

Waltham Forest 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

Waltham Forest College

Greater London Region

Inspected April 1999

Waltham Forest College is a general further education college with four sites in the London borough of Waltham Forest. The college uses other smaller sites in the south of the borough and a European languages centre in the City of London. In preparation for the inspection the college produced a useful self-assessment report. The report was produced following a comprehensive and thorough process that involved all staff and corporation members. Curriculum areas and cross-college services produced detailed sections for the report. The inspection team agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found that the college's assessment understated weaknesses in some teaching and learning and made insufficient reference to students' achievements.

The FEFC has identified the college as one which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. In making their judgements, inspectors took into account that the college draws many of its students from areas of socio-economic deprivation. The college provides courses in all of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Seven curriculum areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-

college provision. The college has been successful in widening participation amongst those who may not have previously considered further education. The college delivers good-quality provision for speakers of other languages and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most teaching is good, but it is less than satisfactory in a few areas. Students benefit from well-organised advice, guidance and counselling services, and the college's careers education and guidance is a notable strength. There is good IT provision. Some improvements have been made to the teaching accommodation on the main site since the last inspection. There are clear and well-documented quality assurance systems. There is a good programme of staff development. The college benefits from effective governance. The changes in the management structure, introduced since the last inspection, have led to clearer lines of responsibility and accountability. The college should address: students' poor attendance and punctuality; unreliable data on students' performance; the lack of teaching qualifications amongst staff in some curriculum areas; the poor quality of the library provision; some ineffective tutorial practice; the limited staff appraisal; the failure to achieve its funding targets, and a lack of regular monitoring of the college's strategic plan.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	4	Support for students	2
Computing	2	General resources	3
Manufacturing, electrical and electronic engineering	3	Quality assurance	3
Automobile and mechanical engineering	3	Governance	2
Hotel and catering	2	Management	3
Humanities	3		
ESOL and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Waltham Forest College is a general further education college situated in the north-east London borough of Waltham Forest. The college opened in 1938 as the South West Essex Technical College and School of Art. The largest campus, which includes the administrative centre, is at Forest Road in Walthamstow. The college has other centres at Chingford, Lockwood Way and Hoe Street, which are all within three miles of the main site. There is also a language centre in the City of London. The college is an associate College of Middlesex University.

2 In March 1999, the college enrolled a total of 9,436 students. Of these, 2,134 were on full-time courses. Over 70% of full-time students are aged 19 or over. Over 60% of students are from minority ethnic groups. This is significantly higher than the 27% of people from minority ethnic groups living in the immediate vicinity of the college. Just over 50% of the college's students are women.

3 The London borough of Waltham Forest is home to a diverse community, with significant Asian and African-Caribbean communities, each comprising over 10% of the local population. There are significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers living in the borough and the college provides a wide range of courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. Whilst Chingford remains relatively affluent, the wards of Leyton, Cathall and St James Street have together been identified as the sixth most deprived wards in England. The London borough of Waltham Forest is ranked the 20th worst area in England in terms of deprivation. Over 90% of local firms employ less than 10 people. The three largest employment sectors are wholesale and retail, manufacturing, and financial and business services. Unemployment,

although decreasing, is higher than that for Greater London as a whole.

4 The proportion of students in Waltham Forest's secondary schools achieving five grades C or above in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) is just over 37% compared with a national average of about 46%. Of the 2,303 school-leavers in Waltham Forest, 68% continue in education. There are two sixth form colleges and four schools with sixth form provision in the borough. A number of school-leavers travel outside the borough to continue their education. There are five other further education colleges within easy travelling distance of the college. Of the college's enrolments, 29% come from its five neighbouring boroughs. Many of these students are adults returning to learning.

5 The college has 416 full-time equivalent staff of whom 206 are involved in teaching the curriculum and 104 are involved in curriculum support. The college is currently organised into eight schools offering courses in all of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Courses are also taught at the college's enterprise centre, English and mathematics learning centre, and swimming centre. Qualifications and progression opportunities range from foundation to postgraduate levels. There are centrally-managed learning support services and business support functions. The college mission statement is: 'Waltham Forest College aims to be the major provider of quality further education and training in North and East London by enabling all members of the community to realise their highest potential'. Its corporate goals are:

- maximum achievement for all
- inclusive partnership
- organisational innovation and adaptability
- economic health.

6 In the interests of widening participation, the college continues to develop its provision within the community on locally accessible sites. It has developed strategic partnerships at a local

Context

and regional level to facilitate and deliver education and training. The college has invested in information technology (IT) to support the curriculum and the college's infrastructure.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected in April 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1998. These data were validated against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The individualised student record (ISR) information on students' achievements for 1996 and 1997 was not reliable enough to be used for the purposes of inspection. In order to form judgements about the quality of the curriculum, inspectors made use of retention and achievement data held by individual programme managers. Consequently, this inspection report contains incomplete tables

for students' achievements. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and an auditor, working in the college for a total of 58 days.

8 This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

9 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, 60% were judged to be good or outstanding and 10% less than satisfactory or poor. These figures are worse than the average figures for colleges in the sector inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	3	2	0	1	6
GCSE	0	4	4	1	0	9
GNVQ	1	4	3	2	0	10
NVQ	3	5	4	1	0	13
Other vocational	7	11	8	2	0	28
Other	4	11	6	2	0	23
Total (No.)	15	38	27	8	1	89
Total (%)	17	43	30	9	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*

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10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Classes at the college are smaller than the national average. The highest attendance level was in automobile and mechanical engineering at 79%, and the lowest in science and mathematics at 65%.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Waltham Forest College	9.5	72
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 4

11 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering a range of science and mathematics courses. The college's self-assessment report significantly overestimated the quality of teaching and learning, and its assessment of students' achievements was overgenerous. The self-assessment report failed to include a clear evaluation of the quality of the GCSE mathematics provision.

Key strengths

- the broad range of science programmes
- students' achievements on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate science and access to higher education courses

Weaknesses

- the poor quality of some teaching and learning
- low retention and achievement on many courses
- inadequate analysis of students' achievements
- poor management and overview of GCSE mathematics

12 There is a good range of courses which includes a foundation course, GCSE courses, a GNVQ intermediate science programme, general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GNVQ advanced science courses, a BTEC national diploma in sports science, and access to higher education courses.

13 The self-assessment report presented an overgenerous assessment of the quality of teaching and learning. Of lessons observed by inspectors, 60% were judged to be good or outstanding, 30% were satisfactory and 10% were unsatisfactory or poor. In the best lessons,

teachers structured the lesson well, set students demanding work and provided them with appropriate support. In these lessons, students responded enthusiastically and worked hard. For example, a GNVQ intermediate group had just finished taking an examination. They came into the lesson in high spirits, but the teacher quickly settled them down, and they were soon working hard and producing good work. Students in a GCE A level chemistry lesson were given tasks to complete in set times. This helped them to work under pressure and develop their examination technique. In the poorer lessons, teachers failed to provide students with sufficiently challenging work to help them make progress. Poor attendance and punctuality often contributed to students' lack of progress. For example, in one lesson two students on the progression to science course were undertaking a practical exercise to measure the effect of exercise on pulse rate. The pace of work was slow and, because most students were absent, the two who were present had little opportunity to discuss their results.

14 Students' achievements are poorer than described in the self-assessment report. On many courses, achievements are below national benchmarks. GCE A level results showed an overall decline in 1998. Retention was especially poor on full-time, two-year courses, while achievement was low on one-year, part-time courses. Both retention and achievement declined on the GNVQ advanced science course in 1998 and few students gained their full GNVQ award. In GCSE biology and chemistry, pass rates are consistently close to the national average. However, achievements in physics and human physiology and health are below the national average. Retention and pass rates for GCSE mathematics are below the national average, but are improving. Retention and achievement rates are high on GNVQ intermediate and access to higher education courses. GNVQ intermediate students produce some good work and many of them progress to the GNVQ advanced course.

Curriculum Areas

15 The management and overview of GCSE mathematics is poor. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. Science is well co-ordinated and much thought goes into planning courses. Teams meet regularly to discuss teaching methods and students' progress. They discuss retention and achievements, but the data used often vary from that held centrally by the college. The school's action plans do not include strategies to improve the attendance and punctuality of students.

16 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements regarding specialist resources for science and mathematics. Staff are well qualified. Laboratories and equipment are adequate for the range of courses offered.

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
GNVQ intermediate science	2	Expected completions	*	*	27
		Retention (%)	*	*	92
		Achievement (%)	*	*	71
GCSE sciences	2	Expected completions	*	*	97
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	49
GCSE mathematics	2	Expected completions	*	*	189
		Retention (%)	*	*	68
		Achievement (%)	*	*	45
GNVQ advanced science	3	Expected completions	*	*	31
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	*	*	16
GCE A levels in science	3	Expected completions	*	*	136
		Retention (%)	*	*	61
		Achievement (%)	*	*	46
Access to higher education in science	3	Expected completions	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Computing

Grade 2

17 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering GCE A level, GNVQ advanced, computer literacy and information technology, access to computing, and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 726 computing courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the wide range of courses
- much good teaching and learning
- good pass rates and retention rates on most courses
- effective curriculum management
- good access for students to computers

Weaknesses

- failure to involve all students in learning
- low pass rates on a few courses
- some out-of-date computer equipment

18 The curriculum is managed effectively. As noted in the college's self-assessment report, much work has recently been carried out to standardise quality assurance arrangements and assessment monitoring procedures. The programme area is developing targets for achievement and retention against benchmarking data published by the FEFC. Targets are now identified in action plans and will be used to inform future self-assessment reports. Regular team meetings are effectively minuted with actions noted and reviewed. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the wide range of computing and IT courses is a strength. The provision includes a BTEC higher national certificate course which has recently been modified to include a module on programming in the modern Java language, in

response to the changing requirements of the industry and the current employment market.

19 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement about the strengths in teaching and learning. There are clear lesson plans and well-written schemes of work for all courses. A college-wide intranet system has been developed which will allow students and staff on-screen access to schemes of work and learning materials. In many lessons teachers take into account students' varying abilities. In one lesson four groups of students were working on different modules, enabling individual students to learn at a pace that suited them. There are good-quality handouts to help students learn. Teachers give clear and concise explanations of the topic being taught. In one lesson, students on the GNVQ advanced course in computing were clearly benefiting from the teacher's use of a small working model of a system to provide early warning of changes in the weather. However, in a few lessons, teachers did not give clear explanations to the students of the appropriate procedures.

20 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students' achievements are good. Over the last three years, pass rates on 27 of the 35 courses have been at or above national averages. However, results on the higher national certificate in computing are below the national average. Retention rates on most courses are good. Students' written work is good. Much of it is wordprocessed, well organised and carefully presented. Students are able to talk about their work clearly and with understanding.

21 There is good access to computers for staff and students. Most of the computers are modern and linked to fast laser printers. An appropriate range of software is available. The college's self-assessment report recognised that a few computers are in need of upgrading. Access to the internet is limited, sometimes making it difficult for students to obtain information for projects and assignments.

Curriculum Areas

Computer rooms are bright and spacious and contain modern comfortable office chairs. Some classrooms are bare, and lack posters or displays of students' work. Teachers are suitably qualified and most have a teaching qualification.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Expected completions	*	*	96
		Retention (%)	*	*	93
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87
NVQ using IT	1	Expected completions	*	*	17
		Retention (%)	*	*	94
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87
C&G 726 computing	1	Expected completions	*	*	119
		Retention (%)	*	*	81
		Achievement (%)	*	*	70
C&G 444 computing	2	Expected completions	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
Access to higher education computing	3	Expected completions	*	*	35
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	66
GCE A level computing	3	Expected completions	*	*	37
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	57

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Manufacturing, Electrical and Electronic Engineering

Grade 3

22 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, they considered the report to be insufficiently critical of teaching and learning. The report understates the good administrative systems used to support learning.

Key strengths

- comprehensive administrative systems to support learning
- effective action-planning for learning by students
- effective feedback on assessment and good moderation and verification systems

Weaknesses

- some underdeveloped teaching skills and lack of teaching qualifications amongst teachers
- some teachers' failure to take account of students' varying abilities
- some unsatisfactory retention and pass rates

23 The programme area includes a good range of courses at first and national diploma level in engineering, GNVQs in manufacturing at intermediate and advanced level, and C&G courses in electrical installations, electronics and clothing crafts. There are part-time courses at technician level, including national and higher certificates, and an access course in engineering. The majority of students are effectively guided onto the most appropriate learning programme. A significant number of students come to the college with the minimum entry requirements. Consequently, the college

has recently introduced a new foundation level programme of study. There are sound administrative procedures for all courses.

24 Most teaching is satisfactory. Inspectors observed examples of effective lesson planning and good schemes of work. In one lesson on the clothing manufacturing course, the class consisted of students with a wide range of abilities, studying different levels of qualification and with varying attendance patterns. The teacher was skilful in dealing with the students' individual learning needs and used a range of well-designed learning activities. Inspectors agreed with the college that student action-planning for learning is a strength. Teachers are skilful at helping students to complete their personal action plans. Students receive effective feedback on their progress, which enables them to understand what they need to do to improve their performance. However, in the poorer lessons, teachers made little allowance for the individual students' learning needs and some students were not sufficiently challenged. In a few lessons, teachers did not check whether learning was taking place. Attendance levels in some classes were low and poor time-keeping by students was not always questioned by teachers.

25 There is good progression by advanced level students to higher education and good pass rates on the higher level programmes. These strengths were recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Many students produce work of a good standard. The effective administrative processes and comprehensive action-planning ensure that parents and employers are kept well informed of students' progress. On a number of courses, retention and pass rates are below national averages.

26 There is an appropriate number of technicians and there is particularly effective administrative support. Technicians play a valuable role in assisting students with a range of project work. However, many teachers lack a formal teaching qualification. Accommodation

Curriculum Areas

is well maintained and attractively furnished, but teachers make little use of displays to support students' learning. Levels of equipment are good and the curriculum area is well resourced. Much of the library bookstock is old and there are few specialist periodicals.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G clothing courses	1 and 2	Expected completions	*	*	67
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	49
C&G part 1 electrical/electronics	2	Expected completions	*	*	26
		Retention (%)	*	*	48
		Achievement (%)	*	*	65
GNVQ intermediate and precursors	2	Expected completions	*	*	41
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	*	*	66
C&G part 2 electrical/electronics	3	Expected completions	*	*	18
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	*	*	44
GNVQ advanced and precursors	3	Expected completions	*	*	30
		Retention (%)	*	*	53
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50
Higher national certificates	4	Expected completions	*	*	18
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	89

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Automobile and Mechanical Engineering

Grade 3

27 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that some strengths and weaknesses were not sufficiently emphasised.

Key strengths

- the broad range of courses
- good practical teaching
- good retention and pass rates
- outstanding advanced technology and motor cycle centres

Weaknesses

- teachers' failure to use an appropriate range of teaching methods
- lack of teaching qualifications amongst teachers
- shortcomings in motor vehicle equipment and accommodation

28 The automobile and mechanical engineering curriculum is taught on three sites. The main college site contains two mechanical engineering workshops and the motor cycle facility. Two miles from the college, an industrial unit provides the advanced engineering centre which enables personnel from small and medium-sized companies to develop skills, particularly in the computer-based advanced engineering industries. A further site contains the motor vehicle provision. There is a wide range of courses at all levels, offered in numerous modes of attendance. The broad range of courses is identified by the college as a strength and inspectors agreed. At interview, prospective students receive an explanation of all the possible course options in

order to enable them to make informed judgements. Whilst on their courses, students' attendance is closely monitored.

29 Inspectors saw much good teaching, particularly in practical sessions. In most practical lessons, the teacher, acting as a facilitator, offered effective assistance and guidance, giving each student individual attention. Teachers provided guidance on theoretical issues and practical skills. At the end of each practical task, students are required to complete their record of achievement or log book. In theory lessons, often up to three hours in length, teachers did not vary their teaching methods sufficiently. In some lessons, the teacher often talked to students while they completed their log books or portfolios. Teachers made little use of visual aids and they rarely used mechanical components to highlight salient points. In most theory lessons, the students quickly lost interest in the subject being studied.

30 The college underestimated some good retention and achievement rates in its self-assessment report. Two-thirds of the programme area's retention and achievement rates are at or above national figures. Students' work is often of a high standard and teachers provide useful written comment on the quality of their work. Students make little use of IT in preparing their work. In a mechanical workshop, progress sheets are displayed, enabling each student to observe their progress easily. Students speak highly of their courses and the college. Safe working practices are observed at all times in workshops.

31 Mechanical workshops are bright and well maintained and have equipment which is appropriate for the range of provision. The high-quality motor cycle facility reflects a modern garage environment. European funding has helped the college to build its advanced engineering centre, which provides an extensive range of modern engineering equipment. As the college indicated in its self-assessment report,

Curriculum Areas

the centre is a strength of the provision. Its facilities include a fibre optics laboratory, computer integrated manufacturing systems and computer-based training systems for pneumatics, hydraulics, robotics, and automation. Other facilities include two computer-aided design rooms which provide 21 workstations. However, some courses in motor

vehicle engineering are taught in facilities that are in need of refurbishment and replacement. The college's self-assessment report recognised this and plans are in hand to improve the facilities. Teachers have appropriate engineering qualifications and many have obtained verifier and assessor awards. However, few have teaching qualifications.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G mechanical engineering	2	Expected completions	*	*	62
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	*	*	57
C&G computer aided design and fibre optics	2	Expected completions	*	*	129
		Retention (%)	*	*	69
		Achievement (%)	*	*	77
NVQ motor vehicle engineering	2	Expected completions	*	*	82
		Retention (%)	*	*	76
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
C&G motor vehicle crafts (over 24 weeks)	3	Expected completions	*	*	51
		Retention (%)	*	*	55
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50
NVQ motor vehicle engineering	3	Expected completions	*	*	96
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	85
GNVQ and precursors motor vehicle engineering	3	Expected completions	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	90
		Achievement (%)	*	*	53

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering

Grade 2

32 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering access, professional certificate and diploma programmes and NVQ courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. They considered that the significance of a few weaknesses was underestimated.

Key strengths

- much good teaching of practical work
- high pass rates on professional cooks certificate and diploma courses
- good standard of students' assignments and other written work
- effective use of high-quality CD-ROM training packages
- good opportunities in catering for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Weaknesses

- lack of correct cooking ingredients for lessons
- lack of sufficiently demanding work in some NVQ lessons
- old equipment and some inadequate building maintenance

33 Catering courses are managed by the school of tourism, hospitality and leisure industries. Regular course team meetings take place to monitor and review the school's range of courses. Meetings of the NVQ team are particularly effective and the progress of individual students is reviewed weekly by the course team. The college judged in its self-assessment that course content is appropriate, well managed and provides students with good progression opportunities, and inspectors agreed. There is a good range of short courses

such as the British Institute of Innkeeping National Licensees certificate, and hygiene courses. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from catering opportunities on both vocational access courses and through their project work.

34 Verification procedures for GNVQ and NVQ courses are clear and effective. Inspectors agreed overall with the college's assessment of teaching and learning, although some strengths in teaching and learning were not sufficiently emphasised. Teachers often praise students for their work in practical sessions as well as offering constructive criticism. Highly effective demonstrations of basic and advanced culinary techniques take place with teachers highlighting relevant learning points. Practical sessions on the NVQ food preparation and food service courses are effectively planned to provide regular assessment opportunities. There is frequent questioning of students to check on their understanding. Tutorials are effectively used to monitor students' progress and offer specialist support where necessary. However, in some theory sessions, the work set is not sufficiently demanding and students' contributions to discussion are not always effective. Note-taking is sometimes unsatisfactory. For some practical lessons, the food stores failed to supply food orders as requested by the teachers and ingredients were often missing and inappropriate substitutions were made. This has an adverse effect on students' learning and they lose opportunities to practise higher skills and master different techniques.

35 Much student achievement is good. Students completing the professional cooks certificate and diploma are particularly successful. Pass rates on the BTEC national diploma in hotel administration compare well with the national average. Retention rates on the cooks professional certificate course have improved over the last three years. Progression by students to the diploma course is good.

Curriculum Areas

36 Students' practical work is of a high standard. Students complete their practical assessments in the time allowed and produce colourful, well-presented individual dishes. Most students are professionally dressed to industrial standards. Although the number of customers using the college's main restaurant is small, they commented favourably on both the food and service they receive. Key skills are included in all vocational programmes and students clearly benefit from having their individual needs addressed.

37 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers are well qualified, although

some are in need of industrial updating. There is a high level of technical support within the school. The school's IT centre is to have its hardware upgraded. The CD-ROMs produced internally for hygiene and safety training are particularly helpful for students on NVQ level 1 courses and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The programme area has some good equipment and facilities, but most of the equipment in the kitchens is over 25 years old. Breakdowns result in equipment being out of action for long periods. Specialist accommodation is in need of better maintenance and refurbishment.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ part time	1	Expected completions	*	*	31
		Retention (%)	*	*	93
		Achievement (%)	*	*	59
NVQ part time	2	Expected completions	*	*	69
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	65
C&G professional cooks certificate	2	Expected completions	7	14	17
		Retention (%)	64	52	71
		Achievement (%)	86	79	82
C&G professional cooks diploma	3	Expected completions	16	14	22
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	100	86	91
BTEC national diploma hotel administration	3	Expected completions	*	19	28
		Retention (%)	*	54	60
		Achievement (%)	*	79	64

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

*data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

38 Inspectors observed 18 lessons covering GCE A level English and sociology courses, access programmes, GCSE English and psychology courses, and modern languages courses accredited by the Open College Network and the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report identified the majority of strengths and weaknesses in the provision, but some weaknesses in teaching and learning and students' achievements were understated.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and learning
- good pass rates on access courses
- high levels of retention on most courses
- effective management of courses

Weaknesses

- some unimaginative teaching
- low GCE A level and GCSE pass rates in English
- low standards of written work on some courses
- some inadequate facilities for modern language teaching

39 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that course management is good. Teachers work well together in teams and there is a developing emphasis on course review and evaluation. Levels of language ability in students are diagnosed before they enrol on courses. Preliminary English courses have been established to prepare students for GCSE English, and additional language support is available for GCSE and GCE A level students. Communication amongst modern language teachers is good, even though there are 19 part-time teachers working on two sites. As a

result of curriculum review, the GCE A level and GCSE provision in humanities has been reduced. Modern languages courses on the main site are restricted to Open College Network entry and intermediate level courses. However, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry language courses and language courses designed to meet the needs of employers are provided at the college's premises in the City of London. Recruitment to language courses has increased.

40 Most teaching is good. As the self-assessment report indicated, most lessons are well planned and resourced effectively with appropriate teaching materials. In the most successful lessons, teachers used an appropriate range of teaching methods, including group work as well as whole-class discussion. In many lessons, students participated fully. In modern language lessons, the language being learned is used extensively and successfully. Lessons for small groups of students employed by businesses close to the college's premises in the City of London were particularly effective. In these lessons, lively teaching successfully engaged some very able linguists. In one lesson, students on the access course were discussing 'childhood'. The topic was brought vividly to life by the different Asian, Caribbean and English childhood experiences of the students. A few lessons lacked structure and teachers failed to involve or interest students in the work. Some teaching of poetry lacked depth and feeling. In some lessons, there was poor attendance and punctuality amongst students. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

41 Access courses have high pass rates and many students progress to higher education. Retention rates on London Chamber of Commerce and Industry courses are excellent. Open College Network courses have good results and there is good progression from level 1 to level 2. Retention levels on the majority of courses are good and above national average. The self-assessment report identified some poor pass rates, particularly in GCSE and GCE A level

Curriculum Areas

subjects. The pass rate at grades A to C in GCSE English was 35%, which is well below the national average. The pass rate in GCE A level English was 55%, again well below the national average. Students' written work is carefully marked by teachers and attention is given to students' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Some students' written work is below the expected standard. This was recognised in the self-assessment report.

42 Teachers are well qualified and effectively deployed. The majority of teachers have

teaching qualifications and most language teachers are first language speakers. Lessons take place in well-furnished, appropriately-equipped classrooms, but little attempt is made to display students' work. Video recorders and cassette players are available for teaching purposes. IT and satellite television are not available in the modern languages area. The library bookstock in English is good, but the provision for modern languages and sociology is poor.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Open College Network modern languages	1 and 2	Expected completions	*	*	260
		Retention (%)	*	*	70
		Achievement (%)	*	*	73
London Chamber of Commerce and Industry	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	295
		Retention (%)	*	*	90
		Achievement (%)	*	*	54
GCSE English	2	Expected completions	*	*	143
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	*	*	35
GCE A level English	3	Expected completions	*	*	40
		Retention (%)	*	*	83
		Achievement (%)	*	*	55
Access to higher education courses (social sciences)	3	Expected completions	*	*	57
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	*	*	85

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

ESOL and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

43 The inspection covered the separate specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as well as for students on full-time and part-time programmes in ESOL. Fourteen lessons were observed. The self-assessment report identified many of the strengths, but not all of the weaknesses. Action had been taken on some weaknesses noted in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned, effective teaching
- the high standard of students' accredited assignments
- outstanding achievements by some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- well-organised and efficiently documented curriculum planning and development for ESOL students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- IT software effectively designed to meet ESOL students' needs

Weaknesses

- the over-reliance on worksheets in some ESOL lessons
- inappropriate level of some lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- high level of student withdrawals on some ESOL courses
- lack of liaison between teachers in curriculum areas

44 Courses are well planned and designed to meet the needs of adults and young people. All courses incorporate a good range of vocational activities. The programme area caters for a wide range of students, including students from local schools, and disaffected young people, refugees and asylum seekers.

45 The quality of provision in this programme area has improved since the last inspection. There is much good teaching, some of which is outstanding. In the outstanding lessons, teachers made the subject come alive by using humour to explain difficult concepts. Teachers are skilful in asking questions that facilitate and extend students' independence, knowledge and overall capability. Teachers working with students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities successfully encourage students to work on their own, enabling them to develop good vocational, social and life skills. In ESOL lessons, good classroom management encourages students of varied abilities to participate fully in learning activities and enables them to develop their use of correct grammar and vocabulary. Inspectors agreed with the college that assessment methods take account of individual students' abilities. Assessed work is of a high standard. On courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the work in vocational areas has attracted recognition nationally. The importance of the informal achievements of students, as well as their formal achievements, was identified in the self-assessment report. On some ESOL courses, the over-reliance upon worksheets sometimes leaves insufficient time for students to develop their speaking skills. In provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the level of work set in lessons in numeracy and IT does not take sufficient account of the abilities of the students. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

46 Of the 1997-98 enrolments in ESOL, only a small proportion of students had their

Curriculum Areas

achievements accredited. Action has been taken to address this issue and all full-time ESOL students in 1998-99 have been registered for Open College accreditation. However, on part-time ESOL courses, about a third of the students had withdrawn by the time of the inspection. The achievements for students who sit examinations or submit portfolios for assessment are excellent, and on some programmes 100% of the students who complete their courses gain accreditation. The self-assessment report recognised this strength.

47 The curriculum is well managed by teams of dedicated, professional staff. Course planning, review and evaluation processes are thorough and take account of students' views. Progression is closely monitored and staff provide effective support to enable students to move on to higher level courses. There is little sharing of information and good practice between teachers in curriculum areas, a fact recognised in the self-assessment report. Induction packs for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities help students with low levels of literacy to understand the programme of events. Tutorials are well organised and recorded in all curriculum areas. A 'buddy' system has been introduced to provide support for ESOL students who enrol late. This development arose out of last year's self-assessment action plan.

48 Teaching accommodation is well-equipped and effectively organised, and classrooms contain displays of students' work. In an ESOL course, computer-assisted language learning activities are designed to meet students' needs. The college has improved wheelchair access to the canteen and some curriculum areas.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

49 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, some strengths were expressed in general terms and some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- good-quality course publicity materials
- well-organised advice, guidance and counselling services
- much good learning support for students
- good careers education and guidance
- effective work placement programme for students

Weaknesses

- lack of evaluation of student support services
- some ineffective tutorial practices

50 The college has a range of well-designed publicity materials for different client groups, and as part of its widening participation strategy has recently opened a 'learning shop' located in a local shopping area. The shop provides advice and guidance on courses and help with basic computer skills. Applicants for courses are interviewed by tutors who aim to ensure that courses will meet students' needs. Applicants who are uncertain about their choice of course receive impartial advice and guidance and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to discuss their specific learning needs with specialist support staff. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students benefit from the grouping of information, guidance, admissions, fee assessment, counselling and examinations

services in one area of the college. Staff responsible for the support services, and additional learning support, work well together.

51 Students are introduced to the college's services and are made aware of the demands of their courses at their induction. An induction document explains to the students the composition of the induction programme. Some students consider that the induction activities they experienced were imaginative and demanding; others say they merely received the basic entitlement. During induction, the level of students' skills in numeracy and English is assessed. These assessments enable tutors to determine the learning support needs of their students.

52 Students receive effective learning support. This strength was identified in the college's self-assessment report. The main English and mathematics learning centre is adequately resourced and well used. A number of other learning centres are also available to students based in subject schools. The college has recently implemented a teaching partnership scheme, whereby English and numeracy specialists work alongside subject teachers to provide support for students. Students and teachers speak highly of this approach. Service standards are in place for many of the student support services. However, there is little evaluation of the effect the services have in improving retention and achievement amongst students. This weakness is being addressed by the college.

53 The focus of the college's tutorial system is on helping students produce action plans that will help them to make progress. Tutors are issued with guidelines on student action-planning. However, the college does not have a tutorial policy or additional documentation to help ensure that the quality of tutorials is consistently high. During induction tutors discuss short-term goals and long-term aims with each student, following which an action plan to improve achievement is developed.

Cross-college Provision

Most tutorials observed by inspectors were satisfactory or better and a few were outstanding.

54 The careers education and guidance service offered to students is good. The relationship between the local careers service and the college's information and guidance service enables an effective, integrated service to be delivered. This strength is recognised by the college. An impressive careers library is combined with good information and guidance services. Students are very aware of what the careers service can offer. The partnership agreement between the college and the local careers service is properly negotiated and reviewed. Careers advisers are available between two and four days each week, and the careers service also provides an adviser for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Appropriate standards and procedures for monitoring these services are in place. Students benefit from the extensive range of work placements available to them. Issues relating to equal opportunity are considered by teachers when arranging placements for students. Students are closely monitored by teachers whilst on placement.

General Resources

Grade 3

55 **Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, the report contained no reference to the poor quality of the library.**

Key strengths

- some high-quality accommodation on smaller sites and the good general teaching rooms at the Forest Road site
- good IT provision

Weaknesses

- poor accommodation on the Chingford site
- poor library resources
- lack of social facilities for students

56 The college's main site is on Forest Road in Walthamstow. The other is in Chingford, where automobile engineering, and painting and decorating courses are provided. The college also uses seven other centres. Six are in the southern part of the borough; the seventh, its European languages centre, is in the City of London.

57 The college's last inspection report made comment about the main site and the 'impressive neo-classical design with wide steps leading to a multi-columned facade'. Recent cleaning has exposed a series of friezes by the sculptor, Eric Gill, which celebrate a variety of arts and sports. The previous inspection report also referred to the poor condition of some accommodation. Since that inspection, a number of improvements have been made on the main site. These include the upgrading of classrooms and staff work rooms, and substantial repairs to the main external steps. Most of the general teaching accommodation is of a good standard. Rooms are attractively decorated, suitably equipped, and provide an appropriate setting for learning. Some temporary hatted accommodation is still in use. The accommodation at the Chingford site is poor. The buildings are in a state of disrepair. The college recognises this situation and plans are in hand to dispose of the site and relocate the provision. Other centres visited by inspectors provide excellent facilities. The accommodation at the City Languages centre is of a high professional standard.

58 Four years ago, inspectors were critical of the college's main library. Attempts have been made to improve the situation by creating a number of school-based learning centres which

Cross-college Provision

provide additional study spaces and library resources. However, the library and school-based bookstock was still inadequate in a number of curriculum areas, including catering, modern languages, social sciences, mathematics and physics. Attempts are being made to improve communication between library staff and teachers to ensure that library bookstocks keep abreast of curriculum developments. The college has no centralised record of resources held across its sites. No reference to these weaknesses was made in the self-assessment report. There is a wide range of equipment in the college's media resources department, including video cassettes, camcorders, audio cassettes and televisions.

59 The college has a clear policy for developing its IT facilities. The facilities are good; a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. During the current year the college has invested a significant amount on IT equipment. All computers on the main site are on a single network and by summer 1999 the college's other sites will be linked to the network. There are 574 computers available for students' use, a ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of approximately 1:8.9. Access for students to computers outside timetabled classes is good. Access to electronic mail and the internet is being extended, and video-conferencing is being developed. The college has recently received £43,000 in funding to improve the IT provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff workrooms are well equipped and staff have good access to IT.

60 The college acknowledges the lack of social facilities for students. The student refectories are not large, though the number of seats has been increased. There is a 30 metre swimming pool and a sauna on the main site. Virtually all of the Forest Road site is accessible to those with restricted mobility, but at Chingford, access is very restricted.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

61 Inspectors agreed with the majority of judgements in the self-assessment report. Some judgements were unclear whilst others were merely statements of current practice.

Key strengths

- comprehensive procedures for the development of the self-assessment report
- clear and well-documented quality assurance systems for curriculum areas
- a good programme of professional development for staff
- effective use of surveys of students', employers' and staff views

Weaknesses

- failure to implement fully the setting and monitoring of service standards in some areas
- insufficient monitoring of students' achievements
- inadequate analysis of achievement and retention data
- incomplete implementation of staff appraisal procedures

62 Inspectors agreed with the college that effective and comprehensive procedures were used in the preparation of the college's self-assessment report. Each course, learning support and business support teams produced their own report which contributed to the self-assessment of each school and service department. A self-assessment validation group, comprising governors and staff, ensured consistency of approach across the college. The final draft of the self-assessment report was agreed by the corporation.

Cross-college Provision

63 A cross-college quality working group co-ordinates quality assurance initiatives. As identified in the self-assessment report, the college has developed clear and well-documented quality assurance systems for courses. Each course team maintains a comprehensive 'quality' file that includes information on course reviews and evaluations. Course teams meet at least termly to review students' progress. Meetings are well documented. Course reviews are informed by internal and external verifier reports and analysis from lesson observations. The grades given to lessons observed by the college staff appear generous in the light of observations by inspectors. The college recognises this. Most course reviews are thorough and well co-ordinated by school management teams.

64 The effectiveness of the college's quality assurance systems are restricted by inadequate analysis of student achievement and retention data. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report. The college has recently revised its system for the production of student data, but it is not yet possible to assess the effectiveness of the new system. The college has not been able to compare its students' achievements with national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC.

65 Effective use is made of surveys to seek the views of students, staff and employers. All full-time students complete at least two comprehensive questionnaires during each year of their course. Employers' views are collected through questionnaires and other forms of research. Staff are surveyed regularly about developments in the college.

66 Service standards have been established for most cross-college services. Inspectors agreed with the college that service standards are not set and monitored fully in all areas. For example, in some areas the process of the setting of realistic targets against which progress can be assessed is underdeveloped. In some areas the same team is responsible for

setting, achieving and monitoring service standards. Performance in service areas is not yet fully reviewed.

67 The college has a good system of professional development for staff. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. The annual budget for staff development totals £160,000, equivalent to 1.6% of college payroll. The budget is devolved to managers, who have to bid for allocations using criteria based upon the college's strategic aims and objectives. Professional development is effectively co-ordinated by an experienced staff training officer. Staff development activities are carefully reviewed and an analysis is contained in the annual staff development report.

68 The college operates a staff appraisal scheme. However, the scheme was not uniformly implemented throughout the college and during 1998 only one-third of college staff were appraised. A revised staff appraisal scheme was introduced in January 1999 and it is intended that all employees will be appraised on an annual cycle. At the time of inspection, only 37% of staff had been appraised under the new scheme.

69 The college charter was revised in 1998. It identifies students' rights and responsibilities and is well publicised in the student diary and in prospectuses. However, it contains few measurable targets and its effect is inadequately monitored. Referred to as a student charter, it contains sections for employers and parents/guardians. The college intends to revise the charter in 1999. A college complaints procedure has recently been revised and complaints are generally responded to promptly.

Governance

Grade 2

70 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some statements in the report are descriptive and insufficiently evaluative.

Cross-college Provision

Key strengths

- governors' wide range of skills and expertise
- comprehensive induction programme and training for governors
- performance indicators against which corporation members assess their own performance
- effective oversight by the corporation of its committees
- consistently high standards of clerking

Weaknesses

- lack of regular monitoring by governors of the strategic plan
- insufficient monitoring of students' achievements

71 The corporation has a determined membership of 14, comprising seven independent governors, a TEC nominee, three co-opted governors, a student governor, a staff governor, and the chief executive. At the time of the inspection there were vacancies for two independent governors. As identified in the self-assessment report, the search committee, which includes two members who are independent of the corporation, is seeking to increase the number of women governors. There is a comprehensive programme of induction which is valued by new members of the corporation. The corporation handbook is a useful reference manual and is much used by members. Governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. They are kept abreast of local and national issues through short briefings from college staff and an annual planning event which enables more detailed exploration of relevant issues. Recent training has addressed issues such as higher education courses in further education colleges, and equal opportunities. Where appropriate, governors attend external training courses. Each governor is assigned to a college school or service. Some

governors make full use of this arrangement to improve their knowledge of the work of the college. The college benefits from the skills and professional expertise which governors bring to the corporation.

72 The corporation has established the following appropriate committees: finance and general purposes; personnel; remuneration of the chief executive; audit; and its search committee. The work of the committees is overseen but not duplicated by the corporation. Sound and efficient procedures for conducting business contribute to the effectiveness of meetings of the corporation and its committees. For example, the annual budget is approved by the corporation on the advice of the finance and general purposes committee in advance of the year to which it relates. Monthly management accounts are amongst the papers for meetings of the corporation and the finance and general purposes committee; in the months when such committees are not held, governors receive a commentary setting out salient features of the financial position. Frequent monitoring by governors of the financial position is appropriate as the college has been in deficit since incorporation, and is required under its financial memorandum with the FEFC to clear this by 31 July 1999. The audit committee effectively monitors the plans and reports of the internal and external auditors, and reports on these to the corporation.

73 As identified in the self-assessment report, the work of the corporation and its committees is assisted by a code of conduct, standing orders which incorporate the seven principles of public life set out in the Nolan report, and registers of interests for governors, senior staff and all budget holders. Comprehensive policies have been established for openness and accountability, including a 'whistleblowing' policy. Arrangements for the annual appraisal of the chief executive and clerk to the corporation by the chair were introduced in autumn 1998 and have now been implemented.

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74 Clerking arrangements which give support to governors are identified by the college as a notable strength and inspectors agreed. The clerk meets frequently with the chair of the corporation. Agenda and supporting papers are received by governors at least seven days before meetings. Draft minutes, providing a clear record of proceedings, are available within two weeks of meetings. Minutes are available on the college's intranet. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings is good. There is effective follow up of absences, with the reasons given being recorded in the minutes.

75 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.

76 The corporation considers the mission and strategic direction of the college. However, there is a lack of systematic monitoring by governors of progress in meeting strategic objectives. The self-assessment report recognised that the corporation's monitoring of students' achievements is insufficient. Performance indicators have been developed, against which the corporation annually assesses its own performance. An action plan addresses identified weaknesses and indicates timescales for dealing with them.

Management

Grade 3

77 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered that the college had underestimated some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- clear management roles and responsibilities
- effective operational planning at school and department level
- well-developed human resource policies and procedures
- effective course management
- effective collaboration with a range of partners

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of the strategic plan
- shortcomings in management information on students' performance
- failure to achieve funding targets for 1997-98

78 The college's management structure was reorganised in 1997. The college executive comprises the chief executive, college secretary, and three directors with responsibility for finance, human resources and learning, respectively. The executive meets fortnightly to discuss strategic and operational issues, as does the senior management team, which comprises the executive, the six heads of school and four heads of service departments. In addition, there are fortnightly meetings of the curriculum group, chaired by the director of learning, which comprises the heads of school and appropriate heads of service departments. This group discusses matters relating to curriculum management. These three management groups are supported by a variety of specialist

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committees and working groups. The minutes of meetings of these groups are detailed and contain clear action points which are reviewed at each meeting. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that school and department management structures are clear and understood by staff. The roles of managers at all levels are well defined and documented through job descriptions. Staff appreciate the approachability of managers in the college.

79 Inspectors agreed with the college that there have been shortcomings in the college's management information system. Managers have been unable to obtain reliable data on students' achievements. The college has recently adopted a new management information system which is beginning to address these issues, and has the capacity to provide managers with a wide choice of on-line reports. Managers and all other staff are being trained to use the system. The ISR information on students' achievements for 1996 and 1997 was inaccurate and could not be used for the purposes of inspection.

80 The college's self-assessment report stated that communication between managers and staff was variable in quality. Inspectors found that aspects of this had already been addressed by the time of the inspection. Staff appreciate briefings from the chief executive and members of the executive team. There are regular school and departmental meetings at which college-wide issues are discussed. A college newsletter is produced regularly for staff and students. Recently, electronic mail and intranet access has been made available to all staff. Minutes of governors' meetings, but not of the executive team or senior management team meetings, are published on the college intranet. Staff are generally well-informed about college matters.

81 The college's latest strategic plan was produced following wide consultation with staff and contains detailed objectives and target dates. In 1998, revised corporate goals were established to reflect the changing environment

in which the college is operating. However, there are no formal mechanisms to review the plan and the extent to which goals are being met. Detailed annual operating plans, containing clear objectives and action plans with target dates, are produced by schools and service departments. In some cases, target dates are not specified and there are no formal arrangements for the monitoring of these plans. The college undertakes regular analysis of market needs, at course and college level, which informs operational and strategic planning. There is an effective academic board which meets regularly and advises the chief executive on a wide range of curriculum issues.

82 The college inherited a deficit of £570,000 on incorporation in 1993. At 31 July 1998, the deficit was £504,000. The FEFC requires this to be cleared by 31 July 1999. At the time of the inspection, it was forecast by the college that this requirement would be met, though it was proving difficult to achieve. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. There is an appropriately-qualified and experienced finance team. Comprehensive monthly management accounts are available about 15 working days after each month-end. The management accounts are distributed to members of the senior management team, and are the subject of consideration at their meetings and those of the executive group. Monthly cost centre reports are distributed to budget holders; the need to improve information provided was acknowledged in the self-assessment report and is being addressed by updating the finance system. Comprehensive financial regulations and procedures were approved by the corporation in 1998.

83 The college has a comprehensive range of policies and supporting procedures. There are well-developed human resources policies, and their implementation is regularly monitored and reviewed. In some other areas the monitoring is less effective. For example, implementation of

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the equal opportunities policy is not sufficiently monitored and reported upon. The college has productive collaborative arrangements with a range of partners. The chief executive is a member of the Higher Education Training Partnership, a consortium of four local colleges and Middlesex University. He chairs lifelong learning partnership meetings and two collaboration projects. In 1998, the college led the East London competitiveness fund consortium to provide training to local companies. There are good links with local schools and employers.

Conclusions

84 The inspection team found the self-assessment report to be a realistic assessment of the college's provision. It provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. The report was the outcome of a comprehensive process of self-assessment which involved all staff and corporation members. The college's difficulty in producing reliable data on students' achievements hampered the formation of some judgements. Strengths in teaching and learning were sometimes overstated, and there was insufficient reference to students' achievements. Most of the findings of the inspection team were in line with those of the college. They agreed with six of the seven curriculum grades and all of the grades awarded for cross-college provision.

85 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 (March 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	20
19-24 years	21
25+ years	58
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (March 1999)

Level of study	%
Foundation	16
Intermediate	18
Advanced	24
Higher education	36
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	6
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	274	856	12
Agriculture	9	21	0
Construction	37	169	2
Engineering	271	758	11
Business	359	919	14
Hotel and catering	204	911	12
Health and community care	254	1,256	16
Art and design	133	88	2
Humanities	186	2,162	25
Basic education	407	162	6
Total	2,134	7,302	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 66% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (March 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	203	3	0	206
Supporting direct learning contact	98	6	0	104
Other support	102	4	0	106
Total	403	13	0	416

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£16,352,000	£17,513,000	£17,454,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£19.48	£16.97	£16.95
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	78%	64%
Achievement of funding target	106%	126%	98%
Diversity of income	18%	17%	20%
Operating surplus	-£349,000	-£1,220,000	-£311,000

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)

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