

Hastings College of Arts and Technology

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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.*

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report. Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, Assessing Achievement. Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course*
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.*

Summary

Hastings College of Arts and Technology

South East Region

Inspected February 1998

Hastings College of Arts and Technology is a general further education college in East Sussex. Its self-assessment report was based on its already existing quality assurance procedures. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's judgements but considered that some weaknesses had been underestimated. At the time of the inspection, progress had been made in some areas in implementing action plans arising from the self-assessment process.

The college makes provision in all of the FEFC's programme areas of which five were covered in the inspection. It mainly offers specialised vocational courses ranging from foundation level to higher national diplomas. This diverse provision, combined with flexible attendance patterns, demonstrates the college's response to the varied needs of the local communities. The college is actively involved in the economic regeneration of Hastings. The college has built up a large amount of overseas work from which it gets a considerable income. Standards of teaching in most areas are good and programmes are well managed. There has been significant improvement in learning support for students, notably through the work of the study centre, since the last inspection. Students consider that the college provides a positive

atmosphere and pleasant environment in which to study and train. The quality of leadership and the sound management structure promote good working relations. The well-controlled quality assurance system has brought about demonstrable improvements. Financial management is a strength and governors exercise an effective role in this important aspect of their responsibilities. The good practice and innovative strategies for tackling poor retention and achievements in some areas should be adapted for use throughout the college. More reliable data are needed as a foundation for these improvements. The college should also address: the lack of involvement of governors in strategic planning and in the monitoring of the college's academic performance; the inadequate provision of study spaces in the library; the lack of central control over IT resources; and the limited access for students with restricted mobility. Inspectors recognise the severe constraints of the main campus which is located on an extremely steep hill.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	3	Support for students	2
Hotel and catering and leisure and tourism	2	General resources	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2	Quality assurance	2
Health and social care	2	Governance	3
Humanities	3	Management	2
Basic education	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Hastings College of Arts and Technology is a medium-sized general further education college. Its main campus is located at St Leonards-on-Sea. Other sites include a management centre and an international centre nearby, a residential conference centre in Battle and an adult education centre in Rye. The college aims to serve its local community (population 85,000) and to complement the work of the five 11 to 18 schools in the area and that of the sixth form college in Bexhill-on-Sea. It therefore offers a diverse range of specialist vocational courses in addition to its general education provision. It provides for all levels of ability up to higher national diploma level. Hastings has assisted area status.

2 Higher than average unemployment, and low average earnings mean that the college has an important role to play in helping people to return to education and training, and to increase opportunities for employment. The principal is the chair of the Hastings Regeneration Partnership and the college is involved in delivering a number of single regeneration budget projects. In 1996-97, the college reduced the fees of around 2,000 students. Outreach work involving the voluntary sector and other organisations to provide basic skills training, educational guidance and return to study programmes is an important feature of the college's work.

3 The college works closely with local industry. Through its enterprise unit and departmental work it earned almost £250,000 from local full-cost activities in 1996-97, in spite of the fact that the local economy consists mainly of small and medium-sized enterprises. The college has made successful bids for external project funding. These have allowed the college to engage in a number of innovative projects. The college has also obtained large contracts with the Sussex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for Jobskills training

and more recently with the Employment Service for New Deal.

4 In 1996-97 there were 2,179 full-time and 11,042 part-time enrolments. Forty-three per cent of full-time and 63 per cent of part-time students were female. The college has increased its recruitment of adult students over recent years; in 1996-97, 84 per cent of all students were adults. There are few students from ethnic minorities, and this broadly reflects the pattern of the local population.

5 The international department plays an important role in the life of the college. It is located in its own building in attractive grounds with sporting facilities and a nursery. It manages a large education and training contract for the United Arab Emirates. A residential centre in Bexhill-on-Sea houses many of the 600 United Arab Emirates students who participate in the contract. Some of this work is subcontracted to the private sector and to other further education colleges. The department also offers English as a foreign language (EFL) courses, consultancies and tailor-made programmes. In 1996-97, income from overseas work amounted to £2.7 million.

The college's aims are:

- to provide a quality education and training service which is responsive and accessible
- to increase learning opportunities to help people progress in their careers and to enrich their lives
- to meet the training needs of employers and to invest in excellence.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 2 February 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held in other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements on most of its programmes for the two years 1995-96 and 1996-97. Data for earlier years were incomplete. These were validated prior to the inspection against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected about two months before the inspection. Twelve inspectors and an auditor spent a total of 49 days on the inspection, observing 79 lessons, and examining students' work and college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students and employers.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 63 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 6 per cent were less than satisfactory. This compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1996-97 according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance during

the inspection was 76 per cent; this compares with an average of 73 per cent for general further education colleges recorded in the same report. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A level	2	5	1	1	0	9
GCSE	1	2	1	1	0	5
GNVQ	0	3	3	0	0	6
NVQ	5	16	9	1	0	31
Other vocational	5	11	10	2	0	28
Total	13	37	24	5	0	79

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

8 Inspectors observed 12 lessons and sampled all courses in this programme area. They confirmed the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report but found that weaknesses in students' achievements and retention were understated.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- the emphasis on meeting individual student's needs
- the quality of management and organisation
- a good working environment

Weaknesses

- the lack of an appropriate foundation programme
- poor retention of students
- poorly planned and excessive assessments
- the lack of targets and performance monitoring

9 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is good. Eleven out of 12 lessons were considered satisfactory or better. Teachers use methods which take account of individual students' needs. They have created a resource area and the majority of students' learning is achieved through projects and practical exercises drawn from this resource. Teachers are supportive of students both in and out of normal lesson times. Students have continuous access to facilities such as computers.

10 The standard of students' work, as demonstrated in their assignments, manufactured engineering systems and artefacts is good. Students display a sound knowledge of

engineering principles and practices.

Attendance is closely monitored but averages only 76 per cent. Many students leave courses early, particularly at the entry level. This weakness is partly explained by the fact that students are sometimes admitted to inappropriate programmes of study and are unable to cope with the demands of the course, even with additional support. While there was an overall improvement in students' achievements in 1997, pass rates are about average for the further education sector according to the engineering national survey. However, inspectors considered that these pass rates do not reflect the quality of teaching and learning nor of students' observed performance. They are the result of the department's underdeveloped assessment strategy which misses some assessment opportunities and often involves unnecessary duplication.

11 A range of courses and levels provides good opportunities for progression. However, there is no full-time foundation programme to provide an entry point for students who do not meet the normal entry criteria for other courses. The department is otherwise responsive to students' needs and often allows students to attend in irregular patterns to fit in with their personal commitments. A clear organisational structure defines staff roles. Most course documentation follows a common style. Course files are comprehensive and well maintained. Students are closely involved in the course review process. The curriculum area has only recently begun to monitor systematically its performance and set targets for improvement. As yet, these have had no impact on results. The self-assessment report failed to identify this weakness.

12 As the college recognises in its self-assessment report, the curriculum area is well resourced. There is good equipment for all programmes of study. There are no serious deficiencies. The accommodation is well maintained and cared for, and creates a

Curriculum Areas

pleasant working environment for staff and students. Teachers are experienced and their expertise and skills match the current curriculum offer. Technicians provide effective learning support.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
BTEC level 3 national diploma and certificate	Retention (%)	*	68	62
	Pass rate (%)	*	68	79
NVQ level 2/GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	*	70	72
	Pass rate (%)	*	48	65
BTEC level 4 higher national certificate	Retention (%)	*	75	68
	Pass rate (%)	*	92	87
All engineering courses	Retention (%)	*	69	66
	Pass rate (%)	*	62	75

Source: college data

**reliable data not available*

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering and Leisure and Tourism

Grade 2

13 The inspection included a sample of all the college's provision in this area. Inspectors observed 15 lessons. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning identified in the college's self-assessment report but thought that the significance of some of the weaknesses was understated.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- helpful feedback on students' written work
- good students' achievements and retention in hospitality and catering
- well-equipped specialist accommodation
- sound hygiene and safety practices
- management and teamwork at departmental level

Weaknesses

- high student absence in some classes
- absence of key skills in craft catering courses
- poor retention on some general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses
- the inappropriate content of the GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism programme

14 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the standard of teaching is good. Lessons are well planned. In some theory lessons, teachers used an appropriate variety of methods to secure the interest and participation of students. During practical catering sessions, students worked in a business-like manner. Teachers checked the progress of students frequently. They also

ensured that most students in a class contributed to the work. Students have good opportunities to develop key skills within GNVQ courses. A learning support officer has been appointed to support this initiative, but it does not yet extend to craft catering courses.

15 Students' written work is of a variable standard. Helpful comments by teachers encourage students to improve their performance. In GNVQ programmes, detailed feedback forms are used. Students' portfolios are generally well presented and provide a clear record of their progress. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that hospitality and catering students benefit from the many opportunities for assessment provided by the college's two restaurants. Teachers have high expectations of their students and set appropriate standards, particularly for the practical aspect of courses. As a strategy to improve retention, GNVQ course teams have rewritten assignments which students found daunting and overcomplex and broken them down into a series of component tasks. More frequent deadlines for the completion of the tasks provide opportunities for teachers to give more regular feedback. This has been effective in improving the motivation of less able students.

16 Achievement rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 and 3 craft courses in 1997 are well above the national average. In 1997, pass rates for the GNVQ advanced course in hospitality and catering were slightly above the national average but significantly below in GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism where numbers are small. Only 10 per cent of students achieved the NVQ level 2 travel skills in 1996 and 46 per cent in 1997; these are poor results. Significant numbers of students leave courses before they have achieved their qualifications, frequently to take up relevant employment. This is particularly so in NVQ travel skills programmes. This trend has prompted the college to modify its work experience policy.

Curriculum Areas

The college has opened its own travel shop on site where students can fulfil some of their work experience requirements. The length of placements outside the college has been correspondingly reduced.

17 There are effective, harmonious working relationships in the department. Inspectors judged that in hospitality and catering, there has been significant improvement in the range of courses offered since the last inspection, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. NVQ catering courses are now well established at levels 1, 2 and 3. Students follow a variety of individual learning programmes with flexible start and finish times. NVQ level 2, food and drink service is offered to all full-time catering students, including those on GNVQ advanced. However, recruitment has been consistently low on all GNVQ programmes. Catering programmes are demonstrably better organised,

more interesting and provide a greater variety of activities for students than leisure and tourism where low numbers prevent much of the vocational activity normally associated with these courses. Consequently, students on these courses receive a narrow range of experiences.

18 Teachers are appropriately qualified and many have good industrial experience. Teaching accommodation is of a consistently high standard. A new travel information office is managed by the college. Students have good access to modern computers and appropriate base rooms. There is insufficient locker space for some students.

Examples of students' achievements in hotel and catering and leisure and tourism, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced hospitality/catering	Retention (%)	*	*	82
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	82
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	Retention (%)	*	100	50
	Pass rate (%)	*	71	50
NVQ level 3 patisserie/confectionary	Retention (%)	*	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100
NVQ level 2 food preparation and cooking	Retention (%)	*	*	94
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	91
NVQ level 2 food and drink service	Retention (%)	*	85	87
	Pass rate (%)	*	95	100
NVQ level 2 travel skills	Retention (%)	*	10	56
	Pass rate (%)	*	10	44
C&G 706 level 2 cooking for the catering industry	Retention (%)	*	60	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	50	*

Source: college data

*no data available

Note: C&G 706 was replaced by NVQ level 2 food preparation and cookery in 1997

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 2

19 Inspectors observed 12 lessons sampling a wide range of courses and modes of attendance. They considered that the college's self-assessment report had overstated some of the strengths of this provision and omitted some of its weaknesses

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- well-planned assessment system
- work-based learning
- good standard of practical work
- active involvement of employers
- management at curriculum area and course level

Weaknesses

- retention and achievements on some courses
- high use and turnover of part-time staff
- insufficient attention to key skills

20 There is much good teaching on most programmes. Teachers set clear objectives and regularly review the main learning points, although lesson plans and schedules of work do not always record these. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is a well-planned assessment system which ensures that students manage their own learning through detailed action-planning supported by their tutors. Tutors work well together, complementing each other's skills. In some lessons, teachers did not make full use of the available learning materials and multimedia facilities to provide work which extended or challenged students. In a minority of lessons, teachers failed to check enough whether students were learning. The integration of key skills with programmes is

underdeveloped. Tutors ensure that students carry out practical work competently in accordance with safe working practices. Well-organised work-based learning is regularly monitored by staff. Employers regularly support events and other curriculum-related activities.

21 The standard of work in students' portfolios is appropriate and tutors keep accurate records of students' progress. Tutors correct both spelling and grammar on students' work in accordance with the sector's marking policy and guidelines for tutors. Students' progress against targets is reviewed regularly to encourage the completion of both assessments and assignments. Students' attendance and time-keeping are not good. The area has introduced a clear attendance monitoring system with daily checks and a six-weekly progress report, which is reviewed by the director. While there are some good students' achievements, for example, NVQ level 2 hairdressing and level 3 beauty therapy, pass rates and retention are variable. However, a significant majority of students progress into employment in their field of study or into other further education programmes.

22 The area offers a wide range of day and evening courses in a variety of modes of attendance. Students participate in many extra-curricular activities and in regional and national competitions. The area is well managed, although the unreliability of some data on students' achievements and progression prevents effective planning. The curriculum area manager and programme co-ordinators work well together. Communication is good.

23 Accommodation and resources are generally appropriate. The resource base and the fitness suite provide additional facilities which are of good quality. Teachers participate in a rolling programme of commercial updating, mainly in their own time, and have been actively engaged in many staff development activities, a key strength agreed by inspectors. The high turnover of part-time and sessional teachers has

Curriculum Areas

increased the tutorial caseload of full-time teachers. Most teaching areas display students' work to good effect.

Examples of students' achievements in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 3	Retention (%)	*	*	70
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	86
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	*	*	73
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	82

Source: college data

**complete data not available*

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

24 The inspection covered foundation, intermediate and advanced vocational programmes in childcare, health studies and social care and included the observation of workplace assessments. Inspectors observed 14 lessons, and judged that the college's self-assessment report provided a comprehensive summary of strengths and weaknesses in this area.

Key strengths

- the wide range of courses
- the standard of teaching
- innovative curriculum developments
- support for individual students
- well-managed and organised provision

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievements on some courses
- second-year full-time students who have yet to complete first-year assignment work
- failure of some teachers to summarise learning for students
- the low stock of library books on nursing and health care

25 The health and social care area is well managed; staff work well together. Innovative curriculum developments include European links, an effective diagnostic system for tutorials and a vocational access course programme which is a model of good practice in inclusive learning. Links with employers are maintained by staff whose specific responsibility is to arrange and monitor work placements. The area provides good support for students. All those who enrol on full-time health and social care programmes complete an induction module

which ensures that they are making an informed and realistic choice of courses. Teachers are creative in adapting programmes to meet the needs of individual students. There is a well-developed tutorial system which is effective in identifying students who have learning difficulties or personal problems. Many students are helped by learning support staff who sometimes join lessons to offer support.

26 Inspectors judged teaching to be good, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Lessons are well planned; learning objectives are clear and shared with students. Teachers use a well-judged combination of methods to secure the interest and participation of students. Where possible, students are engaged in real work environments in the college. For example, they provide a reception service in the multi-skills centre and organise a parent and toddler group in a specially-equipped classroom. Discussion and activity-based approaches to learning are a notable strength in this area. In a few instances, however, teachers could draw out learning points more effectively from activities and ensure that students have noted them. Students are offered a good range of work experience placements and staff make regular visits. The development of key skills is promoted across all programmes, including the full-time NVQ programme. The skills are made vocationally relevant, so that students understand the importance of this work, a strength identified in the self-assessment report.

27 Students' retention and achievements on some programmes, particularly the higher national certificate in caring services, are good. In other programmes they are low, often because some students fall behind in their assignment work. The health and social care team is addressing these issues through programme planning and the tutorial system. These measures are already having a positive effect. Staff responsible for assessing students on childcare courses ensure that students meet the required professional standards of practice.

Curriculum Areas

28 Staff have a good range of skills and experience. They have undertaken updating and some actively maintain professional links, for example, by writing articles for relevant journals. Teaching rooms are pleasant and well equipped. Students make good use of a multi-skills centre located in the department. There are good stocks of books and periodicals for social work and social welfare but the range of books on nursing and health care is inadequate. Students make good use of learning materials that are available in the classroom.

Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	*	46	55
	Pass rate (%)	*	55	83
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	*	68	65
	Pass rate (%)	*	71	73

Source: college data

**reliable data not available*

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

29 The inspection included general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses in French, English language, English literature, sociology, history, law and government and politics. Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They judged that the college's self-assessment report omitted or understated some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the standard of teaching
- the quality of course materials
- good pass rates at GCSE level
- accommodation and resources

Weaknesses

- the tutorial programme
- poor attendance
- poor retention
- the decline in GCE A level pass rates

30 The college provides a wide range of humanities subjects through the departments of adult and community education and of business and general studies. Both departments are headed by directors. The larger business and general studies department provides GCE A levels in humanities and social sciences. Course management is not always effective but the department is imaginative in managing minority subjects, for example, languages, within full-time and part-time provision. The department does not set clear performance targets. The department of adult and community education offers a small number of GCSE and Open College Network accredited language classes. These provide progression opportunities for students from basic skills and leisure programmes which are taught in four local community centres.

Both departments are well resourced with audio-visual equipment and other teaching aids and materials. Accommodation is good and well cared for.

31 Inspectors agreed that the standard of teaching is good. Teachers plan their lessons carefully. Aims and objectives are clear and are shared with students. Some course materials developed by individual tutors are of high quality, particularly in law and access courses.

32 Students' average attendance is low at only 67 per cent and some students are frequently late. The monitoring of students' attendance is prompt and rigorous in the department of adult and continuing education, but in the department of business and general studies there is a lapse of three weeks before action is taken. This problem is compounded by the lack of a systematic tutorial programme on most courses. A key weakness in this area, not identified in the self-assessment report, is the lack of effective differentiation in teaching and learning to take account of the differing needs and abilities of students in some classes. To ensure economically viable group sizes, full-time and part-time students of different abilities and commitment, who are at different stages of a particular course, are brought together in one class. The difficulties of managing teaching and learning and monitoring students' progress which result from this policy are underestimated.

33 Most students work to an appropriate level in their lessons and much of their assessed work is of a good standard. The quality of marking and teachers' comments is variable, although grammatical errors were generally corrected. In 1996, the overall pass rate for GCE A level and GCSE subjects was above the national average for general further education colleges. However, in 1997, the overall GCE A level pass rate fell by more than 25 per cent to well below the national average. GCSE pass rates exceeded the national averages for general further education colleges in 1997. Retention continues

Curriculum Areas

to be a key weakness in this programme area.
Progression from the access to humanities programme is good with 18 out of the 23 students who completed the course going on to higher education.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A levels	Retention (%)	*	48	33
	Pass rate (%)	*	81	54
GCSE	Retention (%)	*	40	34
	Pass rate (%)	*	72	63

Source: college data

**reliable data not available*

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 2

34 The inspection covered provision for young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including key skills and vocational access programmes for full-time students and part-time specialist programmes for adults. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the department's self-assessment report, but judged that a few weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- the range of accredited courses
- opportunities within the vocational access course to experience work in different areas
- imaginative teaching, particularly on adult courses
- good students' achievements
- sound management

Weaknesses

- insufficient educational focus and achievable targets in individual learning plans
- insufficient differentiation in lesson plans and teaching
- too little attention paid to key skills
- a lack of opportunity for vocational access students to join full-time vocational courses

35 The quality of teaching is generally good. Teachers know their students well; they plan a range of activities to ensure that students understand the work and provide good guidance for classroom work. However, plans and teaching methods do not consistently take account of the individual learning needs of the

students and, in some lessons, tasks are not effectively differentiated to facilitate small steps of learning, a weakness underestimated in the self-assessment report. Specialist subject tutors are not always effectively briefed about students' learning needs, particularly with respect to key skills. The current format and content of individual learning plans do not help staff or students in this regard. Some teachers do provide differentiated tasks to suit the individual abilities of students. In an information technology (IT) lesson, for example, all students were working on the same piece of text, yet the requirements for editing and presentation were subtly different for each. In lessons students show industry and concentration. Teachers have respect for students and treat them as adults, frequently linking teaching points to significant factors in students' lives, such as personal preferences for food, sports or pastimes. Teachers are sensitive to the personal needs of students. As a result of the support and encouragement they receive, many students make good progress.

36 The quality of most students' work is satisfactory. Students try hard to organise their work sensibly, although some still struggle with literacy and presentation skills, for example, when they are practising the completion of application forms for employment. Records of the progress made towards achieving qualifications are rigorously linked to portfolio requirements. The intermediate steps are not always recorded. Students make satisfactory progress in lessons and achieve well on accredited courses. In 1997, 27 out of 28 students obtained the Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network bronze award and all six students entered for the bronze/silver award were successful.

37 Changes to the organisation of this area since the last inspection have resulted in more effective management, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. There is now a well-qualified, skilled and co-operative team of

Curriculum Areas

teachers. Lines of management and reporting procedures are generally clear. Some part-time staff are not fully conversant with procedures, for example, on how to check students' attendance. Although the curriculum is broad and varied, opportunities for individual students to join full-time vocational courses are few.

38 Resources are satisfactory. Rooms are generally of good size and well maintained, and have excellent examples of students' work and activities on display. Inspectors agreed that the use of areas such as the hairdressing salon, the training kitchen and the multi-skills workshop is a strength. In adult work, the provision of a new base room and the refurbishment of others are a positive incentive to learning and, as a result, retention is high. Most students make good use of IT to present their work. Sometimes, however, opportunities are lost to make useful links between subjects. For example, students could have used their graphics skills when they were designing containers and labels as part of an art option.

Examples of students' achievements in basic education, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network bronze	Retention (%)	*	*	85
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	97
Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network bronze/silver	Retention (%)	*	*	85
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100
Adults with learning difficulties	Retention (%)	*	*	93
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	+

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

+results not published

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

39 Inspectors judged that the college had overstated some strengths and omitted some weaknesses in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the positive atmosphere created for students
- the joint working of central support services and departments
- the effective planning and delivery of learning support
- the work of the tutor development group
- the support for international students

Weaknesses

- the poor guidance and tutorial practice in a few areas
- the small number of students assessed for basic skills
- the arrangements for remedying weaknesses in tutorial practice

40 The college has addressed the issues raised in the previous inspection in 1994. The central support services and departments now work together more effectively to provide good support for students. Students consider the atmosphere created for them to be the most positive feature of the college.

41 Links with local schools are productive. Well-attended open days and 'taster' days, and some entrepreneurial partnerships with local shops to raise the awareness of young people, ensure that accurate information about the college's vocational provision is available to those of statutory school-leaving age. Publicity about part-time courses is good. Guidance provided in centres away from the college's main sites has been successful in encouraging an increasing number of people not normally

participating in further education to enrol on courses. Impartial advice and guidance are available in the guidance centre and are always offered to those applicants who are clearly undecided. This has led to a significant number of students starting courses different from those they originally intended to follow, or changing courses when they discover that the programme is not suitable for them. However, the limited information provided in advance to students about some courses fails to indicate the demands that courses will make and this sometimes leads to students leaving the college.

42 On many courses, such as those in art and design and hairdressing and beauty therapy, induction programmes are imaginatively designed. They combine an experience of the learning methods to be used with an introduction to college facilities, as well as establishing students' starting points. On a few courses, induction is a tedious experience for students, whose abiding memory is one of completing endless forms and of aimless treks in crocodile file around the college.

43 Good tutorial practice can be found in all departments. Inspectors observed some tutorials of outstanding quality with individual students in health and social care and hospitality and catering. Support for international students is well planned and effective, and valued by these students. The tutor development group has reinforced the principles underpinning good tutorial practice with the production of a useful tutorial handbook. Regular meetings of the group have brought about more consistent practice. The college acknowledges in its self-assessment report that some tutorial practice for part-time students is not effective but does not identify some poor practice in tutorials for full-time students which does not meet the minimum entitlements stated in the college charter. The status/seniority of some tutor co-ordinators prevents them from carrying out their role effectively.

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44 The college has achieved the Basic Skills Agency award for its work in assessing students' basic skills. Staff in the study centre have been the prime movers in the development of learning support. Inspectors agreed with the college in regarding the study centre as a significant strength. Learning programmes for individual students are planned meticulously and a variety of methods have been introduced to meet the needs of an increasing number of students. Assessments have been adapted to take account of the nature of the courses. Joint working with teachers has resulted in improved attendance and retention rates on some courses. Monitoring of students' progress through to the completion of their negotiated learning support programme is thorough. College-wide assessment of basic skills is currently restricted to students undertaking courses at intermediate level, but the college intends to extend this to all students in 1999. Not all who need help make use of the resources available, but the study centre reaches many students whose basic skills have not been assessed.

45 Good teamwork has enabled the student services to cope effectively at a time of staff shortages. Services are generally good and, in most cases, are well recorded. Staff have good links with external agencies to ensure that students can be referred for external help where appropriate. Financial help is sought by a large number of students. Management of the various funds available is efficient and sensitively administered. The college is effective in helping students to find accommodation. The college does not have a counsellor nor data on the extent of use by students of local facilities. There is a service level agreement with the careers service which takes full account of the needs of the college. The college makes good use of the careers adviser's expertise. The college is working closely with the careers service on the 'commitment to careers' initiative. This relationship ensures that students receive effective guidance for the next steps in their careers.

General Resources

Grade 2

46 Inspectors considered that the college had not identified all the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of its general resources.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and pleasant accommodation
- range of specialist vocational workshops and laboratories
- ratio of computers to students
- the new multimedia facility
- management information system networked to all managers and teachers
- two crèches at different locations

Weaknesses

- access for students with restricted mobility
- no central management of computing resources
- the low number of study spaces in the library
- recreational and sports facilities

47 The college is located on seven sites in the south-east of the county between Bexhill in the west and Rye in the east. The main campus, at St Leonards-on-Sea, is located on a steeply sloping site in a conservation area close to the sea. There are numerous buildings of various styles and ages. The largest, a tower block, was built in the mid 1960s and the oldest is a grade II listed terrace of large Victorian houses. Additional teaching and administrative accommodation, the library and refectory, were built during the 1970s and 1980s. A significant amount of accommodation is devoted to specialist laboratories and workshops. As the demand for courses has changed, the college

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has adapted its accommodation to meet new needs. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the accommodation is well maintained and fit for purpose. The very steep access roads and design of the buildings makes access difficult for students with restricted mobility. Only one building, the tower block, has a lift. There is little parking space for staff in the college grounds and none for students.

48 In 1993, the college bought St Saviour's, a former boarding school for girls, in St Leonards-on-Sea. This is used mainly by the international department and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The interior of the main building is gradually being refurbished to a high standard. A crèche that gives priority to the children of students and provides work experience for care students is also located on this site. The college leases two floors of an old school building in Hastings and also runs a second crèche in its grounds. Although this accommodation is of poor quality, the building is ideally situated to serve the needs of the large population in the east of Hastings. Four further sites are used for adult education. The college has sufficient accommodation to meet current and expected demands, although it plans to increase the size of its learning resource centre.

49 Resources for IT are not managed centrally. A computer centre houses 243 machines on two floors, and management of these is shared between a centre manager and a teaching department. Each teaching department has developed its own computer resources independently of the others, with independent departmental networks. The college has a total of 374 computers available for students' use. This gives a ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of approximately 1:7. The college management information system is networked with 80 terminals located in all managers' offices and most teachers' staff rooms. The college did not identify the strengths and weaknesses associated with the college's computing resources.

50 The library has been expanded to include a multimedia centre. The library area is small but the recent addition of mobile bookstocks has improved the use of the space available. The 25,000 books provide an adequate, if ageing, resource for most subject areas. However, provision across subjects is uneven, a weakness identified in the college's self-assessment report. The annual library budget of £35,000 is good. The library is augmented by collections of books, technical literature and resource material held in each department. The library subscribes to about 150 journals, and has an extensive range of video and audio tape material. Thirty networked computers with facilities for CD-ROM and connections to the internet have considerably improved the information available to teachers and students. The learning resources manager maintains good links with course teams and attends their meetings when new courses are being discussed to ensure that resources are available to meet the new need.

51 Staff accommodation is generally good, although teachers' staff rooms have inadequate storage space. Most staff rooms have at least one computer terminal. There are few social and recreational facilities for students on the main site, a weakness not fully recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The student refectory is used also as a meeting and social area. A small area above the refectory has a television and vending machine. Adjacent to this area is the student union office and games room. Although the international centre has better facilities, there are too few sporting facilities. There is a lack of sporting facilities and the student union hires football pitches in Hastings for matches.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

52 The self-assessment process has made good use of the quality assurance procedures in the college. A judgement from outside the

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college was provided by another principal and a college governor. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and is well referenced to the solid evidence provided by course and sector quality reviews, classroom observation, and the appraisal system.

Key strengths

- a clear and comprehensive framework for self-assessment and quality assurance
- substantial improvements of the system since the last inspection
- staff's understanding of the relationship between quality improvement and overall college performance
- clear student entitlements, and appropriate channels for comments or complaints from students
- good staff development arrangements, linked to strategic planning and staff appraisal

Weaknesses

- centrally-set targets and monitoring which are out of step with procedures in departments
- little evidence of governors' interest in a comprehensive and rigorous system of performance review
- little commitment in some departments to aspects of quality improvement
- unclear lines of responsibility for overall performance review

53 There is a generally strong commitment to quality improvement in the college, affirmed in the mission statement, and supported by clear, simple procedures. These procedures are carefully monitored, and have resulted in significant improvements since the last inspection. Termly reviews are conducted against set themes, with standard agendas, and

take account of well-analysed surveys of students' opinions.

54 Performance indicators are used to manage progress achieved against funding and enrolment targets, and are regularly monitored. While this process has resulted in a sharper focus on student retention, and ways of improving it, there is not the same clarity about target-setting for students' achievements. Centrally-produced data and targets are not yet trusted by course managers, and data collection systems are not sufficiently consistent or rigorous to support quality reviews at departmental level. Recent attempts by the college to analyse students' achievements in relation to their previous attainments have not been detailed enough to provide a reliable assessment of 'added value'.

55 Quality assurance procedures cover all aspects of the college's work. Some service departments have started their reviews only recently, but have attempted to set service standards. The college has reviewed employers' opinions of college services by means of a small survey, a focus group, and the evaluation of customised provision. Responses are generally positive. Due regard is paid to the reports of external verifiers. Useful arrangements exist to improve the consistency of internal verification arrangements.

56 There is some confusion about how departmental reviews are reported at the highest executive level in the college. The senior management team reviews the outcomes of departmental reviews, but considers only summaries of the reviews from which most of the detail has been removed. A quality assurance group, constituted from the academic members of the senior management team, also reviews the outcomes of the quality assurance process once a year. This year, the process has been overtaken by the production of the self-assessment report which was overseen by a quality audit group which included a governor and the principal of another college. It is

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intended that the audit group will remain in place. The titles and the terms of reference of these three groups with an oversight role are unclear.

57 There is a charter for students which is published as a separate document which sets out entitlements and is also reprinted in the student diary. There is an effective system of student course representatives. Students are actively involved and understand the purpose of course review. They expressed confidence that issues raised in course reviews would produce a response. There is a clear complaints procedure. Complaints are well documented. Responses are normally prompt and are reviewed by the chair of governors. In addition, a suggestion box has recently been provided.

58 Quality assurance for self-financing work is rigorous, especially in respect of some large overseas contracts, where stringent compliance, rapid feedback, and prompt remedial action are expected. There is little carry-over of the lessons learned in this context to the rest of the college's work and the self-assessment report makes too little of its potential for quality assurance in the college as a whole. Some areas are not rigorous in their application of quality assurance principles and procedures, and their staff are too ready to blame students' abilities or social conditions for their failure to do well. While contract arrangements for collaborative provision are in place, those relating to one centre, to which attention was drawn in the last inspection, have only recently been finalised.

59 Staff development arrangements are good, and connect well with both strategic planning and the appraisal system. The latter is well established; it was sensitively introduced, and is well regarded by staff. Teaching observations have informed the self-assessment report, staff development plans, and quality reviews. In 1995-96, a successful TEC-funded project provided about 10 staff with the opportunity for short placements in industry. Teachers were

able to prepare projects and plan work experience for students, and develop links with college courses, as well as update their knowledge of industry. There have been few such placements since this project finished. The college achieved Investor in People status in August 1995.

Governance

Grade 3

60 Inspectors judged that the college's assessment of governance overstated some strengths and omitted significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- governors' expertise and experience
- governors' commitment to the development of the college as a diverse and entrepreneurial institution
- the good working relationship with senior managers
- the effective oversight of the college's financial health

Weaknesses

- governors' lack of appreciation of the full range of their duties and responsibilities
- little involvement in strategic planning
- failure to review rigorously the college's performance in areas other than finance
- an underdeveloped self-evaluation process

61 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. Compliance with

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some areas of generally accepted best practice could be improved. The clerk to the corporation is also the assistant principal with overall responsibility for finance. Separate job descriptions apply to each role and there is no indication that fulfilling these two roles has given rise to any conflicts of interest. Although there is no comprehensive set of standing orders covering the conduct of meetings, the clerk ensures that the corporation and its committees are well supported administratively. Minutes provide a clear record of the business of the corporation and committees, and are produced within appropriate timescales. The corporation has developed a comprehensive register of interests which has been completed by all members and budget holders within the college.

62 The corporation board has a membership of 16, comprising nine independent members, one TEC member, two co-opted members, two staff members and one student member. The principal is also a member. At the time of the inspection, there were two vacancies. There is no formal search committee. The personnel and finance committee of the corporation is charged with recruiting new members. A person specification and job description have been produced to assist governors in this task. Vacancies are generally filled through the use of informal networks established by the chairman, principal and other members. The corporation recently decided to appoint mentors for new members but the role of the mentor is still unclear. While no formal assessment of the skills needed by the corporation has been undertaken, current members provide a range of expertise and experience which broadly takes account of the profile of the college's work. However, there is no member, apart from the principal, with an educational background. Most governors state that they find it difficult to commit time to the college and attendance at meetings averages 70 per cent. Nevertheless, members support college events and activities whenever possible and give their full backing to the development of the college as a diverse and

entrepreneurial institution. Working relationships between members and senior managers are good and are based upon a high degree of confidence and trust. The appraisal of the principal and senior postholders is based on the achievement of agreed targets.

63 Governors have a clear understanding of their financial responsibilities and devote a considerable amount of time to them at corporation and committee meetings. They are less clear about other responsibilities. They do not fully appreciate their key role in determining the educational character of the college and they rely heavily upon the guidance of the principal which they value highly. Members receive information about key aspects of the college's work in a sporadic fashion, both within and outside the cycle of corporation and committee meetings. However, there are no arrangements which allow them to monitor systematically student enrolments, retention, achievements and destinations as part of their formal business. The opportunity to review and evaluate the college's non-financial activities was an area with which members expressed least satisfaction in their self-assessment questionnaire.

64 Governors have little involvement in the strategic planning process and were not aware of any mechanisms by which they could, or should, be monitoring the achievement of key objectives other than financial ones. Members also lack a clear view of the strategic direction of the college. Each year, towards the end of the planning cycle, members of the corporation, the principal and senior staff take part in a one-day strategic planning workshop. Small groups, led by staff, focus on individual aspects of the college. The strategic plan and financial forecast are subsequently approved by the corporation.

65 Training for governors is underdeveloped and is confined to activities within the college with an emphasis on operational and technical matters. Governors have not attended external training events. They were invited to evaluate

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their own performance by means of a questionnaire. These were completed by only half of the members and the results used as a basis for the governance section of the self-assessment report. It is not clear that any action has followed from the issues raised through this exercise.

Management

Grade 2

66 Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report provides a reliable appraisal of management in the college.

Key strengths

- inspirational leadership
- effective management and good communication
- management of the strategic planning process which involves staff at all levels
- systematic monitoring and review of college-wide targets
- sound financial management
- the strong links with external agencies including overseas contacts

Weaknesses

- contingency planning to support the strategic plan
- underdeveloped setting of targets at departmental level
- communications with part-time staff
- the management information system

67 The college benefits from strong leadership. The executive group consists of the principal, vice-principal (human and physical resources) and assistant principal (finance and administration). There is a senior management team of 14. There is a clear management structure. Directors manage departments which are divided into sectors, each headed by a sector

manager. The directors are assigned cross-college roles to enhance their corporate perspectives. The executive group, senior management and departmental teams meet fortnightly. Detailed job descriptions and committee terms of reference clearly define managerial duties and responsibilities. Regular sector and course team meetings are held during a common cross-college time.

68 The college is well managed. A firm commitment to serving the needs of the local community underpins the well-established links with the Hastings Regeneration Partnership, Sussex Enterprise TEC, local schools, and many local companies through an active business luncheon club. A college enterprise unit successfully promotes full-cost training to local companies. Planning is informed by prudent use of primary and secondary market research and intelligence and has resulted in steady growth since incorporation. The college's international department has established strong links with many overseas bodies which generate significant income for the college.

69 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college is in a sound financial position with FEFC-funded income accounting for only approximately 50 per cent of total income. Key financial ratios are all ahead of the sector averages. The budgetary allocation procedure is comprehensive, understood by staff and considered to be equitable. It is clearly linked to the strategic plan. Monthly monitoring is carried out by the executive group and variances from budget rigorously investigated. Summary reports are sent to all members of the personnel and finance committee monthly. Contingency planning needs to be undertaken to support the strategic financial forecast and underpin the variability of non-FEFC funded income. The college's finance team is appropriately skilled and resourced. The college's internal and external auditors have identified no significant

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weaknesses in the systems of financial control. The college's average level of funding for 1997-98 is £18.63 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £16.72 per unit.

70 Staff are actively involved in the strategic planning process. Comprehensive departmental development plans are used by the executive group to formulate the college's strategic plan. The process incorporates the systematic monitoring and review of performance against college-wide targets. However, in its self-assessment report, the college recognises that the setting of targets at departmental level requires further development. The college further recognises the need to complete the integration of its management information system to provide a more reliable networked service to all managers and to ensure consistency of data at central and local level.

71 The college has a communication policy. A regular staff newsletter and closed-circuit television are used to keep staff informed of college issues as they arise. A procedure exists for staff to bring any issues of concern to the attention of the corporation. Electronic mail facilities are available within all vocational departments. A suggestion box system and surveys are used to monitor the effectiveness of the policy. While communication generally is deemed by staff to be good, the college identifies in its self-assessment report improving communication with part-time staff as a management priority.

72 Human and physical resources are effectively and efficiently deployed. All teaching staff have adopted new contracts. Staffing costs account for 55 per cent of income. Procedures are in place for the collection, reporting and analysis of space utilisation. This information is recorded in the college's detailed accommodation strategy.

73 The academic board has a broad and representative membership. It receives reports from cross-college task groups covering, for

example, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, staff development, key skills, quality assurance, resource-based learning and equal opportunities policies. It provides timely advice for the college's executive group. This arrangement works well. The equal opportunities task group formed in response to the college's first inspection report ensures that the policy is implemented and monitored. All staff are required to declare their knowledge of the college's comprehensive health and safety policy. A health and safety manager reports to the executive group and periodic reviews are undertaken.

Conclusions

74 Although this was the college's first self-assessment report, the inspection team found that it was an effective document for planning the inspection. The findings of the inspection team were substantially in agreement with those of the college's self-assessment report. However, inspectors found that data on students' achievements were not consistently reliable and that the college had underestimated some weaknesses. This resulted in the overgenerous grading of two curriculum areas. Otherwise, the college's judgements were considered to be rigorous and sound. At the time of the inspection, progress had been made in some areas in implementing action plans arising from self-assessment.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	4
16-18 years	14
19-24 years	12
25+ years	65
Not known	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	19
Intermediate	18
Advanced	19
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	41
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	262	990	13
Agriculture	0	23	1
Construction	249	547	8
Engineering	149	241	4
Business	167	799	10
Hotel and catering	128	205	3
Health and community care	252	546	8
Art and design	146	1,502	17
Humanities	277	2,688	31
Basic education	5	516	5
Total	1,635	8,057	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	99	68	0	167
Supporting direct learning contact	40	0	2	42
Other support	130	0	0	130
Total	269	68	2	339

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£10,676,000	£11,758,000	£11,669,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£21.14	£19.72	£20.54
Payroll as a proportion of income	62%	58%	*
Achievement of funding target	100%	108%	*
Diversity of income	47%	46%	*
Operating surplus	-£242,000	-£29,000	*

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	70	136	105
	Average point score per entry	2.5	4.4	4.0
	Position in tables	bottom third	top third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	123	122	106
	Percentage achieving qualification	72%	72%	71%
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	84	65
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	37%	43%
	Position in tables	*	bottom 10%	bottom 10%

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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