	75
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

14 Inspectors observed 24 lessons in health and social care. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but concluded that the quality of teaching and learning was overstated. The report gave insufficient weight to the effect which the lack of some beauty therapy facilities had on teaching and learning and also to the poor retention on some courses.

Key strengths

- some effective teaching
- good pass rates on childcare and counselling courses
- well-developed internal verification systems in care
- good work experience on all care courses
- well-designed schemes of work and lesson plans for some courses

Weaknesses

- lack of inspiration in some teaching
- lack of specialist resources for beauty therapy
- poor progression from year one to year two on two-year courses
- poor retention and achievement on the newly established diploma in holistic therapy
- little development of key skills on some courses

15 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time care 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 certificate in childcare and education, and the BTEC national

diploma in childhood studies. The main part-time provision is in counselling courses. The college has a full-time one-year holistic beauty therapy course and a two-year international beauty specialist diploma, but no part-time courses.

16 Teaching on courses in health and social care is satisfactory, and some lessons observed were good. Teachers are careful to promote appropriate professional values. In some lessons, teachers set up imaginative activities, linked to work experience, in which all students were encouraged to participate. In some weaker lessons, teachers were uninspiring and failed to ensure that the students took part in the work. Some handouts and materials used on care courses are poor. The key skills of communication, IT and application of number are integrated where possible with many lessons, but this is underdeveloped on some courses. Students speak highly of the individual support they receive from their teachers. The teaching of theory in beauty therapy lessons is good and of a higher standard than the practical work. Students in practical beauty therapy lessons are dressed appropriately and are able to work safely, but their ability to achieve the appropriate professional standards is hindered by the lack of clients and appropriate resources. Beauty therapy teaching is enhanced by specialist sessions run by suppliers of commercially available beauty products. All students on care courses participate in well-managed work experience programmes, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. There is no work experience for beauty therapy students, a weakness which is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Inspectors judged that the strengths of teaching identified in the self-assessment report were overgenerous.

17 Assignments are generally of an appropriate level. The standard of some of the work seen was good, although in some work there was little use of IT. Students' portfolios in beauty therapy are well organised and are of a

Curriculum Areas

good standard. As indicated in the college's self-assessment report, pass rates for a few courses in the programme area are higher than national figures. The pass rate for students on counselling courses was outstanding in both 1996 and 1997. The pass rates for the GNVQ in health and social care are similar to the national average. Pass rates on childcare courses are generally good. Pass rates for those who complete courses in beauty therapy are good, but many students fail to complete. Progress to employment in relevant posts in the care and beauty therapy sectors is good. On the newly established two-year diploma in holistic therapy only 50% of students have progressed from the first year to the second year of the course. This course does not appear in the tables as the first intake of students have not yet finished.

18 Course management in care is good, and is characterised by regular team meetings, good record-keeping and careful planning. There are

few formal systems for course management in beauty therapy. The self-assessment report identifies the need to address poor retention on many courses, but does not clearly identify action to be taken.

19 Teachers on care courses possess appropriate qualifications. Accommodation for care courses is good and there is adequate library stock. Teachers on beauty therapy courses are well qualified and have relevant professional experience. The accommodation and specialist equipment for practical work in beauty therapy does not reflect a realistic commercial environment. The lack of a staffed reception area and technical support for beauty therapy adversely affect practical beauty therapy work. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Students and staff across the programme area have insufficient access to IT.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in health and social care, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ in health and social care	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	43
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	64
Holistic beauty therapy course	2	Expected completions	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	75
		Achievement (%)	*	*	85
Childcare courses	2 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	52
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	98
Counselling courses	2 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	38
		Retention (%)	*	*	95
		Achievement (%)	*	*	**

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

**students yet to complete some practical aspects of their course

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

20 Inspectors observed 17 lessons covering all full-time and a selection of part-time courses. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the college overstated some strengths and inspectors identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching
- effective use of teachers' professional practice to inform teaching
- high quality of students' practical work
- wide range of courses with good progression opportunities
- good specialist resources

Weaknesses

- poor retention on GNVQ courses
- some shortcomings in the accommodation affecting the quality of learning
- incomplete records of students' achievements

21 Art and design is taught on two sites: the school of art and design at Queens Road and the main college site at Filton. GCE A level, GCSE and pre-degree foundation studies in art and design are offered on both sites. At Queens Road, there is an extensive range of art and craft courses accredited through the Open College Network which involves some 1,000 part-time students. Many of these students progress to a part-time higher national certificate in applied arts. At Filton, there is an extensive range of GNVQ and national diploma courses which offer good progression opportunities for full-time and part-time students. The majority of students at Queens

Road are mature students, while most school-leavers enrol at Filton.

22 Teaching is thoughtfully planned and makes full use of the extensive experience of the teachers, many of whom are practising artists and designers. At both sites, students experience work conditions similar to those of professional studios. Teachers recognise students' individual differences and encourage their personal development. Open College Network students studying at different levels work alongside each other in classes to their mutual benefit. They welcome the opportunity to gain credits for their work. There are regular assessment tutorials and portfolio reviews. Teachers make good use of educational trips and overseas visits to inform and stimulate students' work. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report. Where teaching is weak, teachers present students with practical assignments that contain too many tasks and complex concepts. Students are unclear of the aims of these assignments and the work that follows is often confused. In some lessons, teachers fail to bring the work to a clear conclusion.

23 Students on many courses are producing work of a high standard. A group of part-time foundation students developed three-dimensional structures that explored and exploited the various qualities of paper. Many of their solutions were innovative producing some elaborate forms. Full-time students develop good drawing and colour work skills. In 1998, the pass rates of 92% at GCE A level, with 58% achieving grades A to C, was above the national average for further education colleges. Pass rates for the foundation courses and for full-time vocational courses are at or above the national average. As noted in the self-assessment report, there has been low retention on GNVQ courses. On GNVQ intermediate in 1998, although there was a 100% pass rate, only five of the nine students completed the course. Only 53% of the first-year intake on the

Curriculum Areas

GNVQ advanced course have progressed to the current second year. Students, particularly the younger students, need to present and store their work more carefully. Much of the work in student folios was damaged. The majority of students from the foundation course and many from the GNVQ advanced course are gaining places on degree courses.

24 At Filton, the art and design studios enable all full-time students to benefit from individual teaching spaces. The level of noise

that carries across these spaces is sometimes intrusive and disruptive to learning. There are some excellent drawing and painting facilities at Queens Road. However, the annexe to this building has many small rooms that limit opportunities for project work or for bringing the whole group together. The self-assessment report does not give sufficient weight to some of the deficiencies in art and design accommodation.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art and design, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	*	*	9
		Retention (%)	*	*	55
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GNVQ advanced and national diploma three-dimensional design for theatre	3	Expected completions	*	*	29
		Retention (%)	*	*	89
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
GCE A level	3	Expected completions	*	*	61
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92
Pre-degree foundation (full time and part time)	3	Expected completions	*	*	102
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	93
Higher national certificate applied art	3	Expected completions	*	*	69
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	*	*	80

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

25 Inspectors observed 22 lessons across a wide range of humanities and social science subjects. They agreed with a number of strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but considered that some weaknesses were overlooked, particularly in teaching and learning. Some weaknesses are not addressed in the action plan.

Key strengths

- a broad range of provision, responsive to local needs
- much effective teaching
- good examination results
- high standard of students' oral and written work

Weaknesses

- poor retention on GCSE courses and in a few GCE A level subjects
- poor attendance in a few classes

26 A wide choice of courses is provided in GCSE and GCE A level social science subjects, including history, geography, economics, sociology, psychology and law. There is a good range of access to higher education courses and teacher training courses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that these courses successfully attract students who have not previously participated in further education.

27 Much of the teaching is good. In the most successful lessons, the teaching is lively and has a clear sense of purpose. Lessons and schemes of work incorporate the requirements of examinations and assessments. In a GCE A level history lesson on the unification of Italy the teacher effectively used a GCE A level question to show students how to bring relevant information to bear on the particular point of

the question. Written material provided for students is of a high standard. GCE A level sociology students use well-designed worksheets which test students' evaluative skills. Work placements, field courses and visits to lectures by outside speakers enrich students' studies. Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods including work in pairs and groups, practical exercises and presentations. Students on the access to social work course worked well together on a case study to extend their knowledge and discuss values. An introductory lecture on research methods given to first-year GCE A level psychology students skilfully presented a series of difficult concepts which all students followed with interest and understanding. Teachers carefully monitor and mark students' written work. In some lessons, the pace of students' learning is reduced by less effective teaching in which learning objectives are not identified or shared. In a few lessons, teachers inappropriately direct questions to the whole class instead of to individual students and consequently fail to involve all students in the work. Sometimes the emphasis by teachers on subject knowledge crowds out the students' development of study and subject-related skills. On occasions, teachers failed to take account of the differing abilities of students. These shortcomings were overlooked in the self-assessment report.

28 Most students write accurately. Their files show a developing ability to organise and present their own work. The oral work and presentations made by access students were of a good standard. Pass rates in examinations are good. In GCSE and two-year GCE A level subjects, results are almost invariably above the national average. One-year GCE A level examination results are generally above the national average. Approximately two-thirds of all 16 to 18 year old students who complete their GCE A level courses in psychology and sociology achieve high GCE A level grades (A to C). Between 1996 and 1998, GCE A level results in psychology and sociology exceeded nationally

Curriculum Areas

recognised predictions based on students' GCSE results at the time of their entry to college. The self-assessment report records as a strength the good examination results of its students. Staff monitor and analyse examination pass rates, but pay less attention to retention. The self-assessment report refers to weak retention on some GCE A level courses, but neglects the problem on GCSE courses. Access, and special assistant teacher courses have good pass rates and most have sound retention rates. A few classes were poorly attended.

29 Management at course and subject level is good. Course team meetings are regular and focus on curriculum and teaching issues. Teams are well established and work effectively together. Inspectors agreed with the view in the self-assessment report that annual evaluation

has led to improvements in teaching. Students appreciate the accessibility of the staff when they seek help with their work.

30 Social science staff are well qualified and confident of their subjects. Classrooms are generally well furnished and equipped. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students make good use of the broad range of resources held in the library and resources centre and that they are helpfully assisted by the staff who work there. Students have ready access to computers in the resources centre, but none of the social science classrooms possess a computer. At present, IT plays little part in the teaching of GCE A level and GCSE social science subjects, but does form a part of access courses.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in humanities, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE social studies (16 to 18)	2	Expected completions	*	*	64
		Retention (%)	*	*	61
		Achievement (%)	*	*	63
GCE A level sociology	3	Expected completions	*	*	38
		Retention (%)	*	*	76
		Achievement (%)	*	*	90
GCE A level social studies (two year)	3	Expected completions	*	*	176
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87
GCE A level social studies (one year)	3	Expected completions	*	*	98
		Retention (%)	*	*	70
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
Access to higher education teaching and social work	3	Expected completions	*	*	56
		Retention (%)	*	*	75
		Achievement (%)	*	*	88

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Adult Basic Education

Grade 2

31 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in adult basic education including literacy, numeracy and IT at the college and in locations in the community. The self-assessment report for adult basic education is clear and comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified. However, they thought that the strengths of teaching and learning were slightly overstated.

Key strengths

- carefully-planned teaching
- students' increased confidence in using basic skills
- successful progress of some students to more advanced courses
- constructive use of volunteers for individual teaching and support in class
- informed and committed management

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-ordination of data on students' achievements and progression
- low student numbers for the capacity of the provision
- inappropriate foundation for work course for some students
- lack of individual teaching and support in the learning support centre

32 The provision for adult basic education includes basic English courses available at three levels, and numeracy at two. Preparation for GCSE courses are available for English and mathematics. Staff who teach on these courses work closely with staff teaching GCSEs to ensure that students have the best chance of success. Courses in basic level computing, often combined with literacy skills, and family learning classes effectively catch the interest of

people new to further education. Some valuable work in enabling travellers to gain basic skills is carried out on a local caravan site. Individual teaching and support is available in the open learning centre on one day each week. This does not match the students' needs. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

33 Most teaching is good. The strengths are identified in detail in the self-assessment report, but are overstated. Teachers use well-trying teaching methods successfully. They plan their courses and lessons conscientiously. In one lesson, the teacher covered grammar and spelling in the first part of the lesson. She then produced various interesting objects, including an antique short measure from an old pub for the students to discuss and describe in writing. Teachers use a range of different activities to enable students to gain new skills and practise those they have already learned. In several lessons, computers were used effectively to teach literacy skills or to enable students to practise them. The teaching methods used foster the development of students' self-confidence. Volunteers provide effective individual teaching and support in some classes, under the direction of the teacher. In a few lessons, teachers did not adequately check students' understanding of the work.

34 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment of students' achievements. Students are well motivated, confident and clear about the progress they are making on their courses. Their progress and achievement is evident in their work. Some go on to more advanced courses within the college while others enter employment or gain promotion at work. Many students are motivated to attend courses by a wish to help their children with their school work. Although students are encouraged to work towards accreditation and to take a range of externally validated tests, there is no requirement for them to do so. This enables staff to respond effectively to the different goals of individual students whilst not disadvantaging

Curriculum Areas

those who wish to gain a qualification. Success rates for students who choose to take qualifications are good. Students' progress is always carefully recorded; their achievements are regularly reviewed and new goals are set with them. However, data on students' achievements and progression, although contained in individual students' and teachers' files, are not adequately co-ordinated to inform effective review of courses and overall success rates.

35 Managers are well informed about adult basic education and are committed to its development within the college. Some 270 students attend courses in basic literacy, numeracy and IT. As the self-assessment report states, this number is lower than the capacity of the provision. Most classes are not full and some courses have been postponed or cancelled. Some were not considered for this year because of poor recruitment last year.

36 Teachers are well qualified and experienced in basic education. They work productively as a team. The teaching rooms in the college are well decorated and suitable for the groups using them. Some appropriate books, photographs and posters are on display. Students benefit from the availability of computers in classrooms and in specialist IT rooms. However, in many of the lessons observed, little use was made of equipment, other than paper, pens and worksheets. Accommodation for classes away from the college is of a lower standard. Computers are not available and there is little equipment. These weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report.

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Support for Students

Grade 3

37 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, there was little evaluation of tutorial support and inspectors judged that the assessment of provision for learning support was overgenerous. The college has started to address some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective recruitment and admissions procedures
- much good general support for students
- good liaison with local schools, business and industry
- well-organised induction programmes for full-time students
- good support for students with dyslexia and disabilities
- effective guidance for students wishing to progress to higher education

Weaknesses

- lack of systematic assessment of students' learning support needs
- insufficient provision of learning support
- little monitoring of frequency and quality of individual tutorials
- inadequate induction and tutorial support for part-time students
- lack of careers education programme for many students

38 Students receive much good support from staff. The student services unit provides generally good-quality services. Keeping parents and guardians informed of students' progress is a high priority on many courses. There are weaknesses in the provision of

learning support and some aspects of tutorial provision.

39 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that pre-enrolment activities provide prospective students with impartial advice and guidance. Liaison programmes are well established with local schools. Publicity materials are of good quality. Open days and careers fairs enable prospective students to find out about courses and college activities. Enquiries are followed up promptly. Impartial guidance is available to help students decide the most appropriate course. Opportunities for accreditation of students' prior learning are available on certain courses, but few students use this service.

40 Induction programmes for full-time students are well organised. They provide students with a good introduction to the college and to their course of study. Surveys of students' opinions reveal that in a minority of curriculum areas students are less satisfied with their induction to college. There is an effective system which enables students to transfer between courses after discussions with careers staff and tutors. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that many part-time students do not receive an adequate induction to the college.

41 Where learning support is provided it is of good quality and well documented, and students make progress. However, inspectors could not agree with the college's assessment of its provision for learning support. The numbers of students receiving learning support is low. Many staff and students expressed concern to inspectors about the low level of learning support compared with the numbers of students identified as needing such support. There is not a systematic approach to identifying the needs of all students. Priority is given to supporting the needs of students with physical disabilities and for those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Learning support is rarely offered to other students unless the college is

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able to claim additional funding for their support. In 1997-98, 90 students were provided with support. This is approximately half of all those referred. Many students with identified needs are not referred to student services by their tutors, as tutors are aware that they will not receive the support they need.

42 The self-assessment report acknowledged that, apart from a brief framework, the college does not have a tutorial policy. There are no other judgements about tutorial support in the report. There is a wide range of tutorial practice across the college, with variations in entitlement, delivery and recording procedures. Tutorial programmes are more effective in some areas than others. All full-time courses have timetabled time for group and individual tutorials. Many individual tutorials are well planned with a regular programme of action-planning and review. However, there is little monitoring of the frequency and quality of personal tutorial work, and insufficient recording of the action points agreed with students. Group tutorials are less effective than individual tutorials and attendance at some sessions is low. There is little guidance for tutors to enable them to fulfil their role effectively.

43 Students receive some good support and guidance on progression, particularly to higher education. Careers service and qualified college staff provide an effective guidance service through formal and drop-in sessions. However, the college lacks a clearly structured careers education programme for all full-time students.

44 The counselling service is well publicised to students. Counsellors have good links with many local agencies to ensure that a full range of support is available. College welfare services are extensive and well used. There is an active students' union which helps to organise a range of student welfare and social activities. Overseas students, who make up 10% of the full-time student population, speak highly of the accommodation service provided by the college.

They benefit particularly from living with local families. Sufficient nursery provision is available to meet the needs of current students.

General Resources

Grade 2

45 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment about its general resources. The report, however, does not refer to the lack of student facilities at the Queens Road site and omits a few weaknesses.

Key strengths

- spacious, pleasant libraries and 'drop-in' computer facilities
- well-maintained and appropriate teaching accommodation
- good accommodation for teaching and support staff
- good access for wheelchair users at the Filton site
- good links between teaching teams and learning centres

Weaknesses

- insufficient computers for teaching and limited access to the internet
- lack of student facilities at Queens Road
- unsatisfactory heating systems

46 The college has made good progress with the development of its accommodation since the last inspection. Three sites have been sold and additional premises acquired adjoining the original main site in Filton. This has increased capacity by about 30%. New facilities of a high standard have been provided for science, art and design, photography, performing arts and fuel services. A new fitness centre, leased by the college to a private provider, is well used by staff and students. Almost all of the main site is accessible to wheelchair users. Spacious

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refectories at Filton provide a suitable range of food. The student common room is well used. In its self-assessment report the college recognises that the lack of sports facilities is a weakness.

47 The college also has a small site at Queens Road, near the city centre, which was purpose built in the late nineteenth century for art and design. All of the teaching rooms are specialist art and design rooms. It is used by about 60 full-time and 1,000 part-time students. Staff and students appreciate the ambience of the building and its central location, but the site has few student facilities and there is no suitable access for wheelchair users.

48 General teaching accommodation is clean, well maintained and of adequate size. A small amount of teaching takes place in huts. Most rooms have overhead projectors, projector screens or blinds. The aged and unsatisfactory heating systems in both the north and south buildings prevent effective control of room temperatures in some areas. A detailed condition survey has informed a planned maintenance programme. A clear system ensures prompt response to routine maintenance requests. Most staff accommodation is fit for its purpose, but the computers planned for staff rooms are not yet all operating. There are pleasant staff lounges in both main buildings.

49 The libraries and 'drop-in' computer centres in the main north and south buildings provide pleasant environments for private study and good access to a range of materials for learning. In most subjects there is an adequate stock of up-to-date books. Over the past two years there has been a 10% increase in the number of books issued. In a few new areas of provision, for example animal care, sports studies and public services, the bookstock is small. The libraries and learning centres are well managed. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that library staff have close links with teaching

teams. The results of questionnaires to staff and students show high levels of satisfaction with the library and learning resource service.

50 On the main site there are an adequate number of computers which can be booked by students, but only two machines in the drop-in centres have internet access. The self-assessment report acknowledged that access to the internet is not satisfactory. There are insufficient computers for teaching. In some curriculum areas there is a need for improved access to networks for teaching, and few general teaching rooms are equipped with computers. The replacement of over 155 machines in the summer of 1998 considerably improved the quality of service. All current machines are less than three years old. Hardware purchases are centrally managed and common standards for software apply across the college. The self-assessment report recognised the need to develop further computing facilities and increase the use of computers by students on all courses. Management of IT facilities has been unsatisfactory. Clear strategies, policies and detailed plans for the development of IT facilities have only recently been developed. There is no plan for the rolling replacement of computers.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

51 The self-assessment for quality assurance is detailed and frank. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements. The effects of some weaknesses, such as the insufficient use and monitoring of performance indicators, was understated. While the college has an extensive programme of lesson observation, the internal assessment of teaching quality was overgenerous.

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Key strengths

- good progress in standardising quality procedures
- the range of surveys used
- development of a dedicated quality unit
- thorough identification of staff training needs
- established and extensive programme of lesson observation

Weaknesses

- lack of rigorous use and monitoring of performance indicators and targets for courses
- overgenerous grading of teaching quality
- underdeveloped quality assurance procedures in some support areas
- insufficiently strong links between quality review and college planning
- delay in completing appraisals for teaching staff

52 The commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in the college's mission statement and strategic objectives. Governors have a curriculum and quality assurance committee to provide oversight of academic standards. The quality assurance policy and strategy is clearly stated, but it does not describe arrangements for business support areas.

53 There is an established annual cycle of programme reviews and team action plans. The quality of course reviews varies and some are unsatisfactory. The self-assessment report acknowledges that reviews of the quality of its provision are insufficiently linked to the planning process. Performance indicators for overall college retention and pass rates have been set, but course targets are only just being established. Lack of rigorous performance indicators for individual courses is recognised in the self-assessment report. There is insufficient

analysis of trends in achievement and retention rates for individual courses. Analysis of students' attendance is not a systematic part of course review. Measures to assess the added value of students' examination success at GCE A level in the light of their GCSE achievements have been regularly used by subject teachers.

54 Several improvements to the quality assurance arrangements have recently been introduced, but their effect is yet to be demonstrated. There is now a quality unit to support, monitor and audit procedures for curriculum and business support areas. This unit has already made progress in standardising quality assurance documentation. For example, a calendar has been introduced to ensure teams review and report on time and there are agreed formats for course files. A recently established curriculum review and development group reports to the academic board. With the quality unit, it forms a quality audit team to monitor review processes. Some support areas have fully defined the standards of service they intend to provide. Others are at an early stage in developing such standards. There has been good review and monitoring of the standards in several areas, notably the learning resources centre and the personnel function, but elsewhere progress is slower. This uneven development is recognised in the self-assessment report.

55 The views of those who use the college's services are included in programme reviews. Surveys of students' opinions are taken three times a year to cover induction, teaching and learning and outcomes. Information is also collected from students who enrol, but withdraw early on. The views of employers and parents are sought. The outcomes are analysed by the quality unit and communicated to teams to inform their action-planning. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the views of part-time students have been given insufficient consideration.

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56 There is an extensive programme of lesson observation, but this has resulted in an overgenerous internal assessment of teaching quality. This is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Over 200 classroom observations contributed to the college's evaluation of standards of teaching and learning. Inspectors identified 66% of lessons as good or outstanding, compared with the 90% identified by the college.

57 Training needs are effectively identified and staff are encouraged to undertake a range of development activities. As identified in the self-assessment report, staff development does not yet always link personal objectives to the needs of the college. Appraisal arrangements are well documented and regarded positively by staff. The backlog in completing appraisals is noted in the self-assessment report.

58 The college charter has recently been revised. Students feel that staff listen to their concerns. The complaints system is set out clearly in the students' diary. Complaints are thoroughly and speedily investigated. The charter is reviewed each year in consultation with student representatives.

59 This is the college's second self-assessment report and is a more evaluative report than the first. External representatives have been involved from the outset. Staff had good opportunities to contribute to the report. Governors were closely involved in preparing their section of the report. The final report was approved by the corporation and academic board. The self-assessment report has a clear structure. Each section has a useful introduction. Strengths, weaknesses, evidence and actions are clearly set out. Actions are usually linked to specified individuals or groups. Target and review dates are stated. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements reached, although they considered that the quality of teaching and learning is overstated. In several subjects, insufficient weight was given to retention.

Governance

Grade 2

60 The self-assessment of governance is critical and evaluative. Governors assessed their own competence and knowledge against their key responsibilities. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements regarding strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses identified by inspectors were not acknowledged in the report.

Key strengths

- commitment, experience and expertise of governors
- constructive relationship between the corporation and senior management
- governors' involvement in setting the mission and in strategic planning
- efficient conduct of corporation business, including sound clerking arrangements
- an appropriate committee structure with good use made of the skills of corporation members
- comprehensive standing orders

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped arrangements for setting and monitoring targets for students' retention and achievement
- failure to ensure that governors receive sound data about students
- insufficient monitoring of the equal opportunities policy

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

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62 The governing body has 12 members with a breadth of experience and expertise which is used to good effect. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, some sections of the community are not well represented on the governing body. There are only three female members and no members from minority ethnic groups.

63 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the corporation manages its business well. The corporation is well supported by an external, independent clerk. The clerk works closely with the chair and the principal in managing the governing body's business and in advising on procedure. Meetings are planned well in advance. Papers are well prepared and presented in good time. Minutes are sufficiently detailed and decisions recorded clearly. Governors receive comprehensive briefing papers and are well informed about financial matters. The board has a realistic overview of the college's finances. Governors have agreed a code of conduct, developed standing orders and a draft 'whistleblowing' policy has been produced. The register of interests is being updated.

64 There is an appropriate and effective committee structure. Committees are chaired by governors who have suitable experience. Each committee has appropriate terms of reference and meetings are well attended. The board acknowledges that the terms of reference of the audit committee need to be revised to bring them in line with the audit code of practice and is in the process of completing this work. Most members of the corporation serve on at least two committees, in addition to the main board, which keeps them well informed and speeds decision-making.

65 Corporation and committee meetings are well attended and members devote considerable time to their responsibilities. Members of the corporation work effectively with each other and with the college's senior managers. Governors

have confidence in the senior management of the college. The principal and other senior managers report regularly to the governing body on some aspects of students' performance and financial matters. Governors have recently established arrangements for setting and monitoring targets for students' retention and achievement. The board does not receive reports on the implementation of the policy on equal opportunities.

66 Governors make a positive contribution to strategic planning. The strategic plan and corporate objectives clearly reflect the college's mission. Governors are kept up to date with issues and developments in further education. However, initial induction to their work is too informal. The corporation recognises this in the self-assessment report and plans to establish a more systematic induction process.

67 Governors have not ensured that managers have provided them with sound data to aid their planning decisions and to enable them to monitor academic performance. The quality of some information regarding students received by governors is not sufficient to allow them to monitor some key aspects of the college's performance. These weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report and have been recognised for some time. The audit committee has discussed reports on these systems from the college's auditors.

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Management

Grade 3

68 Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, the report underestimated weaknesses relating to student information and overestimated strengths relating to financial management.

Key strengths

- senior management with clear sense of purpose
- good communications and an open and consultative management style
- involvement of staff in strategic and operational planning
- good working relationships between managers and staff
- productive external links and collaboration with a wide range of partners
- good format of management accounts

Weaknesses

- inaccurate ISR data presented for inspection
- failure to provide reliable information about students to inform governors' and managers' decision-making and to enable accurate monitoring of students' performance
- slowness to resolve weaknesses in management information
- inadequate central monitoring of students' attendance
- the lack of formal monitoring of management accounts by the senior management team

69 Following consultation with governors and staff, a new management structure was introduced in September 1998. Inspectors

agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the roles of managers at all levels in the college are well defined and documented through job descriptions and organisational charts. Staff welcome the open and consultative management style. However, inspectors found that some staff are still unsure of the distinct and separate roles of some managers.

70 The information about students held by the college's management information system is unreliable. This major weakness was identified in the college's self-assessment report. The college is unable to provide reliable information on student attendance, retention and achievement to inform management decisions and enable accurate monitoring of students' performance. Attendance registers, which act as the source of much of this information, do not always identify whether a student is absent, has withdrawn or has transferred to another course. The absence of reliable information on students is a source of frustration to staff who are often unable to undertake systematic analysis of trends of students' achievements or to monitor achievements and retention. Middle managers rely heavily on their own records. Not all of these were found to be accurate by inspectors.

71 At the last inspection in 1994, inspectors identified the need for further work in order to develop a fully effective management information system. Weaknesses have also been identified by both internal and external auditors. The college has been slow to take effective action. In 1998, new staff have been appointed to address the problem. Curriculum directors have been provided with administrative officers whose job is to help resolve inaccuracies in management information and relieve the pressure of administration from teachers. A working group has been set up to monitor students' progress. At the time of the inspection, formal action-planning had just begun.

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72 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The finance team includes two qualified accountants and an appropriate number of experienced staff. The college has experienced financial difficulties in the past, but forecasts improvements over the next year. Performance indicators have been set to monitor solvency in respect of 1998-99 and these will be reported in the monthly management accounts. The format of management accounts is good and the inclusion of performance indicators will improve them further. Although the principal, director of finance and information, and the financial controller review the management accounts before they are submitted to governors, the senior management team has not to date formally reviewed the management accounts at its meetings. The college's financial regulations are not up to date. The work of the internal audit service substantially complies with audit standards.

73 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is effective communication across the college. Senior managers have a clear sense of purpose and they attach considerable importance to communicating effectively with staff. Staff at all levels appreciate the efforts which managers make to keep them informed of developments within the college. A weekly staff newsletter gives information about college and further education sector developments. This is distributed to all staff and is well received. The role and membership of the academic board has been revised to encourage livelier debate of issues affecting the curriculum. The staff council acts as a consultative forum on general issues affecting staff such as accommodation, and terms of employment.

74 The strategic planning process is consultative. The college makes considerable effort to involve all staff within the college as well as organisations and individuals outside the

college. Within the broad targets set in the strategic plan, operational plans are produced by academic and cross-college areas for approval by senior staff and governors. The strategic plan sets out priorities, includes operating statements and identifies those responsible for implementation. As the college acknowledges in its self-assessment report, the use of coherent market research has not been a strong feature of strategic planning to date, although it is improving.

75 Suitable policies and procedures have either been introduced or updated for most areas of work. Responsibilities for implementing and monitoring policies are generally understood, but have not always been put into practice. A number of working groups have been established to improve policy implementation and monitoring. For example, a working group is reviewing the college's equal opportunities policy and practice with a view to developing a more systematic and active approach within the college. The college has productive working links with a range of partners in education and business, both locally and overseas.

Conclusions

76 The inspection team found the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report. However, they judged that the college had overestimated the quality of its teaching and learning. Different sections of the college took varying approaches to their assessment of students' achievements, particularly with regard to students' retention and completion rates. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements regarding students' success in examinations but, in general, the college gave insufficient weight to issues relating to students' retention. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded by the college in three out

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of five curriculum areas. In cross-college areas, inspectors agreed with the overall college judgements in two areas, but found that weaknesses had been omitted or understated in the other three.

77 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	15
19-24 years	10
25+ years	70
Not known	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	19
Intermediate	34
Advanced	45
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	337	967	17
Agriculture	48	4	1
Construction	0	603	8
Engineering	28	77	1
Business	205	1,305	19
Hotel and catering	103	72	2
Health and community care	248	125	5
Art and design	364	356	9
Humanities	491	2,136	33
Basic education	80	327	5
Total	1,904	5,972	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 18% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (September 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	120	49	2	171
Supporting direct learning contact	28	0	0	28
Other support	78	10	2	90
Total	226	59	4	289

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£9,268,000	£9,916,000	£9,226,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£17.50	£16.15	£16.61
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	68%	65%
Achievement of funding target	116%	127%	100%
Diversity of income	28%	27%	26%
Operating surplus	-£188,000	£240,000	£484,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

FEFC Inspection Report 10/99

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
January 1999**