

Weald 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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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 5

Curriculum areas

Sciences 8

Business 13

English 20

Basic education 27

Cross-college provision

Support for students 32

General resources 37

Quality assurance 43

Governance 50

Management 58

Conclusions 66

College statistics

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

Weald College

Greater London Region

Inspected November 1998

Weald College is a tertiary college in the London Borough of Harrow. The college's self-assessment process is rigorous. The self-assessment report produced before the inspection was thorough, and the judgements made in it were supported by robust evidence. The college has sound plans to build upon the improvements in the quality of provision which have taken place since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found some strengths and weaknesses to be understated.

The college offers courses in all of the FEFC's programme areas except construction. Provision in four programme areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Since the last inspection, the college has improved retention and students' achievements on many courses. It has productive relationships with other colleges, partner schools, the local authority, the TEC, parents, and employers. Most teaching is good. The college's quality assurance procedures are outstanding. The proportion of lessons graded 1 or 2 by inspectors was eight percentage points higher than in the last inspection. The college has maintained the high standard of support arrangements for students noted in the last inspection. The support for students with hearing impairment is particularly good. Management is good at strategic and course

levels. Governors, managers and other staff are self-critical and evaluate their own performance effectively. Governors are committed to the success of the college and make a significant contribution to strategic planning. There have been substantial improvements in accommodation and IT resources over the past four years. The college should improve: the standard of teaching in a few areas; students' achievements on some courses; the monitoring of action plans by some course teams; the timely recruitment of governors; the number of individual study spaces available for students; and the consistency of the data recorded on retention and achievement.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Sciences	3	Support for students	1
Business	2	General resources	2
English	2	Quality assurance	1
Basic education	2	Governance	2
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Weald College, in the London Borough of Harrow, was established in 1987, when a post-16 tertiary system was introduced by the local authority. Most of the college's provision is based at the main campus in Harrow Weald. The college offers courses leading to a range of qualifications at a variety of levels, from pre-foundation to advanced, including general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), general certificate of education advanced/advanced supplementary level (GCE A/AS level), general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Courses are offered in all the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas except construction. The college has a successful business centre which provides professional development courses for employees of local companies.

2 The London Borough of Harrow has a population of about 210,000 and covers less than 20 square miles. There are 10 high schools for pupils aged 12 to 16 and two special schools. Neighbouring boroughs have established mainly grant-maintained schools with sixth forms. Weald College is chosen by approximately 40% of Harrow's high school-leavers. More than 80% of the college's full-time and part-time students are drawn from the local multicultural community. The local economy is diverse. Of the businesses in the borough, 80% have fewer than 10 employees. The unemployment rate in Brent and Harrow has been falling since 1993 and is currently 6%.

3 Weald College, together with two other tertiary colleges and a Roman Catholic sixth form college, provides education and training beyond the age of 16 for the community in Harrow and surrounding areas. It has effective links with local secondary schools, the local education authority (LEA), and the North West London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and is an active partner in a collaborative group which involves all the Harrow high schools and

colleges. The college became an associate college of Middlesex University in December 1997. It works closely with local and national organisations in developing opportunities for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for refugees living in Harrow. It is an active member of the education business partnership in Brent and Harrow.

4 The mission of the college is 'to be a leading provider of broad-based, quality education, training and professional development which supports lifelong learning in the community'. The college is committed to:

- a continuing strong, coherent post-16 provision in Harrow
- contributing to the economic development of the local community
- equality of opportunity
- excellence
- partnership.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in November 1998. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Information about students' achievements was derived from the individualised student record (ISR) for 1996 and 1997. The college provided data on students' achievements for 1998. A sample of the data was validated against class attendance registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The college was told which aspects of provision would be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by a team comprising nine inspectors and an auditor working in the college for a total of 44 days. The team observed 53 lessons and three tutorials, and examined students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, students and support staff.

Context

6 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, 68% were judged to be good or outstanding and 9% less than satisfactory.

These figures are comparable with the average figures for colleges in the sector inspected during 1997-98. The number of classes graded 1 or 2 by inspectors was eight percentage points higher than in the last inspection.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	5	13	5	0	0	23
GCSE	2	0	2	1	0	5
GNVQ	3	7	3	0	0	13
NVQ	0	3	1	1	0	5
Other	2	3	2	3	0	10
Total (No.)	12	26	13	5	0	56
Total (%)	21	47	23	9	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

7 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 (%)
Weald College	13.1	78
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

Sciences

Grade 3

8 The inspection covered GCE A level biology, human biology, chemistry, and physics, and GNVQ intermediate and advanced level courses in science. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made in the college's self-assessment report about sciences. However, they considered that the self-assessment report failed to acknowledge some important strengths.

Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- good retention, punctuality and attendance by students
- well-managed courses
- well-maintained specialist accommodation

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on most GCE A level courses in 1996 and 1997
- poor pass rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses in 1998
- little use of information technology (IT) on some courses

9 The college offers a range of science courses including GCE A level courses, and GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes in science. The majority of students are studying GCE A level subjects full time. Courses are effectively planned and well managed. Regular team meetings enable staff to plan and review courses effectively. Detailed course evaluations, which include critical analysis of teaching and learning, have led to significant improvements in examination results in some subjects. Teachers carefully monitor students' attendance and punctuality.

10 Practical work is successfully integrated with theory in all science subjects. Students and teachers pay proper attention to safety procedures during practical sessions. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods, a strength not noted in the self-assessment report. Most students make effective contributions in lessons, and relationships between teachers and students are good. There are detailed schemes of work which ensure good coverage of course syllabuses. Teachers carefully explain the objectives of lessons to students. Some practical exercises require students to plan their activities and to develop the ability to work in groups. Assignments and practical tasks undertaken by students are appropriate for the type and level of course. Most marking by teachers is accurate, but some teachers do not give enough written feedback to help students to improve their performance. Much of the marked work scrutinised by inspectors was of a high standard. Some GNVQ students use IT effectively in their work. GCE A level students have few opportunities to use IT in their work. The college has introduced a systematic review and action-planning process for all students. This enables teachers and students to review progress regularly throughout the course. There are regular workshops designed to address specific difficulties students are experiencing. Students are tested frequently on their understanding of the work.

11 The college identified in its self-assessment report that, whilst there has been sustained improvement year on year, examination pass rates on most GCE A levels have been below national averages over the past three years. The pass rate in GCE A level human biology is above the national figure. In 1998, the pass rates on both GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses in science declined sharply, and are well below the national average. Students' retention, attendance and punctuality are good. Approximately 80% of students who complete advanced courses progress to science-related courses in higher education.

Curriculum Areas

12 There is an adequate number of well-maintained specialist laboratories which are used for both theory and practical teaching. Some are better suited for this dual role than others. There are good preparatory areas, and a small greenhouse which services biology and horticulture courses. There is a new analytical chemistry laboratory designed and equipped by industrial organisations, which provides advanced level students with opportunities to work in an industrial standard laboratory, which has sophisticated analytical equipment. In

response to a weakness identified in the self-assessment report, the number of computers in the science division is being increased. Equipment and materials required for practical work are adequate. Appropriate text books and scientific journals are provided in laboratories. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. The contribution of the work of technicians in supporting the work of the division is accurately identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate science	2	Expected completions	15	26	18
		Retention (%)	93	85	83
		Achievement (%)	79	71	27
GNVQ advanced science	3	Expected completions	9	18	26
		Retention (%)	89	67	58
		Achievement (%)	17	50	13
GCE A level biology (two year)	3	Expected completions	75	70	98
		Retention (%)	85	83	78
		Achievement (%)	50	63	78
GCE A level human biology (two year)	3	Expected completions	14	30	41
		Retention (%)	93	63	76
		Achievement (%)	46	67	65
GCE A level chemistry (two year)	3	Expected completions	79	80	104
		Retention (%)	90	84	79
		Achievement (%)	54	69	73
GCE A level physics (two year)	3	Expected completions	72	78	87
		Retention (%)	90	79	52
		Achievement (%)	50	66	75

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

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

13 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report. Inspectors observed 13 lessons. The inspection covered GNVQ intermediate and advanced levels; GCE A level business studies and accounting; NVQs in business administration at levels 2 and 3, and business-related adult and continuing education provision.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- well-structured and detailed schemes of work and lesson plans
- improvements in retention on most programmes
- good pass rates on GCE A level business studies and GNVQ advanced business courses

Weaknesses

- low GNVQ and NVQ pass rates in 1998
- inconsistent recording of data on students' achievements

14 The inspectors' grade profile for lessons observed reflected the college's and confirmed judgements made in the self-assessment report about the quality of teaching. In over half the lessons observed by inspectors the teaching was good or outstanding. In one excellent GNVQ intermediate lesson, the teacher encouraged students to describe and reflect on different types of employment. Through effective questioning she actively involved all the students. The students then enthusiastically took part in a range of activities involving group work and short presentations. The teacher took the opportunity to incorporate an assessment of the students' key skills. Her approachable attitude helped to create a relaxed but business-

like atmosphere, in which all students felt able to participate, and, when necessary, seek assistance.

15 Teachers on NVQ programmes draw effectively on students' work placement experiences to help students relate theory to practice. Lessons have clear aims and objectives and, in most lessons, teachers use an appropriate range of teaching and learning methods. Schemes of work for some NVQ programmes, identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, have been revised and are now effective. The value of good schemes of work was demonstrated when a teacher, asked to cover for a sick colleague at short notice, was able to check the scheme attached to the register and to organise appropriate learning activities.

16 Pass rates for GCE A/AS level business studies are well above the national average. In 1998, pass rates declined on the NVQ level 2 course in administration and the GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes in business. Of students who completed the GNVQ advanced in business, 70% progressed to higher education. Action is being taken to improve NVQ pass rates. Poor pass rates on GCE A level accounts, identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, led to the course being withdrawn.

17 The quality of marking of students' work and written feedback by teachers is, in some cases, constructively critical; in others, it is less effective in helping them to improve their performance. Most students' written work is of an appropriate standard. Students work conscientiously in lessons. They speak positively about their experiences at college, and the support given by teachers.

18 Business courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly and carefully consider curriculum and quality issues. Systems are in place to improve students' punctuality and attendance. Retention has improved over

Curriculum Areas

the past three years on the majority of programmes. Access to computerised management information systems has recently been provided for course managers. Managers do not yet make full use of this information, but rely on data from other sources. There are some inconsistencies in the different sets of data.

19 Most classrooms used for teaching business are well equipped. Students have access to up-to-date computers. The learning resource centre has an adequate stock of books and other resources to support students' learning. Teachers on business courses are increasingly encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning using the resources provided. The learning resource centre is well equipped but is often crowded.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Expected completions	73	66	53
		Retention (%)	87	89	93
		Achievement (%)	76	75	53
NVQ level 2 business administration	2	Expected completions	27	22	50
		Retention (%)	95	91	81
		Achievement (%)	60	100	44
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	70	70	84
		Retention (%)	85	86	89
		Achievement (%)	82	84	56
GCE A level business	3	Expected completions	94	115	117
		Retention (%)	93	76	96
		Achievement (%)	65	75	90
GCE AS business	3	Expected completions	22	16	34
		Retention (%)	88	84	94
		Achievement (%)	41	71	78

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

Curriculum Areas

English

Grade 2

20 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, they thought that some of the strengths were overstated, and that the report failed to identify some weaknesses. Inspectors observed 14 lessons in English, covering GCE A level, GCSE, and English for business courses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- high GCE A level English pass rates
- effective management and good teamwork at course level

Weaknesses

- some poor lesson planning
- the significant decline in the GCSE English pass rate in 1998

21 The college offers a wide range of courses in English, including GCE A levels in language, literature, and combined language and literature, GCSE English language, and a pre-GCSE course, English for business. Some students who have enrolled on the GCE A level English language course are finding the demands of the course too high. New guidance procedures have been established to ensure that students are in future better informed about the course.

22 Much of the teaching in English is good, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the subject they are teaching. Many schemes of work, particularly those at GCE A level, identify the subject and study skills which are to be developed. In the better lessons observed, teachers successfully employed a range of appropriate teaching methods. Teachers' expectations of students are high.

Contributions by students in lessons are often mature and thoughtful. Students demonstrate the communication skills necessary to work effectively in groups, and to give clear presentations. In one particularly effective lesson, students were provided with copies of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, and asked to compare the styles of reporting a particular story. They were able to identify the effect the choice of language made to the sense of the reporting. Some less effective lessons observed lacked clear aims and teachers did not involve all the students in the work. In a few lessons, many students did not participate actively and the work did not stretch or challenge them.

23 Students' written work is usually of a high standard but some work set on the English for business course is repetitive and insufficiently challenging. Teachers' comments on students' work are often positive and encouraging, though at times they give insufficient detail to help students to understand how they might improve their work.

24 GCE A level retention and pass rates have been consistently higher than the national average for the past three years. This was identified as a significant strength in the self-assessment report and inspectors agreed. GCSE pass rates before 1997-98 were good. However, the pass rate in GCSE English in 1998 declined sharply from 70% to 43%. In addition to success in examinations, students are encouraged to develop study skills, and to work co-operatively. Students are formally involved in assessing their own progress at least twice a year. Where students and teachers identify learning needs teachers refer students to English workshops.

25 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that English courses are well managed. Staff work closely together, and hold regular, productive meetings. They use a shared bank of resources, including textbooks, printed learning materials, and sound and video recordings. They have established common

Curriculum Areas

procedures to follow in the setting and marking of work. Decisions about syllabus changes are based on a careful analysis of students' achievements.

26 Lessons take place in a group of base rooms in which relevant displays, including students' work, contribute to a pleasant working environment. However, some rooms are very

crowded. The learning resource centre is currently in the process of updating bookstock in many subjects, including English. Some older texts are now kept by the English division. There are insufficient stocks of fiction and texts to support the new GCE A level English language course.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
English for business	1	Expected completions	40	19	40
		Retention (%)	80	74	79
		Achievement (%)	68	53	67
GCSE English language	2	Expected completions	243	242	247
		Retention (%)	82	81	89
		Achievement (%)	69	70	43
GCE A level English courses	3	Expected completions	113	109	147
		Retention (%)	92	84	83
		Achievement (%)	86	84	95

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

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 2

27 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified by the college in its self-assessment. However, the report failed to identify some important weaknesses. Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering basic education, courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and GNVQ foundation programmes.

Key strengths

- effective identification of students' needs
- some imaginative and creative teaching
- good retention and achievements
- outstanding support for students with hearing impairments
- effective management of students' challenging behaviour
- good use of classroom assistants to support learning

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching
- failure to set specific learning objectives for some students
- inappropriate learning materials used in some lessons

28 The college's mission statement makes clear its commitment to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's provision includes the 'headway' course for students with moderate learning difficulties, English courses for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and a range of GNVQ programmes at foundation level. The quality of support for students with hearing impairments is outstanding. The provision is managed through three divisions of the college. Although staff hold regular team meetings, they do not yet have a fully co-ordinated approach to curriculum planning.

29 Inspectors observed some imaginative teaching on courses for adult learners, the GNVQ foundation programme, and in mathematics and English workshops. Students with challenging behaviour are effectively managed by staff. Teachers make good use of classroom assistants to support students in lessons. Students are encouraged to develop the skills necessary to work on their own. Students' work demonstrates that they are developing a range of useful skills. Many lessons are well planned and teachers share the aims of lessons with the students. In the best lessons, teachers employ an appropriate range of teaching methods to motivate and stimulate students. At some times, students work on individual tasks and at others they work co-operatively in groups on project work. They are encouraged to evaluate their own learning. In one particularly effective lesson, students were considering the structure of companies and were encouraged to draw on their experience of working and their knowledge of local businesses. They had the opportunity to discuss their findings in pairs before participating in a discussion involving the whole class. In some poorer lessons, teachers failed to plan the work in detail and did not make clear to students the purpose of what they were doing. In some cases, teachers had chosen learning materials which did not take account of the needs of the students. Although teachers keep records of the activities undertaken by students, they do not always evaluate what the students have learned. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

30 All students are able to take nationally recognised qualifications. Some students progress from foundation level courses to more advanced courses in the college, and in a few cases, to higher education. Two students who originally enrolled on a GNVQ foundation programme have progressed to the GNVQ advanced business course and are currently applying to university, and a student who enrolled four years ago on the GNVQ foundation

Curriculum Areas

is now studying for a business degree. In 1998, 80% of students on GNVQ foundation programmes completed the course successfully. This is significantly above the national figures. Over 82% of adults on basic education courses achieved a full qualification. Retention on all basic skills courses is high. However, the achievements of students with moderate learning difficulties on separate specialist courses are poor.

31 All staff have teaching qualifications and are highly committed to the provision. While there are teachers with specialist qualifications

in English, mathematics and IT, there are insufficient staff with relevant special education qualifications. Many teachers have expertise and qualifications in supporting students with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia and hearing impairment. Students have access to up-to-date computers and other IT. The English and mathematics workshops take place on the second floor of the learning resource centre and are not accessible to students or staff who use wheelchairs. The college noted these weaknesses in its self-assessment report.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation courses	1	Expected completions	55	64	63
		Retention (%)	73	89	82
		Achievement (%)	88	72	79
Headway course, C&G Skillpower	1	Expected completions	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	33
Open college basic education units	1	Expected completions	*	*	90
		Retention (%)	*	*	86
		Achievement (%)	*	*	82

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

*courses not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

32 The college's assessment of students' support was thorough and the evidence presented in support of the judgements made was clear. Inspectors agreed with the judgements the college made in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective care and pastoral support
- well-structured tutorial and induction system
- excellent links with schools and parents
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- effective careers education programme
- good organisation of work experience

Weaknesses

- failure to provide effective support to develop basic/key skills of some students

33 The college has developed a caring culture which is appreciated by students and which supports their learning. Prospective students receive detailed information and advice about the college and its courses. There is an effective system, shared with other providers of further education in the borough, to help students transfer from school to college. Senior tutors have close links with partner schools. There is good co-operation with schools and other colleges in the borough. The college recognised that communications with parents is a significant strength. There is a useful handbook for students and their families which provides information about college and community services. Prospective students are interviewed before being offered a place on a course, and their choice is confirmed at another interview during enrolment. A contract, signed at the

start of a course by students and, where appropriate, their parents, clearly sets out what is expected of students and the college's commitment to them. The college holds two consultation evenings each year to enable students and their parents to review students' progress. These are well attended. Students' achievements are celebrated at presentation events, and in regular newsletters.

34 As the college recognised in its self-assessment report, it has established an effective tutorial system. Students are allocated to a tutor group which includes other students from the same year of study. Students have the same personal tutor throughout their course. A college-wide tutorial framework, contained in the tutor handbook, guides individual tutors on what to include in their tutorial programmes. As well as weekly group tutorials covering topics such as job applications, higher education opportunities, and health issues, tutors see students individually, at least twice each term, to review progress and to plan for the future. All students maintain a comprehensive personal record of achievement. The group tutorials observed by inspectors were all satisfactory or better. The college is continuing to provide training for tutors in order to maintain the quality of tutorials across the college. Students can choose from a wide range of additional activities such as music, drama and sports clubs which are organised by teachers. These activities are popular with students. A confidential counselling service is offered to students. The college counsellor deals mainly with personal problems and is able to refer students to outside agencies when specialist help is needed.

35 Inspectors agreed with the college that it has good systems for identifying the additional learning needs of individual students. The college receives information from partner schools about those students whose additional learning needs have already been identified at school. Other students, who have not reached

Cross-college Provision

an appropriate standard in English and mathematics, take basic skills tests during their induction to the course and then a programme of additional support is agreed by the students and their personal tutor. The college carefully monitors the effectiveness of the support given to students. As it concluded in its self-assessment report, links between basic skills tutors and course teachers are not always effective, and some students do not receive the help they need. The college employs a number of specialist staff to support students with physical disabilities. The support given to students with hearing impairment is outstanding.

36 The college highlighted in its self-assessment report the emphasis it places upon careers education and guidance and inspectors agreed that this is a significant strength. The college has established its own careers section which offers advice to full-time and part-time students. Effective co-ordination and communication between careers teachers, the work experience co-ordinator, and personal tutors, help students to progress within the college, and to higher education and employment. The comprehensive range of activities includes regular visits from representatives of universities, and visits by students to higher education conferences. Many students progress to higher education after completing their course at the college. Of the 722 students who applied for a higher education place in 1998, 75% were successful. The college has established contact with many local employers through its well-organised work experience programme. All NVQ, most GNVQ and many GCE A level students participate in work experience.

General Resources

Grade 2

37 The college's self-assessment report identified the main strengths and weaknesses in the college's resources. Evaluative reports were prepared for the college's estate and accommodation, and the learning resource centre.

Key strengths

- development of accommodation clearly linked to the strategic plan
- attractive sites and well-maintained accommodation
- well-equipped learning resource centre
- good access to IT facilities
- good sporting facilities

Weaknesses

- insufficient spaces for students' group work and private study
- inadequate social facilities for students
- insufficient space comfortably to accommodate current numbers of students

38 The college recognises as a strength its accommodation strategy which is closely linked to the strategic plan. The main campus comprises seven permanent and several temporary buildings which occupy an attractive site in the London borough of Harrow. The oldest building was completed in the 1930s as a grammar school. A phased, planned maintenance programme is in place. Most buildings are well maintained, but the college has identified problems with heating and ventilation, acoustics and the poor condition of some parts of the estate. Room occupancy at the main campus is high according to a recent space utilisation survey. Careful timetabling ensures efficient use of the rooms while keeping overcrowding to a minimum. However, the

Cross-college Provision

college acknowledged the difficulties in ensuring that all lessons take place in suitable rooms.

As well as its main campus, the college owns a small building nearby which is close to an arts centre, supermarket and swimming pool, and is surrounded by green fields. This has proved to be a good location for basic skills courses for adults.

39 Inspectors agreed with the college's view that improvements made since the last inspection are a strength. These include: improved facilities for computing, media studies, and science courses; multimedia computer workstations; the provision of a 64 seat lecture theatre which is well used for teaching and let to commercial users; the development of an industrial standard chemical analysis laboratory; and improvements to the refectory. Staff have adequate accommodation and access to photocopiers and computers. Suitable provision is made for part-time staff who are allocated space in staff work rooms.

40 An attractive learning resource centre was opened in September 1998 in line with the plan to improve the facilities for students and to encourage students on full-time courses to study more on their own. The centre houses 80 modern computer workstations, has good 'drop-in' facilities for students, a selection of books and other learning resources, such as video and audio tapes, CD-ROMs, and access to the internet. An average of 2,000 students use the centre each day. There is effective liaison between the centre's staff and teachers, enabling groups of students to work in the centre on course projects. Monitoring of the use made of resources has shown that, although students' access to computers has been improved, there are insufficient individual study spaces. The centre is open on only one evening each week.

41 Since the last inspection, the college has improved access for those who use wheelchairs. Most parts of the college are now fully accessible. Suitable arrangements are made for

staff and students who are unable to reach facilities which are still inaccessible.

42 There are good sporting facilities which are well used, including two playing fields, a small fitness room, basketball, tennis and netball courts, and a main hall used for sports such as table tennis. In addition, the college has arrangements for students and staff to use facilities outside the college. The college acknowledges that there is insufficient social space for students. The refectory and other public areas become overcrowded at certain times of the day, particularly in inclement weather. Although it has been improved, the refectory does not always offer a welcoming environment for staff, students or visitors.

Quality Assurance

Grade 1

43 The self-assessment report emphasised the strong commitment to quality assurance by the college's senior management team. Inspectors agreed with the judgements made by the college in the report.

Key strengths

- well-established procedures for course review and performance evaluation
- effective target-setting and action-planning
- rigorous observation and evaluation of teaching and learning by senior staff
- effective use of value-added measures for measuring students' progress
- a well-managed staff development programme linked to college plans

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of action plans by some course teams

Cross-college Provision

44 A commitment to continuous improvement is at the heart of the college's quality assurance processes and policies. The college sets high standards which are explicitly stated in the student contract and the handbook for students and their families. There is a well-established quality review cycle which encompasses curriculum, business support and pastoral teams. All teams write a self-assessment report annually, based on agreed performance indicators and an analysis of surveys of the views of students and staff. Each report identifies strengths and weaknesses, and includes an action plan which is intended to build on the strengths and address weaknesses. The reports and action plans are reviewed by the quality and standards subcommittee of the academic board. Targets for improvement are agreed and reviewed annually. Teams found to be performing exceptionally well, or underperforming, are designated as 'focus' teams. 'Focus' teams value the additional support received from managers, and staff development. If an underperforming 'focus' team fails to improve its performance it is designated a 'highlight' group, and must produce a rigorous action plan to address weaknesses. This system has been demonstrably successful in improving pass rates on a number of courses over the past three years. For example, the pass rate in GCE A level psychology has improved from 62% in 1995 to 95% in 1997 after subject staff were designated a 'focus' team.

45 The self-assessment report recognised that the evaluation of courses and services by students is a central feature of the college's quality assurance systems. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. The college surveys the views of students on course management, teaching standards, and the quality of resources. The views are analysed in detail in course reviews and are used to formulate action plans. Surveys of staff opinions are used by senior managers to identify management and

organisational strengths and difficulties. While the results of surveys of staff are effectively reported to staff throughout the college, students are not always made aware of the outcomes of surveys of their views. Some course teams do not monitor progress made in achieving action plans thoroughly enough.

46 The college calculates the GCSE point scores of all full-time students. This score is used to predict the students' expected results on GCE A level or GNVQ advanced courses, and to monitor their progress through the course.

47 Self-assessment has been an integral feature of the college's quality assurance cycle since the last inspection. The process of self-assessment involved all staff and governors. An important feature of the self-assessment of curriculum areas is the rigorous observation and grading of lessons. During 1997-98, division managers observed and graded 115 lessons. The profile of grades awarded internally conformed closely with the profile of grades given by inspectors during the inspection. All self-assessment reports and grades are subject to internal moderation. Robust systems of internal verification meet the requirements of examination and awarding bodies in assuring the quality of assessment of students' work.

48 The college's previous inspection in 1994 identified the underdevelopment of quality procedures in administrative and cross-college areas as a weakness. Progress has been made in setting up processes for evaluating performance in these areas. Learning resource centre staff have successfully operated service standards for a number of years. A successful application for the charter mark was awarded to the college in recognition of the service standards used by support staff dealing directly with the public. However, the college recognised in its self-assessment report that targets and standards are not as highly developed in all service areas.

Cross-college Provision

49 Teachers have been appraised since 1992, and observation of teaching and learning is a part of this process. The appraisal system for teachers has been reviewed and simplified recently. The system now requires managers to conduct a development interview with each teacher at least once each year in order to produce a personal development plan. Through the interviews, staff development needs are identified in line with the college's strategic objectives or teachers' professional development requirements. This system closely mirrors the system that has been used successfully for support staff. Staff speak highly of the range of development opportunities open to them. The college first achieved Investor in People status in 1994, and has recently had the award reconfirmed.

Governance

Grade 2

50 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment of governance, although they identified some weaknesses not included in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- governors' role in determining the college's mission and their awareness of strategic issues facing the college
- effective contribution by governors to strategic planning
- appropriate committee structure
- clerking arrangements

Weaknesses

- long-standing corporation vacancies
- incomplete standing orders
- the need for some governors to develop a greater understanding of the college's curriculum

51 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.

52 The corporation has a membership of 15. There are currently four vacancies, of which two have existed for more than a year and two are more recent. The present membership comprises five independent, two co-opted, and two staff governors, a representative of the TEC, and the principal. There is a search committee but it has not ensured that vacancies are filled promptly. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. The corporation benefits from the expertise and experience of its members and has carried out a skills audit to determine its ideal membership.

53 Governors have identified in the self-assessment report the difficulty of ensuring full attendance at corporation and committee meetings. Some committee meetings held over the past 12 months have not been quorate. In order to address this weakness, the corporation has recently revised the committee structure. The finance and general purposes, personnel, and assets committees have been replaced by a single resources committee in an attempt to reduce the number of committee meetings. All committees have terms of reference which identify their responsibilities and relationship to the corporation. Comprehensive papers are provided to the corporation and its committees which provide a good basis for discussion and decision-making. Minutes of meetings provide a good balance between recording the decisions made and providing evidence of debate on key issues. Committee meetings are sometimes arranged to take place just before corporation meetings which results in committee minutes not being available for consideration at the following corporation meeting.

Cross-college Provision

54 The clerk to the corporation is a senior postholder in the college. The clerk has a separate job description for the role and receives appropriate support to carry out his duties effectively. The corporation does not have a comprehensive set of standing orders to guide the conduct of business for the corporation and its committees. It has established a register of interests which includes declarations by all governors and college managers. The corporation has a code of conduct but this has not been updated to reflect the Nolan committee's recommendations.

55 Governors play an active role in the strategic planning process and scrutinise the financial implications of proposed plans. The corporation has carried out a review of the mission and strategic direction of the college. Governors considered that formal agreements among tertiary colleges in Harrow would provide a more coherent and supportive experience for young people and adults in the borough. The results of a recent feasibility study have led the corporation to agree to merge with one other college in the borough in August 1999, subject to the outcome of consultation and the approval of the secretary of state for education and employment. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the corporation's vision and involvement in strategic planning is a strength. The governors have ensured that there are effective arrangements for the appraisal of the principal.

56 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that governors effectively monitor the achievement of financial targets throughout the year. Governors receive accurate financial reports and have a good understanding and knowledge of the college's financial position. All governors receive financial information of good quality before each corporation or resources committee cycle, rather than monthly.

57 Although governors visit the college for special events such as college open days and presentation evenings, they acknowledge in the

self-assessment report that they do not all have a detailed understanding of the college's curriculum. They receive statistics on students' achievements each year and spend some time reviewing them. They are knowledgeable about poor achievement in specific curriculum areas but do not all have a comprehensive grasp of the quality assurance procedures in place in the college. Governors receive regular training, either through short briefings on relevant issues at the start of corporation meetings, or through annual training days. Recent training has addressed issues such as self-assessment, inclusive learning and the college's accommodation strategy.

Management

Grade 2

58 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses of management identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective senior and course team management
- good strategic planning
- prudent financial management
- effective communications
- effective co-ordination of curriculum and tutorial management
- good links with external organisations

Weaknesses

- non-compliance with Treasury standards of internal audit
- inconsistent data on some students' achievements held in several sources
- limited use made of market research to develop new courses

59 The college is well managed. The college executive group comprises the principal, three

Cross-college Provision

assistant principals, and three directors. Each of the assistant principals has responsibility for one of the cross-college functions of marketing and enterprise, curriculum and quality, and client services, respectively. They also lead a team of eight division managers, seven of whom are responsible for teaching and tutorial teams, and one for examinations and quality. The three directors are responsible for property and facilities, finance and administration, and human resources, respectively. Two of the directors are employed on fixed-term contracts pending the outcome of the proposed merger with a neighbouring college. Teaching teams are led by team managers who are responsible for course development and some aspects of staff management. Tutorials and the pastoral care of students are overseen by senior tutors in each division. Team managers and senior tutors report to division managers. The team manager is a new role, and those appointed are receiving management training. Although this part of the management structure is new, it is effective in providing good course management and support to students. However, the recording of outcomes of course team meetings is, in some cases, poor. This weakness was not identified in the college self-assessment report.

60 The college's strategic planning process is clear and thorough, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. All staff, through their teams, contribute to the formulation of the plan. Divisional plans are produced, in line with institutional objectives. The college is close to achieving its enrolment target for the third consecutive year. The college uses labour market information produced by the TEC to be better informed about local education and training needs. It has also commissioned further research, but as the college identified in its self-assessment, it makes little use of this information to inform decisions about curriculum developments. Inspectors agreed with this assessment. The college has now started to forge links with more community

organisations to become better informed about the needs of the local community.

61 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The budget planning process is well defined and clearly understood by staff. The college is implementing a devolved budget management system. There is detailed and effective monitoring of the college's financial performance but financial reports do not include a rolling 12-month cashflow forecast. The college's internal auditors have not ensured that their reviews of the college's systems have been carried out in accordance with Treasury standards. As a result, the college cannot be assured that it has adequate systems of internal control. The college has taken steps to remedy this situation. The college's external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the systems of financial control.

62 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that communication in the college is a strength. The principal provides briefings each month to curriculum and service teams. Meetings of all college staff are held twice each term. There are also regular staff bulletins and newsletters. Communications about the proposed merger involving the college have been very good. The principal has written to all staff, and to students and their parents, to inform them of the merger proposal and its implications.

63 The college's computerised management information systems are being improved. The college has separate systems for information on students, finance and personnel. A new computerised student information system has been in use for a year and has recently been networked to all divisional managers. Information on students' achievements is also held by teaching teams, and success in GNVQs is recorded separately. There are some inconsistencies in the data held in these

Cross-college Provision

systems. The computerised information systems for finance and personnel are about to be replaced by new systems that better meet the needs of the college.

64 The college has good links with employers, schools, further education colleges, local universities, the local TEC and the community. It has a productive relationship with the local division of an international imaging company. The company has assisted the college with new science accommodation, and with the selection process for the new team managers. The four post-16 colleges in the borough work effectively together on a number of initiatives, and the three tertiary colleges deliver the adult and continuing education programme for the borough. The colleges in Harrow with a neighbouring further education college, adult education centre and the local TEC have jointly formed a company to develop and deliver a range of courses. The college is an associate college of Middlesex University, and has productive links with the University of Westminster. Links with North West London TEC are good and have led to many joint enterprises.

65 The college's academic board has regular, productive meetings. It presents reports on its work to the corporation. The college's equal opportunities policy is regularly reviewed and has been updated. The policy is displayed prominently in the college and in all publicity material and has a significant impact on the college. The equal opportunities committee meets regularly to monitor the implementation of the policy. The college has a detailed health and safety policy. The equal opportunities and health and safety committees report to the academic board and to the corporation.

Conclusions

66 The self-assessment report used for the inspection was the third one produced by the college. Inspectors found the document helpful when they were planning the inspection. The college is self-critical, and all staff were involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is clear and concise, and identified strengths, weaknesses and planned action under the headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The report is supported by detailed evidence drawn from course reviews, observation of lessons, and internal validation processes. The college rigorously evaluated the quality of its provision and the inspection team agreed with most of its judgements. Inspectors agreed with all but two of the grades awarded by the college.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	41
19-24 years	7
25+ years	50
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	18
Intermediate	12
Advanced	31
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	35
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	598	504	21
Agriculture	6	32	1
Engineering	7	12	0
Business	442	156	11
Hotel and catering	148	41	4
Health and community care	203	284	9
Art and design	221	273	9
Humanities	468	1,457	37
Basic education	25	387	8
Total	2,118	3,146	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 7% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	94	11	21	126
Supporting direct learning contact	26	4	4	34
Other support	58	5	2	65
Total	178	20	27	225

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£6,735,000	£7,149,000	£7,190,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£16.76	£16.80	£16.47
Payroll as a proportion of income	80%	67%	67%
Achievement of funding target	101%	100%	102%
Diversity of income	14%	16%	17%
Operating surplus	-£646,000	£48,000	-£69,000

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 data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	115	166	268	344	809	385
	Retention (%)	74	81	78*	87	89*	84*
	Achievement (%)	70	66	77	28	35	84
2	Expected completions	849	1,184	1,174	224	210	317
	Retention (%)	86	81	80	75	81	89*
	Achievement (%)	42	54	54	33	19	54
3	Expected completions	–	2,239	2,458	–	348	358
	Retention (%)	–	89	82	–	84	85*
	Achievement (%)	60	64	70	21	39	61
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	13	21	–	21	19
	Retention (%)	–	92	86*	–	100	100*
	Achievement (%)	60	n/a	100	78	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Expected completions	23	42	447	981	647	749
	Retention (%)	96	90	97	97	94	89
	Achievement (%)	10	21	67	10	30	92
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	127	195	321	179	263	439
	Retention (%)	88	82	84	94*	98*	97*
	Achievement (%)	13	58	77	n/a	4	90

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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