

Hopwood Hall 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.

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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

Hopwood Hall College

North West Region

Inspected November 1998

Hopwood Hall College is a tertiary college in the metropolitan borough of Rochdale. The managers and staff produced a detailed self-assessment report in which judgements were well supported by evidence. The report was carefully considered by the corporation. A booklet specifying the key strengths and weaknesses went to everyone who works in the college. The self-assessment process is well established and rigorous, and draws on a reliable and comprehensive internal inspection system. It involves governors and all staff. Since the report was written, the college has made good progress in addressing many of the weaknesses it identified. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, but considered that it underestimated weaknesses in the retention of students.

The college offers courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. The inspection covered provision in six of these programme areas, and aspects of cross-college provision. The corporation, managers and staff have vigorously addressed all of the issues identified in the last inspection report. Governors play a full role in the life of the college. Senior managers provide

strong leadership and have successfully promoted teamworking. Careful business planning and rigorous performance review are closely linked to strategic planning. General accommodation and most specialist facilities are excellent. Arrangements for quality assurance are outstanding. Full-time students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. There are some pockets of low achievement and in all curriculum areas there are examples of low retention rates. The college should: continue working to improve retention and achievement rates; provide better support for part-time students; further develop its computerised management information system; and strengthen financial controls.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	2	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	1
Business	2	Quality assurance	1
Leisure and tourism	3	Governance	2
Health, social care and early years education	1	Management	2
Sociology, psychology and religious studies	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Hopwood Hall College is a tertiary college in the metropolitan borough of Rochdale. It opened in 1990 following a reorganisation of post-16 education in the borough. The college operates from two campuses. The Rochdale campus is in the town centre. The Middleton campus is five miles to the south of Rochdale centre, and is set in 75 acres of playing fields and landscaped gardens. Vocational courses are offered on both campuses; non-vocational courses are mainly provided at Rochdale.

2 Employment in Rochdale is dominated by engineering, retail and distribution businesses and by the service industries and the public sector. This pattern is typical of the north-west region. Job centre vacancies indicate a growing demand for skills in business and finance, health and social work, leisure, and wholesale and retail distribution. The college is adapting its courses accordingly. There are some 4,500 companies in the borough, 80% of which have fewer than 20 employees. Unemployment for Rochdale as a whole stands at 5.9%, which is slightly above the national average of 5.1%. In six of the borough's 20 wards, unemployment rates are well above this average, with rates which range between 9% and 14.7%. Rochdale has a population of 212,000, of whom 8% are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly Asian.

3 Hopwood Hall College operates in a highly competitive market, both for 16-year-old school-leavers and for adult students. Within a radius of 10 miles of the college there are four schools with sixth forms, two sixth form colleges, and four further education colleges. In Rochdale in 1997-98, 59.7% of pupils aged 16 entered full-time education, compared with 66% for England as a whole; 13% entered full-time employment. Attainment at the end of compulsory schooling in the borough is low; in 1998, 36.1% of pupils aged 16 achieved five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades at grade C or above, compared

with 46.3% for England as a whole. Of the college's students, 19% are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 52% are aged over 25.

4 The college offers courses in all Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas, from foundation to higher national levels. These include: GCSE and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses at levels 1 to 4. The college is an associate college of Salford University, and has collaborative links with three other universities.

5 The college's executive team comprises the principal and four other senior postholders. Teaching and learning are managed through eight schools, each with a school manager. School managers and managers of service areas are supported by 40 programme team leaders.

6 The mission of the college is to 'provide quality education and training in a challenging but caring and supportive environment. All staff are committed to helping students to realise their full potential and achieve their personal, educational and employment goals'. Its strategic aims for 1998-99 are:

- to achieve the FEFC's aim of convergence by the year 2001
- to widen participation and help all students realise their full potential
- to become an 'inclusive learning' college which enables students to achieve their personal, educational and employment goals.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 23 November 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had considered information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted

Context

data on students' achievements for 1998 and corrections to individualised student record (ISR) data for 1996 and 1997. The corrected data and those for 1998 were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. Inspectors used the corrected ISR data in arriving at judgements, but this has not been included in tables. The college was told in September 1998 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors over a total of 44 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 87 lessons and tutorials, and examined students' work and college documentation. They met college governors, staff at all levels, and groups of students. They discussed the work of the college with a representative from Rochdale Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise.

8 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, 75% were rated good or outstanding, and 8% were less than satisfactory. This profile of grades compares very favourably with the national average for grade 1 and 2 lessons observed during 1997-98, but is slightly worse for grade 4 and 5 lessons.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	6	8	3	2	0	19
GCSE	2	2	2	2	0	8
GNVQ	3	10	5	0	1	19
NVQ	3	3	1	0	0	7
Other vocational	6	12	4	1	0	23
Other*	4	6	0	1	0	11
Total (No)	24	41	15	6	1	87
Total (%)	28	47	17	7	1	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*

*includes three tutorials

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9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Hopwood Hall College	11.6	80
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

Science and Mathematics

Grade 2

10 Inspectors observed 20 lessons in mathematics and science covering GCSE, GCE A level, GNVQ advanced level, and access to higher education. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but considered that the college had underestimated weaknesses in the retention of students.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning on advanced level courses
- high pass rates on advanced level courses
- suitably varied approaches to teaching in science
- detailed monitoring of students' progress
- well-motivated and attentive students
- a broad range of courses
- plentiful learning resources

Weaknesses

- examples of unsatisfactory teaching and poor achievements on intermediate level mathematics courses
- poor retention rates on most courses

11 Mathematics and science courses are provided in the college's centre for academic studies. As noted in the self-assessment report, courses offer progression routes for school-leavers and adults. For example, courses in mathematics at foundation and intermediate levels meet the needs of students for whom the GCSE is not an appropriate choice. Provision in mathematics and science is well managed. In science, there are clear policies, procedures and lines of communication which are understood and supported by staff. In both science and

mathematics there are regular team and course review meetings. Student representatives make a useful contribution to course review meetings in science.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that science teaching is good. Lessons are well structured, and include varied and appropriate activities such as demonstrations, group work, and the use of video films and worksheets. Teachers give clear explanations of scientific concepts and carefully define technical terms. Practical work is well organised and there is due attention to developing safe working practices. For example, as their first assignment, students on the GNVQ advanced science course carried out a safety inspection of the laboratories and submitted a written report to the college's managers. They successfully identified hazards and gained a thorough understanding of the need for safety at work. Students are set written work at frequent intervals. Teachers correct it thoroughly and give students appropriate feedback on the quality of their work. In GCSE science, a homework assignment was set at the end of a unit on forces and motion. This required students to recall the work covered and to work on examination questions. The assignment was well prepared and the questions were of an appropriate standard. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not question individual students to check their understanding. Students who work more quickly or slowly than others in the group are not helped to progress at their own pace.

13 The teaching of advanced level mathematics is a strength. A well-judged mix of activities enables students to profit to the full from lessons which may last for as long as three hours. Teachers place appropriate emphasis on the development of logical arguments and mathematical thinking. They frequently check students' understanding of basic principles and mark work carefully, providing specific action points to help students to improve their

Curriculum Areas

performance. There are examples of unsatisfactory teaching at intermediate level; these lessons have no clear purpose, the tasks set are undemanding, development of mathematical skills is insufficient and checks on students' understanding are limited. These weaknesses were not highlighted in the self-assessment report.

14 Examination pass rates are good at advanced level in both mathematics and science. In two of the last three years, pass rates in GCE A level mathematics exceeded 90%. In 1997 and 1998, pass rates in GNVQ advanced science were above the sector average of 63%. By contrast, the proportion of students who achieve grade C or above in GCSE mathematics is declining and in 1997 and 1998 it fell below 40%. Retention rates on most courses are poor. Only 42% of students who originally enrolled on two-year GCE A level courses completed them in

1998. The college's self-assessment report underestimated the weaknesses in the retention rates. Most students are well motivated, attentive and co-operative. Attendance rates at lessons observed were good in science, but below average in mathematics.

15 The teaching of science and mathematics is well resourced. Staff are well qualified and experienced. There is a plentiful supply of equipment. Funding is available to support new courses. Students have easy access to a learning resource base which contains computers and a good stock of books and other materials. The use of information technology (IT) as an aid to teaching and learning is developing quickly. Technicians provide the support needed for practical work in science. As noted in the self-assessment report, some laboratories are in need of refurbishment.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE mathematics	2	Expected completions	+	323	320
		Retention (%)	+	73	65
		Achievement (%)	+	35	30
GCSE sciences	2	Expected completions	225	133	137
		Retention (%)	74	70	68
		Achievement (%)	34	30	61
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	14	16	10
		Retention (%)	79	88	60
		Achievement (%)	45	80	67
GCE A level mathematics (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Expected completions	+	+	53
		Retention (%)	+	+	42
		Achievement (%)	+	+	95
GCE A level sciences (two-year courses)	3	Expected completions	+	+	186
		Retention (%)	+	+	42
		Achievement (%)	+	+	87

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
+data were inaccurate

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

16 The inspection covered courses in mechanical engineering, electrical and electronic engineering and automotive engineering. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed in almost all respects with the college's own assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

Key strengths

- well-organised lessons
- thorough monitoring of students' performance
- effective teamworking
- carefully maintained students' files
- range of appropriate courses
- well-designed laboratories and workshops
- high pass rates on most courses

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on many courses
- unpunctual students
- unsatisfactory work experience arrangements for GNVQ students

17 The college has developed a range of courses which successfully meets the changing learning and progression needs of students, employers and training providers in the north-west region. Courses are well organised and managed, and there are clearly defined procedures for maintaining the quality of provision and for supporting students. Students' progress and performance are systematically monitored through a timetabled weekly tutorial. In addition, a detailed programme of group activities helps students to understand the regulations, requirements and the aims of their respective course and the progression routes open to them if they

complete the course successfully. Course teams are small and staff are well motivated.

Communications are good, with frequent, minuted meetings which result in rigorously implemented action plans. These strengths were noted in the self-assessment report.

18 Most teaching is of a good standard. Lessons are well organised, and teachers vary their approaches in order to maintain students' interest and strengthen students' learning. In a manufacturing technology class covering the heat treatment and applications of aluminium and copper alloys, difficult concepts were effectively presented. The teacher used well-designed, multi-layered overhead projector slides to introduce the underlying principles. A carefully chosen video on the practical applications of the process helped to strengthen learning. After carefully directed questioning, students completed gapped notes. Time in lessons is not always well used. In a significant number of lessons, students who finished their work early were held back by having to wait for further instructions from the teacher.

19 Teachers relate the topics they cover to industrial practices and draw on their own experiences of work and on those of students. Practical activities are carefully planned, and students receive detailed guidance and instruction briefs. Teachers of mechanical engineering have designed an imaginative series of tasks involving the making of test piece components for a model heat engine. The purpose of the tasks is to enable students to acquire a carefully defined range of skills. When students have manufactured all of the test pieces to the specified quality standards, they assemble them and test the effectiveness of the engine. The exercise is popular with students and they find it interesting. In the motor vehicle workshop, students work on tasks which simulate practice in commercial garages. They are encouraged to compare the time they take to complete a task with typical commercial times, which are stored on a computer in the

Curriculum Areas

workshop. They conscientiously record the details of the work they have undertaken to use as evidence for assessment.

20 Not all full-time students have the opportunity to undertake work experience, a weakness which was identified in the self-assessment report. Students are not given sufficient encouragement to take up the work experience places which are available. In some instances, as on the full-time national diploma course, the number of students who opt for work experience is low. Students on GNVQ courses take part in simulated work experience in the college's workshops, but they do not have the opportunity to enhance their employment prospects through gaining experience with an employer.

21 In 1998, examination pass rates were in line with or better than the average for the sector. Some results were outstanding, such as those on the national certificate and diploma courses and the NVQ level 2 course. Retention data show that a significant number of courses across each of the years for which data are available have rates below the average for the sector. This weakness was identified in the college's self-assessment report. There are reliable systems for recording and reporting poor punctuality and attendance, and staff are making good use of the information from these in order to bring about improvements in student achievement and retention rates.

22 Teachers are appropriately qualified, and have relevant industrial and commercial experience. Opportunities for staff development include industrial secondments. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most specialist equipment is of a good standard. Some machines in the mechanical engineering workshop are outdated, though still serviceable. A plan for their replacement is being implemented. The workshops are impressive; they are well laid out, spacious and brightly lit. The recently remodelled and refurbished motor vehicle workshop provides an excellent learning environment.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ	1	Expected completions	+	52	48
		Retention (%)	+	79	71
		Achievement (%)	+	93	59
NVQ	2	Expected completions	+	+	87
		Retention (%)	+	+	45
		Achievement (%)	+	+	100
GNVQ	2	Expected completions	+	+	17
		Retention (%)	+	+	94
		Achievement (%)	+	+	69
Other vocational qualifications including C&G	2	Expected completions	103	120	125
		Retention (%)	76	80	73
		Achievement (%)	62	63	73
Other vocational qualifications including C&G	3	Expected completions	23	22	35
		Retention (%)	91	91	97
		Achievement (%)	48	47	93
BTEC national awards	3	Expected completions	+	53	87
		Retention (%)	+	72	67
		Achievement (%)	+	94	93

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
+data were inaccurate

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 16 lessons, covering courses in business, administration, and retail and distribution services, leading to NVQ, GNVQ, GCE A level and higher national certificate awards. The self-assessment report concentrated on teaching and learning and students' achievements and the inspectors agreed with its judgements.

Key strengths

- the responsiveness of the provision to a wide range of needs
- effective curriculum management
- well-organised teaching and learning
- the teaching of key skills as an integral part of the course
- above average examination pass rates on many courses
- well-organised work experience for full-time students

Weaknesses

- a minority of poorly taught lessons
- poor retention rates on full-time courses
- low pass rates on GNVQ advanced courses

24 The business school offers a very broad range of business courses, extending from entry level to higher level and professional courses. It provides modern apprenticeship training in administration and accounting and bespoke courses to meet the needs of local industry. The work of the school is spread across both of the college's campuses. It is managed efficiently and communications between staff are good. The six programme team leaders and the school manager meet once a week to discuss operational matters. Minutes and action points from their meetings are circulated to all staff.

Course review procedures are effective and result in the setting of demanding targets.

25 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that lesson planning and the organisation of teaching and learning are strengths. The majority of teachers use common schemes of work and have lesson plans which show aims, objectives, and teaching activities. In the majority of lessons, teachers use a variety of appropriate methods, including group work, group discussion and case studies. They use teaching aids effectively, and these include CD-ROMs, multimedia materials, and videos. For example, in a carefully organised retail and distribution lesson the teacher used a video to provide the underpinning knowledge needed by students to complete a small group assignment. They were required to solve logistical problems for a transport plan using a computerised journey planning package. Students worked enthusiastically and were highly motivated. In another lesson, students in a business skills workshop learned the rudiments of producing graphs and charts using a spreadsheet package. The teacher had structured the exercises in such a way that the more able students found them exacting and demanding. The students systematically recorded their progress in a well-designed booklet. In a minority of lessons, teachers failed to ensure that all students participated fully in appropriate learning activities. In these lessons, the teaching lacked excitement and variety and often students had to listen to teachers reading through handouts. Questioning was not aimed at individuals and many students failed to pay attention and concentrate on the lesson. The teaching and assessment of key skills are integral to GNVQ programmes. Students receive support in developing key skills through timetabled skills workshops, the content of which is carefully mapped against assignment requirements. Staff of the business school are now extending this good practice in relation to key skills into courses other than those leading to GNVQs.

Curriculum Areas

26 The quality of students' assessed assignments and other written work is good. Students pay close attention to the presentation of their work, and files and portfolios are neat and well maintained. Teachers return corrected work promptly and give students encouraging and detailed written feedback on their performance. Examination pass rates on a number of courses, such as higher national certificate and GNVQ intermediate level business, have shown steady improvement between 1996 and 1998, and are well above averages for the sector. On others, pass rates are unsatisfactory. In 1998, the pass rate on the GNVQ advanced business course was 39%, and on the certificate in administrative management course it was 33%. Most students on the GNVQ advanced business course who had failed to achieve a full qualification had completed their

portfolio evidence successfully but had failed external tests. Retention rates on many business courses are good or improving. In contrast, in 1998, the retention rate on the GNVQ advanced level business course was 56% and on the GCE A level business course it was 32%. These figures show a decline compared with previous years and they are well below the averages for the sector.

27 Teaching rooms are well maintained and clean, and all are equipped with audiovisual aids. Students are appreciative of the facilities and resources available to them in the newly completed learning resource base. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, the college does not provide full-time staff with sufficient opportunity to update their industrial experience.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Wordprocessing and text processing	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	+	+	386
		Retention (%)	+	+	96
		Achievement (%)	+	+	84
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Expected completions	73	52	33
		Retention (%)	77	77	73
		Achievement (%)	55	63	92
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	96	75	50
		Retention (%)	68	61	56
		Achievement (%)	37	42	39
NVQ administration	3	Expected completions	46	19	17
		Retention (%)	83	100	65
		Achievement (%)	100	50	82
GCE A level business	3	Expected completions	59	50	38
		Retention (%)	78	68	32
		Achievement (%)	53	53	100
Professional and management	3 and 4	Expected completions	104	126	136
		Retention (%)	79	87	95
		Achievement (%)	62	46	81

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
+data were inaccurate

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

28 The inspection covered GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced level and Association of British Travel Agents certificate courses offered within the school of tourism, sport and leisure. Sport was not inspected, though it was included in the self-assessment report for this curriculum area. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the report, but considered that these failed to cover weaknesses in retention and pass rates.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- the comprehensive planning of most lessons
- a well-resourced specialist learning base
- good progression opportunities for students

Weaknesses

- the poor recording and unsatisfactory assessment of key skills
- low examination pass rates
- low retention rates on the GNVQ advanced course
- superficial feedback to students on the quality of their written work

29 Leisure and tourism courses are based in the school of tourism, sport and leisure. The school offers full-time GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism at advanced, intermediate and foundation levels. There are part-time courses leading to the Association of British Travel Agents certificate and an NVQ course in travel services at level 2. A GCSE course in travel and tourism and an NVQ course at level 3 were withdrawn in 1998. Students on the GNVQ advanced have the opportunity to enrich their studies by following the Association of British Travel Agents certificate course, although few do

so. All full-time students are encouraged to study a language. They may also take short courses in sport. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that GNVQ students have good opportunities to progress to higher levels of study. Almost 50% of those students who completed their foundation or intermediate course successfully progressed to the next level. In 1997-98, over 40% of those who completed the GNVQ advanced course successfully progressed to higher education or other further education courses. Shortly before the inspection, there were considerable changes in the management and staffing of leisure and tourism courses. At the time of the inspection, it was too early to assess the full impact of these changes. Teachers and managers meet regularly. Comprehensive minutes are kept of meetings and these include clear action plans.

30 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of most teaching is good. The majority of teachers use a standardised scheme of work. Most lessons are well planned. Teachers use a variety of appropriate approaches, including whole-class discussions, group work, and brainstorming. They go to considerable lengths to assemble interesting and useful materials. Where possible, they draw on their own experiences of work and on the experiences of their students in order to enliven their lessons. For example, in a lesson on Spain as a tourist destination, the teacher started by asking students which towns and regions they had visited. The students then located major features on a map, checking their answers against information on a transparency. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, teachers have not done enough to ensure that key skills are an integral part of courses and that the criteria for their assessment are clearly identified. Briefings to students on how they should demonstrate key skills in assignments are vague and the feedback which teachers give students on their performance in key skills lacks detail.

Curriculum Areas

31 Students are responsive in class and work in a disciplined way. Increasing numbers of them are taking up opportunities to undertake work experience, though they are not necessarily required to do so. A small number of students have benefited from work experience abroad. Students are set assignments of an appropriate standard, but the written feedback they receive on their performance in these is often cursory and contains little guidance on how they should improve the quality of their work. Students' achievements in leisure and tourism in 1998 were below average for the sector. In 1997, the pass rate on intermediate leisure and tourism fell to 68% and in 1998, this fell further to 56%. In 1998, pass rates on the Association of British Travel Agents certificate course fell to 42%. Retention rates on most courses are below average for the sector. Retention on the GNVQ advanced course is particularly poor, at 42%. The significance of

poor retention and pass rates was underestimated in the self-assessment report. This year a system is being piloted to measure the value-added factor in students' achievements by comparing the GCE A level grades the students attain with those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE achievements. It is too early, however, to judge the effectiveness of this new system.

32 Most teaching accommodation is adequate. Access to computer equipment is good, though most students have little opportunity to become familiar with the software commonly used in the travel industry. The school has its own learning resource base, which students value. The college has an attractive travel shop. It is, however, not conveniently located and opportunities to use it in teaching are being missed.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ	1	Expected completions	+	19	19
		Retention (%)	+	42	89
		Achievement (%)	+	86	56
GNVQ	2	Expected completions	31	29	30
		Retention (%)	65	69	90
		Achievement (%)	100	68	56
Association of British Travel Agents certificate	2	Expected completions	36	25	18
		Retention (%)	72	44	67
		Achievement (%)	27	82	42
GNVQ	3	Expected completions	31	38	52
		Retention (%)	74	76	42
		Achievement (%)	64	46	59

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
+data were inaccurate

Curriculum Areas

Health, Social Care and Early Years Education

Grade 1

33 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering intermediate, advanced and higher level childcare courses, GNVQ courses at all levels, and NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found that a few weaknesses were understated. At the time of the inspection, significant progress had been made in addressing many of the weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- the excellence of the lesson planning and of course and class management
- much good or outstanding teaching
- well-organised work placements
- pass rates significantly above national averages
- good retention rates on many courses
- well-documented and effective course planning and review
- a broad range of well-attended courses
- good resources

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on some advanced courses
- unsatisfactory accommodation for some larger classes

34 Curriculum management in this area is outstanding. The range of courses, which is regularly reviewed against a local needs analysis, has been extended considerably over the last two years, and numbers of students have grown by about 50%. An extensive enrichment programme enables students to obtain supplementary qualifications. As the

self-assessment report identified, the school has sought to widen participation by targeting deprived areas of Rochdale and by developing more flexible modes of attendance. The school has succeeded in attracting a high proportion of students who do not usually participate in further education.

35 Course reviews are meticulous and take place three times a year. Performance indicators such as retention rates and examination results are reviewed and detailed action plans for improvements are drawn up. Students' attendance and retention rates are improving. Staff are working together to further develop schemes of work and assignment schedules. Lesson plans follow a common format and include an evaluation which teachers take into consideration when planning the subsequent lesson. An analysis of students' learning styles carried out during induction is used to inform teaching and learning methods.

36 Teaching is of high quality. Teachers always shared learning objectives with the students, and in most lessons they provided them with a variety of appropriate learning activities. These practices were identified as strengths in the self-assessment report. When summarising the lesson, many teachers reviewed its objectives and assessed with the students the extent to which these had been achieved. In the learning activities, the students were encouraged to draw on their experience in the workplace. In a part-time course on childcare, students were required to identify a range of activities through which children's motor skills could be developed. Small groups of students, using relevant reference materials and drawing on their experiences at work, identified three appropriate activities and associated toys for a particular age range. The briefing for the task was clear and a deadline was set for its completion. The students found the exercise interesting and they could clearly see its relevance to their work. All full-time students have well-organised and

Curriculum Areas

supervised work placements. In response to action plans in the self-assessment report, the management and co-ordination of assignments have been improved. Assignment briefings are clear and schedules are well planned to ensure that students have sufficient time to meet deadlines. Students receive extensive written and oral feedback on their performance. They value the opportunities they have to record their progress and update their action plans.

37 The self-assessment report identified that pass rates are significantly above national averages for all courses except GNVQ at intermediate level. Those for the GNVQ advanced course have improved and reached 95% in 1998. All the 87 students who completed advanced level diploma courses in nursery nursing, childhood studies and health studies in 1998 and all students completing the higher national certificate course achieved the award. Pass rates on NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 have consistently improved and reached 88% and 95%, respectively, in 1998. The good opportunities which all students have to develop key skills were acknowledged as a strength in the self-assessment report. IT skills are an integral part of the curriculum. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the students' development of other key skills on all courses and on monitoring their performance in these. Though retention is good on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses and NVQ level 3 courses, it has declined recently to below national averages on the certificate in childcare and education, the GNVQ advanced and the national diploma in health studies courses. The retention rate is unsatisfactory on the national diploma in nursery nursing course and it has declined from 77% in 1997, to 72% in 1998. These weaknesses in relation to retention were acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Actions have been taken to address them, though it is too early to judge their effectiveness. Many students progress from intermediate to advanced courses and, more recently, they are

progressing from advanced to higher level courses.

38 Students benefit from high-quality learning resources. The school's library is well stocked with good numbers of modern texts, reference books and specialist journals. Students have ready access to computers. Although most accommodation is good, some classrooms are adversely affected by traffic noise and overheating, defects which were insufficiently acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions	+	+	52
		Retention (%)	+	+	79
		Achievement (%)	+	+	95
Certificate in childcare and education and GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	Expected completions	40	48	80
		Retention (%)	85	75	80
		Achievement (%)	88	97	73
NVQ	2	Expected completions	72	53	101
		Retention (%)	82	67	61
		Achievement (%)	51	77	88
NVQ	3	Expected completions	104	120	89
		Retention (%)	80	73	91
		Achievement (%)	64	80	95
National diplomas in nursery nursing, childhood studies and health studies and GNVQ advanced in health and social care	3	Expected completions	143	186	182
		Retention (%)	78	80	70
		Achievement (%)	82	87	99
Higher national certificate early years care and education	4	Expected completions	*	*	15
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

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

+data were inaccurate

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Sociology, Psychology and Religious Studies

Grade 2

39 Inspectors observed 12 lessons, covering GCSE, GCE A/AS level subjects and access provision in psychology, sociology and religious studies. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, though they considered that weaknesses in retention were underestimated.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- appropriately varied teaching methods
- the teaching of key skills as an integral part of the course
- the teachers' detailed and constructive feedback to students on their written work
- the regular setting of homework
- good examination results on GCE A level and GCSE psychology and sociology courses
- co-ordinated approach by subject teachers

Weaknesses

- the failure of some teaching methods
- inappropriate assessment strategies at the beginning of courses
- low attendance at evening classes
- low retention rates

40 Provision of psychology, sociology and religious studies is managed through the centre for academic studies. Different teachers of the same subject make every effort to co-ordinate their teaching across both campuses to ensure that they cover the syllabus adequately and use appropriate teaching and learning methods.

Subject teams are based together and course teams meet regularly to discuss issues related to teaching and learning and students' achievements, and to conduct course reviews and set up action plans for making improvements. Students' views on teaching are gathered using questionnaires. Course documentation is comprehensive. It includes information and guidance leaflets and comprehensive handbooks for each subject area.

41 As noted in the self-assessment report, teachers use a wide variety of teaching methods. In some instances, however, these methods are not necessarily appropriate for the learning needs of some individual students. Most lessons were carefully planned to ensure that the students' interest was held and sustained. Where possible, teachers draw on students' own experiences to good effect. For example, in a sociology lesson, students analysed their own family structures and discussed how the structures fitted into different theoretical models. In another lesson, students' experiences in education were used to highlight issues of inequality. The key skills of IT, numeracy and communication are taught and learnt through all aspects of every course. For example, in a carefully structured access lesson, students working in small groups on a project made good use of computers to develop research and data analysis skills. They also developed their communication skills and had an opportunity to practise making presentations. There is, however, no opportunity for students to record their achievements in key skills in a particular subject area, a weakness which was noted in the self-assessment report. Teachers set homework regularly and correct it thoroughly. The feedback they give to students is detailed and constructive, and they do not allow errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar to go uncorrected. They have detailed criteria for awarding marks, which they share with students so that they understand the standards they must reach in order to complete

Curriculum Areas

the work successfully. The good practice in assessment was acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Some students on two-year courses said they were discouraged by having to take initial tests which were too advanced for them.

42 Students' progress is closely monitored. In psychology and sociology, the GCE A level modular course allows students' progress to be measured by external examinations and it gives students the opportunity to retake modules to improve their performance. The self-assessment report identified that the students' examination results in GCE A level and GCSE psychology and sociology are above the average for the sector. Retention rates on almost all courses are low, and there is poor attendance at evening classes.

43 Resources for psychology, sociology and religious studies are good. Teachers have

appropriate subject qualifications and all hold teaching qualifications. They are enthusiastic about their work and have very detailed knowledge of their subjects. Many hold examinations. The self-assessment report identified the willingness of most teachers to take full advantage of staff development opportunities as a strength. Library resources are good. Plentiful, well-designed learning support materials are provided in subject base rooms. They include study packs for topics and current reference materials. Accommodation is well maintained. Some teaching rooms are the wrong shape or size for group work and some rooms are too small for the classes using them. Most rooms have relevant displays of subject materials.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in sociology, psychology and religious studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE psychology	2	Expected completions	119	91	92
		Retention (%)	55	67	58
		Achievement (%)	64	87	96
GCSE sociology	2	Expected completions	97	89	64
		Retention (%)	51	76	62
		Achievement (%)	66	83	92
GCSE religious studies	2	Expected completions	7	12	7
		Retention (%)	85	91	71
		Achievement (%)	83	100	100
GCE A level psychology	3	Expected completions	+	+	112
		Retention (%)	+	+	51
		Achievement (%)	+	+	100
GCE A level sociology	3	Expected completions	+	68	100
		Retention (%)	+	94	55
		Achievement (%)	+	75	62
GCE A level religious studies	3	Expected completions	8	10	9
		Retention (%)	87	90	44
		Achievement (%)	83	71	75

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
+ISR data were inaccurate

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Support for Students

Grade 2

44 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- high levels of personal support for students
- effective recruitment and good induction for full-time students
- effective reviewing of students' progress
- additional support arrangements
- a popular enrichment programme

Weaknesses

- no aims and objectives for pastoral care across the college
- induction, guidance and support arrangements for part-time students
- inadequate arrangements for monitoring and evaluating learning support

45 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the energetic approach to the development of support for students was a strength. New arrangements and procedures for student support, developed during 1997, have begun to have a noticeable impact. The teams involved in providing support work to clearly defined standards. Co-ordination and monitoring arrangements have been introduced. Meetings of tutors and co-ordinators are purposeful and ensure that new initiatives and ways of working become well established and are understood. The college's commitment to improving the quality of support given to students is reflected in staff development plans for 1998-99.

46 The college has successful arrangements for recruiting students. Comprehensive and well-produced prospectuses, customised for

particular groups, contain detailed course information. Open days draw large numbers of visitors. 'Taster' courses are well attended and staff believe that they result in many enrolments. There is a schools liaison team whose members work with pupils in both primary and secondary education. Admission and enrolment procedures for full-time students are efficient. All full-time students benefit from a well-structured induction programme supported by attractive and informative handbooks. Of students surveyed in 1998, 96% felt that induction had been effective in helping them to settle into their course. Induction programmes for part-time students are less well developed.

47 Students speak highly of the support they receive from their teachers and personal tutors. All full-time students have a personal tutor and designated tutorial time. In the majority of curriculum areas, reviews of students' progress and action-planning are detailed and thorough. Students are encouraged to maintain records of achievement and are provided with software to help them do so. The quality of pastoral tutorials is better in some schools than in others. For example, personal tutors in engineering and in health and social care have developed worthwhile programmes of pastoral activities. The self-assessment report acknowledged the need to establish minimum standards for tutorial practice and to establish clear aims and objectives for pastoral care across the college. The report also identified the inadequate support for part-time students as a weakness. Part-time students have little access to guidance and counselling and, with a few exceptions, are not allocated personal tutors.

48 The local careers company has a partnership agreement with the college to supply careers education and guidance. The company's advisers work with personal tutors to provide a service to both groups and individuals. There are well-equipped careers areas on both campuses. The self-assessment report identified

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the failure, in 1997-98, to provide 15% of full-time students with careers advice, as a weakness in its provision of student support.

49 A team of well-qualified and experienced workers provides effective additional support for students who need it. An attractive and informative additional support handbook outlines the opportunities available to students. Students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities take part in a well-documented assessment process. There are good systems for identifying students with dyslexia. An additional support co-ordinator works with tutors and students to draw up individual learning plans, and maintains records of the support students receive. There is a well-used bank of learning materials on which teachers in all curriculum areas can draw. Teachers do not involve support workers in the planning of lessons. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the unsatisfactory arrangements for supporting students who need help to develop their skills of literacy and numeracy are a weakness. All students are initially tested in basic skills. The needs of those students who require additional help with basic skills are met by the individual schools and not through a programme of learning support for the whole college. The provision of help with numeracy and literacy skills is unco-ordinated and fragmented.

50 The college provides financial advice for students, and, through its access fund and internal student support fund, some financial help. A team of well-qualified and widely experienced counsellors provides a service across both sites of the college. Records show that an increasing number of students with a wide range of personal problems use this service. Students who need childcare have the use of two attractive and well-managed crèches. In 1997-98, 450 students benefited from a lively and diverse enrichment programme, which includes the opportunity to join sports teams.

General Resources

Grade 1

51 The self-assessment report for general resources was based on a wide range of evidence collected and analysed by teams responsible for areas of work such as learning resource centres, IT and the college's estates. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements about general resources. Considerable progress has been made to remedy the weaknesses recorded in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- significant improvements in the quality of accommodation since the last inspection
- the high standard of provision in classrooms and other learning areas
- the accessibility of most facilities to students with restricted mobility
- a wide range of appropriate learning resources
- the ready availability of up-to-date personal computers and software to staff and students

Weaknesses

- the failure to refurbish some specialist facilities

52 Since the last inspection, the college's managers have vigorously pursued strategies to improve the quality of resources used by students, staff and members of the community. In line with the accommodation strategy, major parts of the Rochdale campus have been refurbished to a high standard. Systematic improvements to buildings at the Middleton campus have resulted in appropriate accommodation for almost all curricular areas. The exceptions, noted in the self-assessment report, include some aspects of sport and leisure

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and performing arts, where specialist accommodation is showing signs of wear and tear and is no longer suitable for some types of activities. Changes in accommodation at both campuses take full account of the needs of wheelchair users and others with restricted mobility. The accessibility of about 90% of the college to persons with restricted mobility through the provision of lifts, ramps and crossing points on roadways, was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. There are detailed plans to reduce surplus accommodation at the Middleton campus. In accordance with the action plan for implementing improvements following self-assessment, all the college's schools use computer software which facilitates effective timetabling and detailed statistical analysis of the use of space.

53 Most classrooms provide an appropriate learning environment. They are well decorated, comfortably furnished, and are equipped with modern teaching aids. Staff accommodation is also of good quality. These strengths in accommodation were mentioned in the self-assessment report. At both campuses, reception areas are attractive and easy to find. The foyer at the Rochdale campus is spacious, light and airy, and close to a renovated assembly hall which is used not only by the college for its own events but also by members of the community. Common room facilities for students are poor but most students are content with what is provided. They appreciate that it is the college's aim that students should develop good habits of study by using the library and learning resource centres when they are not in class. Sporting and recreational facilities at both campuses are adequate. There are extensive playing fields at the Middleton campus. Students and people who live in the local community make good use of the college's gymnasias and sports halls.

54 A particular strength noted in the self-assessment report is the quality of resources in the learning resource centres at each campus,

and in the learning resource bases attached to individual schools or curricular areas.

Designated staff from the learning resource team support specific areas of the curriculum. Each year the college spends 1% of the income it receives from the FEFC on appropriate books, periodicals, journals and CD-ROMs to support courses. A computerised catalogue lists the stock held in the learning resource centres. The centres are heavily used. At peak times, for example in the lunch break, there is often a shortage of study spaces. Periods when students are expected to study in silence in learning resource centres are widely publicised.

55 The self-assessment report identified the quantity, quality and reliability of the personal computers available to staff and students as strengths. In these respects the computing resources have been significantly improved since the last inspection. A system of networked computers enables information to pass electronically between the two campuses. About 460 workstations are available to students; a further 190 are for staff use only. Personal computers are housed in the learning resource centres and learning resource bases for students to use at times which suit them. Use of the internet is tightly controlled and monitored carefully. Some workstations are housed in rooms which are timetabled for lessons, to enable the use of IT to be integrated with other aspects of the curriculum. Currently, teams of staff are working closely with the IT manager to develop software for courses which students can use by themselves. Staff described the level of support provided by technical colleagues through the IT help desk as excellent.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 1

56 There have been significant improvements in the arrangements for quality assurance since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Judgements in the report were well supported by clear evidence, including references to appropriate performance indicators. By the time of the inspection, most of the weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed.

Key strengths

- a strong commitment to quality assurance
- well-developed and effective self-assessment systems
- rigorous procedures for reviewing performance
- a reliable and comprehensive internal inspection process
- good use of students' evaluations of provision
- the close linking of staff training to the strategic plan

Weaknesses

- a minority of insufficiently analytical course reviews
- poor use of data in monitoring retention on two-year courses

57 The college's comprehensive and well-established quality assurance system forms an integral part of strategic and operational planning and is understood and valued by staff. There is an effective quality management and committee structure, comprising: the quality unit, led by the performance review manager; the quality council, which is a subgroup of the academic board; and the self-assessment

committee, which includes a governor and someone from outside the college. The corporation's employment and finance committee also receives reports on some aspects of quality. The various strengths of the college's quality assurance arrangements were recognised in the self-assessment report.

58 A system of termly course and programme area reviews, annual service area reviews, annual internal inspection and in-house quality audit, underpins quality assurance. Heads of school attend termly monitoring meetings with the director of curriculum and programme review manager, at which retention rates and other indicators of performance are reviewed. Serious weaknesses are reported to the executive team. The majority of course reviews lead to measurable improvements. A minority of course reviews are superficial, and in some cases, unrealistic targets are set. Analyses of retention rates on two-year courses have relied on data which span one year only. These data do not record the disappearance of students between the first and second years of courses and do not provide a reliable basis for calculating retention rates. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses in relation to data. Good use is made in course reviews of information on added value in students' achievements on GCE A level courses. The college is now piloting a system to assess added value in students' achievements on vocational courses.

59 Self-assessment, which was introduced in 1995, covers all aspects of the college's work. The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive and concise. It makes use of appropriate performance indicators, and contains effective action plans to address weaknesses. The self-assessment committee closely scrutinises all contributory reports and changes self-assessment grades where it sees fit. In 1998, the college produced a useful executive summary of the self-assessment report which went to all staff.

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60 There is a comprehensive, reliable and rigorous internal inspection process. A major feature of this is a well-organised programme of lesson observations. In 1997-98, trained staff carried out 340 observations, using the same grading scale as the FEFC's inspectorate. Teachers who are observed are told of the grade awarded to their lesson. Teachers who give a lesson which is graded 4 or 5 are reinspected. Overall, the college's grade profile for lessons was broadly similar to that arrived at by the inspectors.

61 Staff value students' opinions. Questionnaires are used to elicit students' views on the quality of courses and college services. They are analysed and action is taken to address any issues identified. Students receive summarised information about their responses to questionnaires and this is incorporated into self-assessment reports. All full-time courses have a student representative who attends course review meetings and plays a valuable part in course evaluation. The college has also produced questionnaires for employers, parents and staff, but there has been a poor response to these.

62 The college's charter is distributed to all full-time and most part-time students. Teachers discuss its content with students during induction. Students are aware of their entitlements and their commitments. The charter contains measurable targets, and progress towards reaching these is monitored.

63 Arrangements for staff development are good. Staff speak appreciatively of the training opportunities they are offered. An extensive internal staff development programme is closely linked to the college's strategic plan, business plans and action plans arising from staff appraisals. The college's staff development manager regularly meets colleagues from other colleges to pool ideas. In 1997-98, the staff development budget was 1% of the college's total expenditure. All staff, including part timers, are appraised. The appraisal system

includes lesson observation but the extent to which it covers other aspects of job performance varies significantly from one appraisal to another. Staff are set individual objectives during their appraisal interview and these mostly relate to staff development.

Governance

Grade 2

64 Inspectors were in broad agreement with the college's judgements on governance in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some strengths were overstated and they found some weaknesses which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- governors' involvement in the life of the college
- a supportive and challenging relationship with college managers
- diligent monitoring of the college's performance by the corporation
- the corporation's full involvement in strategic planning
- the corporation's commitment to self-improvement

Weaknesses

- the corporation's failure to keep itself well informed about student affairs
- the failure to update the code of conduct

65 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.

66 The corporation has 14 members. There is currently one vacancy. The majority of

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governors are in their second term of office. Governors have expertise in community matters, business, accountancy, health care, local politics, management and industrial relations. The last formal audit of their skills took place in March 1996. The corporation has no student governor. The self-assessment report judged the corporation's failure to keep itself well informed about students' views and concerns as a weakness in governance. The student council is supposed to report formally to the corporation on student affairs. So far it has not done so.

67 The corporation has four committees: audit, remuneration, employment and finance, and nominations. The corporation and its committees meet frequently. Attendance at the monthly meetings of the key employment and finance committee is good, at over 80%. Governors have a clear understanding of the way in which further education is funded and of their financial responsibilities. Both the employment and finance committee and the full corporation carefully scrutinise the management accounts, which are circulated monthly. Terms of reference for the audit committee do not reflect FEFC guidance.

68 Relationships between members of the corporation and the college's senior managers are productive and professional. Governors support the executive team, but do not do so uncritically. They challenge and question its members in a confident and well-informed manner. In 1997-98, governors had formal meetings with staff in each of the college's eight schools. Twelve meetings with schools and service areas are planned for the current year. These meetings enhance governors' understanding of the college's work. The college's newsletter has contained detailed information about individual governors and their roles in the college. Governors support major college functions, though the self-assessment report acknowledged that their attendance at these events could be improved.

69 Governors are consulted about their training programme. Internally organised training is of good quality and encourages governors to explore issues affecting the college. However, take-up of training opportunities is low. Governors receive newsletters, FEFC publications and presentations from college staff to keep them up to date, and have consulted with the corporations of two other colleges in the interests of developing best practice. The clerk and five other governors observed a corporation meeting at a third college. In addition to standing reports, items of major importance to the college are presented for consideration to the full corporation. There is no formal induction for new governors. Governors have now completed two self-assessments. The corporation reviewed its own performance at a lively meeting, at which they also considered the vision of the college. They produced a list of strengths and weaknesses and an action plan. The college's self-assessment report recognised the lack of formal targets and performance indicators to help governors evaluate their own work systematically. The self-assessment grade for governance was agreed after full discussion involving the whole board.

70 Governors contribute effectively to the strategic planning process. There is an annual residential event to affirm the mission of the college and confirm its strategic objectives. As observers, the chair and vice-chair of the corporation attend the termly meetings of the executive team at which progress against the college's performance indicators is reviewed. They are able to check the information arising from these reviews for clarity before it is received by all governors in the form of the principal's report. The corporation also receives and discusses reports on students' achievements, which are compared with national benchmarks.

71 The corporation and its committees are well supported administratively. Papers are

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circulated in good time for meetings. Agendas are clear and minutes provide an informative record of the corporation's business. The corporation has a calendar of recurring items and policy reviews which is published in advance of the academic year. The corporation conducts its business in an open manner. Standing orders are clear and concise. The register of members' interests, which also covers the interests of senior managers with major financial responsibilities, is insufficiently comprehensive. The code of conduct, produced in 1995, has not yet been updated to reflect recommendations arising from the second Nolan committee report. The corporation has not yet instituted a code of practice on 'whistleblowing'.

Management

Grade 2

72 The self-assessment report on management was comprehensive and inspectors were in broad agreement with the strengths and weaknesses it identified. By the time of the inspection, the college had taken action to address several of the weaknesses but in some cases, it was too early to judge its effectiveness.

Key strengths

- effective leadership
- a strong culture of teamworking
- open management
- well-defined lines of communication
- good links with external organisations
- successful promotion of equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- an underdeveloped computerised management information system
- some weak aspects of financial control

73 Managers have done a great deal to address the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report, and the college is now well led and effectively managed. Staff throughout the organisation regard managers as approachable and responsive. They have confidence in them and speak appreciatively of their open and consultative style. Morale is high. As the self-assessment report recognised, the executive team, which consists of the principal and four directors, provides strong direction to the work of the college. The team's members regularly monitor in painstaking detail the progress made in implementing the college's strategic objectives.

74 Inspectors concurred with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college has done much to improve its internal communications. The college's newsletter contains informative but entertaining articles, and is produced to a professional standard. There is also a college bulletin, which provides the latest information on management issues. There is a published annual calendar of meetings of staff teams. Minutes of these meetings are professionally produced to a standard college format, and team leaders ensure that any members of staff who cannot attend meetings are fully informed of decisions taken at them. School managers have only recently begun to receive the minutes of the meetings of staff teams which operate within their areas of responsibility.

75 Planning by management takes into account self-assessment findings and the college's resourcing needs. In 1998, business planning acquired a sharper focus by including the measurement of the college's performance against quantifiable targets. Some of the targets set by course and subject teams are unrealistic. Direct access for managers to the computerised management information has recently been improved. As the self-assessment report recognised, the system produces a range of reports which are useful in helping senior

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managers to measure performance, and their confidence in the system has grown. However, inspectors discovered several inaccuracies in the student achievement data used for inspection and, as the self-assessment report recognised, there is a need for further improvements to the management information system.

76 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college is in a strong financial position with significant reserves. It has successfully reduced its average level of funding from one of the highest in the sector and is actively considering strategies to reduce it further to meet the convergence target. Detailed monthly management accounts are prepared and the executive team considers them carefully. The assumptions behind the financial forecasts are explained in detail. Internal control weaknesses in the cash collection system came to light shortly before the inspection. Managers have taken all the action needed to deal with the weaknesses, but the full extent of their effect has not yet been determined. The finance department is appropriately resourced; there have been recent staff changes. Pay and consumables budgets are delegated. The monthly budget reports which the finance department provides for budget holders do not provide details of committed expenditure. Accordingly, budget holders maintain their own records of financial commitments. Financial and statistical returns to the FEFC are made within specified time limits.

77 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that links between the college and external organisations have grown and strengthened since the last inspection. The principal is the deputy chair of the local TEC, which for the last two years has seconded a member of its staff to the college to help to promote links with employers. In line with its aim to widen participation, the college has significantly expanded its work in outreach centres. It has introduced a scheme for local

business people to link with curriculum areas and serve as consultants to supplement the work of advisory groups. The project is relatively new and is not yet fully effective in all areas. At the time of the inspection, the college was about to undertake a review of the impact of its various initiatives to promote links with employers, in order to identify and build on good practice.

78 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the college attaches a high priority to the implementation of its equal opportunities strategy. Staff training sessions on equal opportunities have been held and equal opportunities features in the induction programme for new staff. There is an 'equal opportunities and harassment' policy. Guidelines on equal opportunities are issued for use by staff who observe teaching and learning as part of the quality review process. At the time of the inspection, progress had been made in addressing a weakness identified in the self-assessment report by the introduction of a language policy, but it was too soon to judge its effectiveness.

Conclusions

79 The college's self-assessment arrangements are comprehensive and robust. The self-assessment report provided an excellent basis for planning and undertaking the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified through self-assessment. They found a few weaknesses, particularly in regard to low rates of retention, which were not mentioned in the report. The college has made great progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report and has made many improvements. The inspectors mostly agreed with the college's grading of curriculum areas but, in one instance, they awarded a worse grade than that given in the report. Two of the five grades which the inspectors awarded for

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aspects of cross-college provision were better than those given in the self-assessment report, and one was worse.

80 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	1
16-18 years	28
19-24 years	14
25+ years	57
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	34
Intermediate	20
Advanced	22
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	20
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	419	1,155	14
Agriculture	26	23	1
Construction	10	150	1
Engineering	190	491	6
Business	253	833	10
Hotel and catering	192	134	3
Health and community care	421	2,784	29
Art and design	360	185	5
Humanities	517	2,380	26
Basic education	294	256	5
Total	2,682	8,391	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 41% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the then Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	145	67	0	212
Supporting direct learning contact	42	35	0	77
Other support	92	26	0	118
Total	279	128	0	407

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£15,607,000	£15,878,000	£14,117,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£25.64	£23.33	£22.35
Payroll as a proportion of income	64%	65%	64%
Achievement of funding target	113%	119%	112%
Diversity of income	17%	20%	22%
Operating surplus	-£626,000	-£11,000	-£122,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

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

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

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

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Students' achievements dat

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	414	505	649	1,203	1,205	1,167
	Retention (%)	88	78	80	84	66	69
	Achievement (%)	51	44	74	34	41	69
2	Expected completions	1,368	1,817	1,700	1,382	1,489	1,448
	Retention (%)	92	78	76	94	76	78
	Achievement (%)	52	63	74	51	55	72
3	Expected completions	–	1,728	1,692	–	982	1,163
	Retention (%)	–	85	84	–	79	77
	Achievement (%)	66	57	65	48	53	69
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	96	146	–	261	186
	Retention (%)	–	67	66	–	88	87
	Achievement (%)	8	47	97	56	41	72
Short courses	Expected completions	272	673	639	1,287	2,456	4,032
	Retention (%)	95	97	93	97	98	95
	Achievement (%)	19	68	80	17	86	80
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	109	455	304	602	677	858
	Retention (%)	94	81	75	92	89	69
	Achievement (%)	26	15	75	20	23	33

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

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