

Weymouth College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Weymouth College

South West Region

Inspected October 1997

Weymouth College is a tertiary college which serves south and west Dorset. The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report as a result of a process monitored by the college management team and the academic board. Every substantial curriculum and cross-college area produced a report which contributed to the college's overall self-assessment. Some areas were more accurate in their judgements and grades than others. Lesson observations formed part of the self-assessment process. Weaknesses in teaching identified by inspectors were not always reflected in the college's self-assessment. Some judgements and grades relating to students' achievements were not based on reliable data. Consequently, although in some respects the judgements and grades reached by the college were well founded, inspectors considered that a significant number were overstated.

The college offers a broad range of courses in all the FEFC programme areas. Provision in five of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Procedures for students' recruitment and enrolment are effective and there is a good range of student services. Standards of teaching are good in a

number of subjects. On some vocational courses and many GCE A level courses, the achievements of students who complete their studies are consistently good. The quality assurance system results in regular reviews of college policies. Resources for learning are generally adequate. The college should: improve the quality of teaching and learning and the level of students' achievements and retention in some subjects; address inconsistencies in tutorial support and in programme management; rectify weaknesses in the implementation of quality assurance; improve the accuracy of students' achievements data; ensure that the audit committee is operating effectively and that governors are more fully involved in strategic planning; and improve aspects of its accommodation.

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

Curriculum areas inspected	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Construction	2	Support for students	2
Business	3	General resources	3
Hotel and catering/leisure and tourism	2	Quality assurance	3
Art, design, media and performing arts	2	Governance	3
Humanities	2	Management	3

The College and its Mission

1 Weymouth College was established in 1985. The college mainly serves south and west Dorset although some students come from further parts of the county. There are two main sites in Weymouth, at Cranford Avenue and Newstead Road, and a small site in Dorchester. The Cranford Avenue site accommodates most of the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and foundation programmes, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, information technology, sport, creative and performing arts and a nursery. The Newstead Road site is two miles away and accommodates construction, engineering, business studies, leisure and tourism, catering, care, hairdressing and beauty therapy. The Poundbury Enterprise Centre in Dorchester is a small unit catering for new technology and video conferencing for the college's European partners and local businesses. Weymouth and Portland are seaside towns with a population of 62,840, of which 4 per cent are in the 16 to 19 age range and 18 per cent are over 65 years of age. The local economy is heavily dependent on service industries, including tourism, professional services and public sector organisations which together account for 82 per cent of employment in the area. There is also some manufacturing, agriculture and fishing. Ninety-four per cent of businesses in the area employ fewer than 25 people. The unemployment rate in Weymouth and Portland is currently 5 per cent. This is lower than the Dorset county average of 7 per cent.

2 Within the area served by the college there are two schools with sixth forms with which the college competes for students. Approximately 79 per cent of school-leavers in the college's catchment area proceed to further study after the age of 16. This figure is slightly above the national average of 78 per cent. The nearest further education college, about eight miles

away, is Kingston Maurward which is primarily an agricultural college.

3 In 1996-97, 2,245 full-time and 6,191 part-time students enrolled on college programmes. Seventy-four per cent were aged 19 years or over. There has been a considerable growth in part-time enrolments during the past three years. The college employs 379 full-time equivalent staff. At the time of the inspection, the college was divided into six departments: business, care and catering; built environment and engineering; creative and performing arts; community education and training; science, mathematics and humanities; and new technology and flexible learning.

4 The college's mission is to meet the education and training needs of the people of Weymouth and Portland and of those who live further afield in Dorset. It seeks to achieve the following:

- increase part-time enrolments by 30 per cent by the year 2000
- provide opportunities for students to study on a modular basis across 50 per cent of the college's learning programmes
- provide opportunities for students to enrol at any time of the year on 20 per cent of the college's programmes of study
- increase income from non-Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) sources.

The Inspection

5 Weymouth College was inspected during the week beginning 6 October 1997. Inspectors had previously studied the college's self-assessment report. The college experienced difficulty providing reliable students' achievement data. Much of the data were found to be incomplete and, in some cases, inaccurate. The inspection was carried out by a team of 13 inspectors and an auditor. The team spent a total of 51 days in the college. Inspectors observed 127 lessons, examined students'

Context

coursework and scrutinised college documentation. Inspection team members met college governors, managers, staff and students. The work of the college's internal auditors was also assessed.

6 Sixty-two per cent of the 127 lessons inspected were judged to have more strengths than weaknesses. This is above the figure of 61 per cent for colleges inspected during the 1996-97 academic year according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97; Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance for the lessons inspected was 82 per cent. This compares favourably with the average of 77 per cent for all tertiary colleges inspected in 1996-97. The highest attendance was in art and design at 90 per cent and the lowest in hotel and catering at 71 per cent. The following table shows the grades awarded for the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE AS/A level	7	18	15	1	0	41
GCSE	0	4	1	0	0	5
GNVQ	1	6	7	4	0	18
NVQ	0	14	4	0	0	18
Higher education, including access	2	4	0	0	0	6
Other vocational	7	16	12	4	0	39
Total	17	62	39	9	0	127

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 2

7 Fifteen lessons were observed. These included practical lessons in masonry, brickwork, furniture, carpentry and joinery for students on national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses at levels 1, 2 and 3, and theory lessons for students on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate and national diploma courses. Inspectors agreed with the college's overall assessment of this provision.

Key strengths

- good specialist pre-entry guidance
- generally well-structured and effective schemes of work and lesson plans
- well-managed practical teaching and some good theory teaching
- appropriate attention paid to health and safety
- effective application by students of knowledge gained during site visits and work placements
- good use of mathematics workshops to develop numeracy skills
- improved students' achievements and retention in 1997
- good levels of achievement and retention on many courses

Weaknesses

- students not encouraged to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning
- inconsistent tutorial practice
- failure of teachers to take account of differing abilities of students in some classes

- some weaker achievements and retention rates on, for example, national diploma and national certificate in construction and brickwork courses

8 The college's construction provision comprises the BTEC national diploma in construction and GNVQ intermediate award in construction and the built environment; BTEC national certificates in building and civil engineering; NVQ craft courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 including NVQ level 1 in wood occupations; and NVQ levels 2 and 3 in architectural stone carving, masonry, carpentry and joinery and brickwork. In addition, there is a wide range of basic skills courses and a programme of computer-aided design courses. Entry requirements and course content are clearly outlined in publicity material. Teachers provide students with effective guidance on their choice of course. Induction programmes are well thought out, but their presentation varies in quality. Most schemes of work and lessons are well planned and shared with the students. Most students attend lessons punctually. The college's self-assessment report accurately observes that although teaching and learning is generally well planned, the quality of some documentation should be improved.

9 Teachers provide students with carefully prepared guidance notes and instructions to support learning. They also give students helpful written and verbal comments on the progress of their work. In the better theory lessons, teachers use question and answer techniques effectively to reinforce students' understanding of the topics discussed. Most students are developing acceptable standards of craftsmanship. Some are delighted at the quick progress they have made. Many teachers

Curriculum Areas

skilfully use the experience students gain during site visits and work placements to extend their learning in the classroom. Students' work is generally appropriate to their level of study. The poorer lessons observed by inspectors were characterised by over reliance on the dictation of notes and students copying from the whiteboard. In classes where there was a wide range of ability, some teachers had difficulty in taking account of the differing needs of students. As a result, some students do not achieve their primary learning qualification within the time allocated.

10 The construction workshops are generally well appointed with sufficient tools and materials. However, some of the larger machinery is old and there is no replacement policy. Students pay due attention to health and safety issues. Staff lead by example by wearing protective clothing. Most classrooms are attractive and have sufficient audiovisual equipment. Some have good wall displays.

11 The mathematics workshops for construction students provide them with the

opportunity to improve their numeracy and computer skills, and achieve a qualification in information technology. Although students can attend the workshops at times that suit them, not all take advantage of this facility. Tutorial practice is inconsistent. Some tutorials are held at times when not all of the students can attend. The self-assessment report makes little mention of issues relating to tutorials.

12 Retention and students' achievements are good on many courses, for example, the GNVQ intermediate course in construction and the built environment and the NVQ level 2 course in stonemasonry. However, the number of students achieving a national diploma in construction was particularly low in 1996. Many students do not gain the qualification they are seeking in the time allowed and instead are awarded a national certificate. In brickwork, results have been variable over the past two years. Judgements in the college's self-assessment report that relate to students' achievements are not always accurate because of the lack of reliable data.

Examples of students' achievements in construction, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 2 in stonemasonry	Retention (%)	*	88	96
	Pass rate (%)	*	82	85
GNVQ intermediate in construction and the built environment	Retention (%)	*	71	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	80	93
BTEC national diploma/national certificate in construction	Retention (%)	*	82	87
	Pass rate (%)	*	33	64

Source: college data

*college unable to provide sufficiently reliable data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

13 The inspection included observation of 24 lessons on courses ranging from BTEC first diplomas to BTEC higher national certificates and NVQ level 4. Although inspectors agreed with some of the judgments in the self-assessment report, the college failed to identify weaknesses in the way that some subjects are taught, and retention and achievement levels were frequently overstated. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report conflict with weaknesses stated elsewhere in the report.

Key strengths

- some enthusiastic, good teaching
- effective use of course handbooks
- strong internal verification procedures
- high levels of motivation among adult part-time students
- class work effectively linked to current commercial practice
- well-presented portfolios on vocational courses
- opportunities for students to undertake additional study
- good levels of achievement for those completing vocational and secretarial courses

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching
- the poor quality of some handouts and other support materials
- low levels of students' achievement on GCE A level and GCSE business studies and accounting courses
- enrolment targets not met
- a limited range of programmes

- low retention on several courses
- low numbers of students achieving the full qualification on some professional courses

14 The college's business provision includes GCE A levels in accounting, business studies, economics and law; advanced GNVQ, BTEC national and higher national certificates; NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 in administration and at levels 2, 3 and 4 in accounting; and a range of programmes leading to professional qualifications, for example, those validated by the Association of Accounting Technicians and the Institute of Legal Executives. Office and secretarial courses provide students with the opportunity to improve their shorthand and wordprocessing skills. The college has had difficulty meeting its student recruitment target for business courses. Several new professional courses, offered in September 1997, recruited insufficient students and had to be cancelled. The intermediate GNVQ in business has been dropped from the programme. Some recruitment difficulties may be linked to increased competition from local schools. The college's action plan identifies the need to develop a wider range of programmes to ensure enrolment targets are achieved.

15 Teachers of administrative and secretarial subjects use course handbooks effectively. In the better lessons, teachers show enthusiasm for their subjects and make good use of a variety of teaching and learning methods to engage students' interest. They effectively link class work to current commercial practice. In the poorer lessons observed the teaching was characterised by unimaginative teaching and there was an over reliance on the dictation of notes to passive students. Key skills, particularly the application of number, are not sufficiently integrated with students' assignment work.

Curriculum Areas

16 Most business courses are held at the Newstead Road site. Many classrooms are of a good standard. There is appropriate audiovisual equipment. Students are encouraged to use the learning centre which has an extensive range of information technology equipment.

17 Pass rates for general vocational and secretarial courses are good for those students who complete their course of study. In 1997, 88 per cent of students achieved the full qualification on the BTEC national certificate programme, 96 per cent on the BTEC higher national certificate and 75 per cent on the BTEC intermediate GNVQ course. The number of students achieving the full qualification is low on some professional courses. In 1997, only 32 per

cent achieved NVQ level 3 and 18 per cent achieved level 4 on the accounting technicians programmes. Students' achievements are below the national average for GCE A levels and GCSEs in business and accounting. Student retention rates vary significantly between programmes and are low on NVQ levels 3 and 4 courses in management, the Institute of Legal Executives programme, and 'flexi-study' courses at GCSE and GCE A level. Course reviews do not include a sufficiently rigorous analysis of students' achievements and the self-assessment report generally overstates students' achievements. Retention is not always identified as an area for concern on courses where data suggest that it is unacceptably low.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
BTEC higher national certificate in business finance	Retention (%)	*	92	68
	Pass rate (%)	*	93	96
GCSE accounting (A to C) students aged over 18	Retention (%)	*	83	76
	Pass rate (%)	*	40	62
GCE A level business studies students aged 16 to 18	Retention (%)	*	70	78
	Pass rate (%)	*	67	71

Source: college data

*college unable to provide sufficiently reliable data

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering/Leisure and Tourism

Grade 2

18 Inspectors observed a total of 22 theoretical, practical and tutorial classes in hotel, catering, leisure and tourism. Class observations and course reviews carried out as part of the self-assessment process resulted in many rigorous and accurate judgements. Although much of the self-assessment report is descriptive rather than evaluative, the inspection did support the college's overall judgement about the quality of provision.

Key strengths

- most courses and lessons are well planned
- generally effective teaching
- detailed course handbooks and assignment booklets in leisure and travel and tourism
- some good pass rates on, for example, most hotel and catering courses, BTEC national diplomas in leisure, and travel and tourism
- good retention on most courses, for example, leisure, travel and tourism and catering courses
- good rates of progression to higher education and related employment
- strong links with employers in hotel and catering

Weaknesses

- some teaching which failed to maintain students' attention
- some unsatisfactory attendance and poor retention
- weak integration of key skills with hotel and catering

- lack of a realistic work environment in college and lack of work experience for hotel and catering students
- too few teachers with industrial experience in leisure and tourism
- poor levels of students' achievements on some courses, for example, GNVQ foundation and NVQ level 1 in food preparation

19 The college offers a variety of courses in hotel and catering, including NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3, foundation and advanced level GNVQs, food hygiene and general interest courses. Numbers are low on some courses. Leisure and tourism courses at advanced level include advanced GNVQ and BTEC national diplomas in travel and tourism. There is a BTEC first diploma in public services at intermediate level. There are few opportunities for part-time study in leisure, tourism and travel. Links with the industry are strong in hotel and catering, but weak in leisure and tourism. The self-assessment report makes little mention of issues relating to the range of courses and subjects.

20 Most courses are well managed. Teaching is generally effective and lessons have clear objectives. Teachers involve students in a range of appropriate activities and give attention to the needs and progress of individual students. Practical work is effectively taught. Health and safety is emphasised. In some lessons, teachers failed to make their objectives clear or check students' understanding of the work. The integration and evaluation of key skills is at an early stage of development. Although the quality of teaching and learning was generally good, inspectors found some judgements and grades in the self-assessment report to be overstated.

21 There is a well-organised programme of work experience and overseas visits for students in leisure and travel and tourism. There is no

Curriculum Areas

such formal programme for hotel and catering students, although they are encouraged to seek part-time jobs in industry outside college hours. There are adequate resources for sport including a large well-equipped sports hall. Practical areas for hotel and catering are generally well resourced. Equipment, although old, is well maintained. Students have insufficient access to information technology in practical areas. The public restaurant does not provide students with enough opportunities to work in a challenging work environment.

22 There are some good students' achievements and retention is satisfactory on most courses. There are good pass rates on national diploma courses in leisure, and travel and tourism. Students' achievements on most hotel and catering courses are at or above the national average for those students who complete their course of study. However, retention and pass rates are poor on the GNVQ foundation, NVQ level 1 food preparation and NVQ level 2 college apprentices food preparation and cooking courses. There is a lack of reliable historical data on students' achievements.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
BTEC national diploma in catering and hospitality/ GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	79	64
	Pass rate (%)	*	55	100
BTEC national diploma in travel and tourism	Retention (%)	*	95	90
	Pass rate (%)	*	86	88
NVQ level 2 food preparation and cooking	Retention (%)	*	77	82
	Pass rate (%)	*	60	97

Source: college data

*college unable to provide sufficiently reliable data

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design, Media and Performing Arts

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 30 lessons on GCE A level and vocational programmes in art and design, media and performing arts. Inspectors found that weaknesses in examination pass and retention rates were sometimes understated in the college's self-assessment.

Key strengths

- some good examination results, particularly at GCE A level
- good progression to higher education for students who complete their courses
- effective links between theory and practical work
- good support for students from teachers and technicians
- key skills generally well integrated with programmes of study
- health and safety issues emphasised
- an appropriate standard of students' work

Weaknesses

- some low retention rates, for example GCE A level art and design
- some poor students' achievements, for example, on the GNVQ intermediate course in media
- some poor classroom management
- aims and objectives of projects not always made clear to students
- assessment which is not always sufficiently rigorous
- small range of vocational provision for art and design students
- some inadequate equipment and inappropriate accommodation

24 The college offers full-time and part-time programmes in art and design, media and the performing arts. There is a good range of GCE A levels which includes art with art history, dance, photography, media studies, performing arts and music. Students can study art and design at foundation and advanced level. There are BTEC intermediate GNVQs and national diplomas in media and in performing arts. The proportion of part-time students is increasing. Progression routes within the college now include a higher education course in media. The college's liaison arrangements with schools are effective. Successful community activities include a promotional video made by students for the local health authority through the college's media business. The self-assessment report made little mention of issues relating to the range of provision.

25 Most lessons are effectively planned. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods effectively. Relationships between staff and students are good. Students appreciate the help they receive from their teachers. They enjoy and value learning activities which take them outside the college. Students on the foundation diploma in art and design course recently undertook a field trip to Dartmoor which provided material for their studio work. Assignments are set regularly. Teachers use an appropriate range of assessment methods. Much of the practical teaching is effective. Theory sessions help students to place their work in context. In media studies, key skills are effectively integrated with the curriculum. In the less effective lessons observed, the objectives were not made clear and students were not encouraged to undertake enough research to widen their opportunities to develop more innovative work. Assignment briefs vary in quality. Assessment criteria are not always made clear to students. The college's self-assessment report overestimates the standard of teaching. Although inspectors found the quality of teaching to be generally good, few lessons were outstanding.

Curriculum Areas

26 There are effective links with industry, particularly in media and performing arts. Teachers demonstrate a range of specialist skills. The quality of technical support is good. Media workshops have professional standard equipment which simulates a small-scale industrial environment. Media staff have been enterprising in obtaining equipment from manufacturers. Accommodation ranges from satisfactory to good. There is some overcrowding in rooms used for media studies.

27 Pass rates are generally good for those students who complete their course of study. In 1997, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 were above the national average in GCE A level art with art history, photography, theatre studies and media studies. In GCE A level photography, pass rates for all students have been high for the past three years. For students aged 16 to 18 on GCE A level courses, pass rates have been

generally above the national average for the past three years, although the pass rate in GCE A level music declined from 92 per cent in 1995 to 82 per cent in 1996 and 75 per cent in 1997. The generally good level of students' achievements is reflected in good progression rates to related higher education or employment. Teaching staff provide students with detailed information on higher education and employment prospects based on their specialist knowledge of the sector. Retention rates are a matter for concern on some courses, for example, GCE A level art and photography, the GNVQ intermediate media course and the BTEC national diploma in media. Although reasons for students leaving early are recorded in detail by teaching staff, the self-assessment report makes little mention of issues relating to low retention.

Examples of students' achievements in art, design, media and performing arts, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level photography (students aged 16 to 18)	Retention (%)	*	76	47
	Pass rate (%)	*	96	100
GCE A level media (students aged 16 to 18)	Retention (%)	*	52	74
	Pass rate (%)	*	89	89
GCE A level music (students aged 16 to 18)	Retention (%)	*	65	78
	Pass rate (%)	*	82	75

Source: college data

*college unable to provide sufficiently reliable data

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

28 Inspectors observed 36 lessons. The college's self-assessment report lists many of the strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection, although inspectors considered some aspects of retention and students' achievements were misjudged as a result of using inaccurate data.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- good relationships between staff and students
- pass rates for most full-time GCE A levels and a few GCSE subjects consistently above the national average
- the good standard of most students' written work
- thorough marking of students' work on most courses
- some well-maintained accommodation

Weaknesses

- weaker results in some, mainly part-time, GCE A level subjects and in GCSE subjects
- some low retention rates on GCSE and vocational modern languages courses
- some inconsistent course and departmental management
- some unsatisfactory accommodation

29 Humanities provision is located in the recently reorganised department of science, mathematics and humanities. A wide range of subjects is offered to students. GCE A level subjects include history, English language, English literature, geography, government and politics, Latin, psychology, sociology, Spanish, German and French and some subjects not usually available such as archaeology and

Christian theology. Many of these are also available as GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and GCSE subjects. There is also a good range of additional studies from which students can choose, including modern languages, modules of GCE A level general studies and other non-examinable activities.

30 There is much good humanities teaching. At its best, the teaching is well prepared and teachers use a variety of methods which stimulate students' interest and maintain work at a good pace. Some teachers show particular skill in using question and answer techniques to confirm or extend students' understanding. Relationships between staff and students are friendly yet purposeful. Marking is generally thorough and helps students to improve their work. The inspection broadly confirmed the college's assessment of teaching and learning.

31 Course management is inconsistent. Poor practice was evident in some inadequate guidance given during induction, lack of attention to students' files and the absence of marking schemes. Not all schemes of work were as good as the college claimed. The recent reorganisation of the department has led to the appointment of a curriculum manager whose remit is to remedy these weaknesses. The lack of commonly implemented policies across humanities subjects is identified as a weakness, but not emphasised, in the self-assessment report.

32 The accommodation for geography, sociology and government and politics is satisfactory and good displays provide a stimulating environment for learning. Some of the rooms used for the teaching of modern languages, English and history are poorly ventilated and too small for the size of groups using them. The department's self-assessment report acknowledges these issues.

33 GCE A level results are at or above the national average in most subjects. Some subjects, for example English literature, English

Curriculum Areas

language and communication studies, have a record of sustained high achievement. Good levels of achievement are also found in GCE A level French, German, history, sociology and general studies. There are poorer results in GCE A level psychology and several part-time GCE A level programmes. GCSE results are inconsistent. Some subjects such as English and Spanish achieve pass rates which are above the national average. Most GCSE subjects in the social sciences achieved results which were below the national average in 1995, 1996 and 1997. Retention rates are low on modern languages one-year vocational courses and in some GCSE subjects.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level English literature	Retention (%)	*	92	81
	Pass rate (%)	99	93	98
GCE A level French	Retention (%)	*	84	77
	Pass rate (%)	89	88	89
GCSE English language (students aged 19 or over)	Retention (%)	71	76	50
	Pass rate (%)	77	70	84
GCSE psychology (students aged 19 or over)	Retention (%)	60	70	64
	Pass rate (%)	55	51	44
GCE A level sociology (students aged 16 to 18)	Retention (%)	*	81	61
	Pass rate (%)	71	76	81
GCE A level geography (students aged 16 to 18)	Retention (%)	*	59	77
	Pass rate (%)	85	71	93

Source: college data

*college unable to provide sufficiently reliable data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

34 Students generally receive good support but inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report understates some weaknesses. There is no judgement on the quality and consistency of tutorial practice.

Key strengths

- productive links with the careers service and with many schools
- a good range of events for prospective students to learn about the college
- well-developed and thorough admissions procedures and initial guidance
- informative and attractive publicity materials
- an accessible and welcoming information and guidance service
- effective learning support for students identified as needing it
- strong tutorial support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- a good range of appropriate services for students

Weaknesses

- inconsistent quality of tutorial support
- not all students are assessed for their learning support needs
- inconsistent approach to the provision of learning support
- variable quality of students' induction
- lack of an organised approach to inclusive learning

35 Prospective students receive good guidance when applying to the college. Guidance is based on clear policies and procedures. Careers events are held at most local schools. College

staff work with some schools to develop joint approaches to the curriculum. School students attend vocational 'taster' days at the college. Interviews are conducted in a way which takes account of applicants' needs and circumstances. Students are accredited for their prior learning on some courses. Students spoken to during the inspection valued the pre-course guidance provided by the college. In this aspect of student support, inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment.

36 The quality of induction is variable. Students' entitlement to induction is clearly specified by the college. Tutors are provided with adequate support to enable them to provide effective induction. Students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities. The students' diary and handbook contain information about student services and the complaints procedures. Students are able to transfer between courses, especially during the first months of their course. However, students' responses to their induction reveal varying degrees of satisfaction. The college failed to identify in its self-assessment, weaknesses in the way induction is implemented.

37 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by their tutors. However, they are accommodated in a poor working space some distance from some key central college facilities. The extent to which the college has included students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on vocational courses varies from subject to subject. It is most effective on those courses where specialist facilities are easily accessible and staff have appropriate training. Although the academic board has discussed the involvement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in a wider range of vocational areas, the college has not yet developed a strategy to increase inclusion. The self-assessment report overestimates the college's performance in this area.

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38 The college is committed to increasing the proportion of students who are assessed when they enter the college in order to identify their learning support needs. Currently, not all students are assessed. The college's self-assessment accurately identifies the need to review its assessment on entry policy and procedures. Learning support is available on both sites in learning workshops where teachers provide students with help either on a drop-in or appointment basis. In addition, an increasing number of students are receiving help with the key skills of communication, number and information technology as part of their main course of study. Although teachers provide some students with effective individual support, the quality and amount of learning support vary. The college is unable to ensure that the learning support needs of all students are met.

39 Although the college is aware that there are inconsistencies in tutorial practice, they are not identified in the self-assessment report. There is a well-thought-out tutorial policy which applies to all students and a comprehensive handbook for tutors. There are timetabled tutorial sessions during the week for full-time students, but not for part-time students. Students can gain a range of accredited qualifications through their tutorial programme. Most students spoken to by inspectors considered that they were well supported by their tutor. However, the number of students allocated to each personal tutor varies widely, as does the amount of time allocated for tutorial activity and the use made of tutorial time. The college has begun to develop procedures to enable more systematic monitoring of its tutorial provision.

40 Students receive a range of careers advice and support. A well-structured careers education and guidance programme has recently been introduced for full-time students. Provision for part-time students is less well organised. There are effective links with the careers service. Students report that they have

easy access to careers advice from their tutors and careers advisers. The college is keen to gain the Investors in Careers award. An initial assessment for the award has identified the need for the college to review and evaluate its careers advice and support procedures to improve consistency of implementation. Inspectors agreed with the college's identification of many strengths in this area.

41 Students have good access to a range of services that include counselling, the chaplaincy and financial and personal advice. The information and guidance service is well located next to the main college reception area. The service is well used. Detailed records are kept of the number of clients seen and the areas of college from which they come. Appointments are usually made within 24 hours. There are effective procedures to deal with emergency cases as they arise. The college has a comprehensive range of policies covering equality of opportunity. There is much evidence of the college's commitment to the provision of effective student services.

General Resources

Grade 3

42 Inspectors concluded that the college's self-assessment overstates some strengths of resources and that some weaknesses are omitted or understated. There is little analysis of general accommodation or of the facilities for students with disabilities.

Key strengths

- an attractive site at Cranford Avenue
- good libraries on both sites
- good provision of computers with adequate access for students
- classroom accommodation generally fit for its purpose
- good sports facilities at Cranford Avenue

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Weaknesses

- one block in use in a dilapidated condition
- some teaching accommodation which is too small or of poor quality
- underuse of some accommodation
- some accommodation, including specialist areas, inaccessible for wheelchair users
- insufficient social areas for students and some aspects of refectory facilities which do not meet students' needs
- inadequate plans for the development and replacement of resources

43 Most general classroom accommodation is suitable for its purpose, clean and well maintained. Some rooms, for example in humanities and travel, are enlivened by well-organised displays of students' work. Some teaching rooms are bare and others are too small for the classes scheduled to use them. A few rooms are of poor quality, in particular the rooms used to teach students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Room use surveys show that both general and specialist accommodation is underused. The college is in the process of reviewing its accommodation strategy. A survey by the college to judge the quality of teaching rooms led to a programme of repairs which was carried out in summer 1997.

44 Although a college survey on access for people with restricted mobility has resulted in a number of improvements, including a new lift at the Newstead Road site, some important parts of the college can still not be reached by wheelchair users. These include the language laboratory, a learning centre and the students' common room at the Newstead Road site; and at Cranford Avenue the main open access information technology centre and an area used as a kitchen and classroom for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This area is inaccessible to wheelchair users who

have to participate in classes from the top of a small flight of stairs. The college's self-assessment report contains little analysis of general college accommodation or of the facilities and access for students with disabilities.

45 The college has good libraries on both sites with an adequate stock of books, videos, journals and a range of networked CD-ROM databases. They are open during evenings throughout the week and on Saturday mornings. Members of the public can use them free of charge. The libraries provide suitable accommodation for students to discuss their work with tutors. There are sufficient study spaces to meet current students' needs. Over 85 per cent of students use the libraries. A users' charter sets out the aims of the library service and provides guidance for users. Each library contains a small shop selling items such as stationery, books and computer disks. A well-equipped computer centre adjoins each library which students can use at times of their own choosing.

46 Student services accommodation is well located next to the reception area at Cranford Avenue. However, some of the rooms are small and the two counselling rooms are not sufficiently soundproofed. There is a new student common room at Newstead Road, but students at Cranford Avenue lack similar social facilities. Both refectories are closed in the evening, although a vending machine is available. Students are dissatisfied with some aspects of the refectory service. The sports hall at Cranford Avenue is large and well equipped. The 30 place nursery at Cranford Avenue provides appropriate accommodation. Although most staff rooms are large enough and contain computing facilities, some are too small.

47 Planning for resource needs is weak. There are few references in the strategic plan and operating statements to accommodation developments, libraries, resource centres and

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facilities for students with disabilities. There are no costed plans to show how strategic objectives will be resourced. Some useful surveys have taken place. These have led to some improvements, but they have not been followed up with action plans. There are clear and detailed procedures for the purchase of computer hardware and software and an up-to-date inventory of computing resources. However, there is no rolling replacement programme and the assets register contains assets which no longer exist. There is little mention of weaknesses relating to resource planning in the college's self-assessment report. Inspectors judged that some aspects of resource management were unsatisfactory.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

48 Although the college's self-assessment report notes the college's strong commitment to quality assurance, inspectors concluded that it overestimates its effectiveness. A well-planned quality framework has been developed, but it requires fuller, more consistent implementation backed by more reliable data.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to quality assurance
- revised quality assurance policies and procedures resulting in improved provision for students
- a widely disseminated college charter reflecting the quality assurance framework
- staff development effectively implemented and given high profile
- effective and valued staff appraisal for all staff
- some candid and self-critical judgements in the self-assessment report

Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in the implementation of quality assurance procedures
- inconsistent and incomplete use of performance indicators
- use of unreliable students' achievement data to support judgements
- wide variation in the quality of course reviews and related action plans
- insufficient rigour and accuracy in some self-assessment judgements
- some overgenerous grading of lessons observed in the self-assessment report

49 The college's commitment to developing quality assurance arrangements which will lead to measurable gains in performance is clearly stated in the strategic plan and strongly supported by senior management. Actions and timescales for achieving this objective are set out in the college's operating statement. Improvements to the quality assurance framework have resulted in the introduction of new policies, for example, on customer care and complaints. Quality assurance reports have led to the introduction of parents' evenings for GCE A level students and a charter for employers. The college's self-assessment report identifies the college's commitment to continuous improvement of its quality assurance.

50 Considerable progress has been made in implementing quality assurance procedures. Some are new, such as the requirement for course and cross-college teams to conform to formats laid down in the quality handbook. Others have been in place for some time. The college policy and practice for internal verification, for example, is updated annually. It is gradually improving standards of assessment in the college's major vocational areas. Quality assurance documentation is mostly clear and informative. The quality

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assurance framework has been accepted by external awarding and accrediting bodies. However, procedures are not uniformly applied. This lack of consistency is particularly noticeable in the variable quality of course reviews. In its self-assessment, the college recognises the need for fuller implementation of quality assurance procedures and increased rigour in their application.

51 The procedures for establishing standards, setting targets and for monitoring their achievement are set out in the quality assurance framework. The systematic use of reliable quantitative data is not yet consistent or complete. The extent to which performance indicators are used by course teams varies widely. The college's self-assessment report underestimates significant weaknesses in its ability to collect and generate reliable students' achievement data. In some areas, there is little use of performance indicators to set targets for students' achievements and to inform course reviews. Consequently, many reviews and reports are insufficiently evaluative. The quality of action planning varies. Some courses are more specific than others when identifying targets and timescales for improvements. Overall, targets for retention, students' achievements and customer satisfaction are set out in the strategic plan, but the lack of reliable students' achievement data means that judgements relating to the college's achievement of its targets are often flawed since they depend on data that are either incomplete or absent.

52 The college's charter reflects the quality assurance framework. The charter is updated annually following consultation with students and approval by the academic board. Students' views are sought. There are student representatives on course and college committees. The charter is widely distributed. Briefings have been held for staff and students. Most full-time students are aware of the charter, although this is not always the case with staff and part-time students. The college has

identified the need to increase student and staff awareness of the charter. The college's complaints procedures are included in the charter. Responses to complaints have resulted in improvements to teaching and learning. The charter contains few quantitative targets which would enable standards of service to be monitored.

53 Staff development is effective and is given a high priority. The college successfully achieved revalidation as an Investor in People in 1996. Staff training priorities to meet the requirements of strategic planning are identified in the operating plan. A management development programme, for example, has been designed to improve the expertise of middle managers. The effectiveness of such training is systematically evaluated. Staff development needs are also identified through staff appraisal. The staff appraisal process covers all staff. It is well established, effective and reviewed on a regular basis. Classroom and workplace observation is gradually being introduced. Currently it is not mandatory and practice is uneven. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths associated with staff development and appraisal which were noted by the college.

54 The college had planned to produce its first self-assessment report in November 1997 as part of the annual course review process. This was brought forward in order to meet the requirements of the inspection. The self-assessment process involved a wide range of college staff. Account was taken of the views of parents, students and employers. The basis of the report is an assessment of strengths and weaknesses produced by each substantial curriculum and service area. The process was monitored by the college management team and the academic board. The college's procedures for self-assessment are at an early stage of development. They are not yet firmly embedded in the college's quality assurance and strategic planning process.

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55 The self-assessment report identified many of the strengths and weaknesses which were subsequently confirmed by inspectors. However, in some areas the college underestimated its weaknesses and awarded overgenerous grades. In some curriculum areas, teaching, the promotion of learning and students' achievements were graded too highly. This produced a more optimistic view than was warranted. In some cross-college areas, self-assessment judgements were insufficiently critical and evaluative and did not provide a complete and accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses. Evidence included the subsidiary self-assessment reports prepared by teaching teams and the teams responsible for other college functions. These were of variable quality but were generally useful to inspectors. Evidence also came from lesson observations and from analysis of students' achievements. The inspection team was unable to rely on some of the students' achievements data presented by the college. Often, records held by teaching teams differed from those held centrally. The college's self-assessment report includes an action plan which addresses weaknesses and builds on strengths. Individual actions have deadlines for completion but there is no indication of how progress is to be monitored.

Governance

Grade 3

56 Governors are strongly committed to the college. Much of their business is soundly administered, but there are significant weaknesses which were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- governors strongly committed to the college
- an appropriate range of committees with clear terms of reference

- generally sound administrative arrangements and effective minuting of meetings
- thorough standing orders regularly updated
- regular financial reports

Weaknesses

- insufficient governor involvement in preparation of the strategic plan and consideration of financial implications
- insufficient setting and monitoring of targets for the college's performance
- discussions sometimes focusing more on operational than strategic matters
- audit committee not operating effectively

57 Governors devote a considerable amount of time to supporting the college. They come from a wide variety of professional and business backgrounds. Many have experience of senior levels in company management and many have a good knowledge of local issues. A significant number of members are approaching the end of their terms of office and do not intend to seek re-appointment. Two members have agreed to serve a further year of office beyond their term. Members are concerned to ensure that the corporation has an appropriate balance of skills and experience. The board has a search committee, but there has been little success so far in identifying and recruiting new members. Difficulty in finding people with appropriate expertise is reflected in the problems which have arisen with the operation and membership of the audit committee. Two of its meetings in the past year have been inquorate. Inspectors consider that these weaknesses are not adequately addressed in the college's self-assessment report.

58 The board is supported in its work by sound administrative arrangements. Standing orders are regularly updated. The clerk to the

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corporation ensures that members receive clear agendas and minutes. There is an appropriate range of committees. Governors have a code of conduct and a register of interests, although the register is presently incomplete. Members of the finance, policy and resources committee receive monthly management accounts. Some governors have commented that they are faced with too much detail and that this does not help them to focus on strategic matters.

59 The FEFC's audit service concluded that within the scope of its assessment governance is weak. The audit committee is not effective and in this regard the college is in breach of its financial memorandum with the FEFC. Some governors take an active part in strategic planning, but the whole board is not sufficiently involved to demonstrate it fulfils requirements under the college's articles of government. Some governors considered the plan in a working group with senior managers. However, most of the board members received the plan rather than contributed to the formulation of its objectives. The college has experienced ongoing financial difficulties. It also has continuing problems in making accurate submissions of student data on time to the FEFC. These data form the basis on which FEFC funding decisions are made. Some significant weaknesses identified by the audit service were not identified in the self-assessment report.

60 Governors receive regular information on developments in the college. They scrutinise managers' reports on finance, accommodation, students' achievements and other matters. They have expressed concerns regarding important issues such as the level of students' retention and the use of college accommodation. There has been limited critical debate about the college's academic achievements and governors are insufficiently involved in setting and monitoring targets for the college's performance. The quality of information they receive on students' achievements makes it difficult for them to judge trends or to make national

comparisons. Discussions sometimes focus on operational matters at the expense of strategic direction and planning. The premises committee, for example, makes decisions regarding building work which would more appropriately be made by managers. Insufficient time is spent discussing the strategic development of accommodation. In its self-assessment, the college overestimates the rigour with which governors monitor the college's performance and the performance of the board.

Management

Grade 3

61 The college's self-assessment report identified several strengths in management with which inspectors agreed. However, some weaknesses during inspection were not identified in the report.

Key strengths

- clear and widely understood management structures
- clear procedures for generating and reviewing strategic and departmental plans
- generally effective communication
- unit costing developed and regular financial reporting established
- varied and productive links with external organisations
- an appropriate range of active college committees

Weaknesses

- lack of reliable students' achievements data
- insufficient analysis and monitoring of students' achievements by managers
- strategic and operational planning not fully costed

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- aspects of strategic plan not addressed in operational plan
- lack of a suitably qualified and experienced senior financial manager
- inconsistencies in departmental and programme management

62 The college and departmental management structures, in some cases recently reorganised, are generally clear and widely understood. Staff at different levels in the organisation understand their responsibilities. Communications are generally effective. Staff told inspectors that they felt in touch with decision making. There are appropriately constituted committees with well-defined functions which meet regularly. Equality of opportunity is promoted and staff awareness raised by a committee which has wide representation across the college. A curriculum committee, which approves new courses and authorises the closure of others, has been established to ensure course provision meets the college's strategic objectives.

63 Inconsistencies in the quality of departmental and programme management result in some ineffective monitoring of teaching and learning. Course and programme documentation and procedures in some departments are in need of review in order to ensure consistent practice. Inspectors found that departmental claims relating to students' achievements and retention were often not supported by the evidence. These weaknesses were understated in the college's self-assessment report.

64 The FEFC's audit service consider financial management of the college to be adequate. The finance team has an appropriate number of experienced staff, but there is no suitably qualified and experienced senior financial manager. The college's management accounts are reported promptly each month to the senior

management team who review them. However, the management accounts are not prepared on an accruals basis and therefore are not directly comparable with the approved budget figures. Financial regulations are up to date and comprehensive. The work of the college's internal auditors complies with audit standards, however their reports identify a number of weaknesses in college systems.

65 The college has varied and productive links with external organisations. The business development unit is working with departments to attract new business to the college. Marketing and publicity activities are increasing as more market research is undertaken. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that this area is a strength. However, better statistical data would enable a more extensive exploration of the college's potential client base.

66 Procedures for generating the college's strategic plan involve extensive staff collaboration. An operating plan is derived from the strategic plan. This, in turn, leads to departmental plans. Most staff are familiar with the objectives to which they are working. In its self-assessment report, the college judges that not all its strategic aims are supported by staff. Inspectors found no evidence that this was a major weakness. However, the operating plan does not address all aspects of the strategic plan and strategic objectives are not fully costed at any level during the planning process. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses in planning.

67 The college has experienced difficulties generating reliable and adequate management information. In some areas, improvements are evident. Financial reporting and budgetary control include unit costing which relates income to expenditure for each course. Heads of department commented that financial reports have been much more reliable in recent months and enable them to relate actual enrolments to

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teaching costs. Last year the college exceeded its enrolment target. Departmental staff consider data about students to be much more accurate now than last year. The main weakness in management information is the college's inability to produce reliable summary information on the full range of students' achievements. Targets for students' achievements set by senior managers are based on incomplete and inaccurate information. Insufficient attention has been given by senior managers and the academic board to the monitoring and analysis of students' achievements and retention rates. Although the college's self-assessment report draws attention to difficulties over management information, it underestimates the problems caused by its inability to provide reliable summary information on retention and students' achievements.

Conclusions

68 The college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. The inspectors agreed with the majority of the curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected. However, in some curriculum areas the college's self-assessment of teaching and learning was overgenerous. The college failed to identify weaknesses in retention and students' achievements as a result of using inaccurate data and consequently overstated students' achievements. There was less agreement about grades for cross-college provision. Inspectors considered that the college overstated the significance of some strengths and understated some weaknesses.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	23
19-24 years	15
25+ years	59
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	49
Intermediate	18
Advanced	15
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	15
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	343	1,028	16
Agriculture	1	0	0
Construction	191	101	4
Engineering	148	365	6
Business	169	747	11
Hotel and catering	171	23	2
Health and community care	284	997	15
Art and design	290	157	5
Humanities	422	2,711	37
Basic education	226	62	4
Total	2,245	6,191	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	215	2	5	222
Supporting direct learning contact	45	0	0	45
Other support	112	0	0	112
Total	372	2	5	379

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial Data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£12,162,000	£13,061,000	
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.52	£17.93	£18.12
Payroll as a proportion of income	77%	73%	
Achievement of funding target	96%	100%	pub. data n/a
Diversity of income	30%	25%	
Operating surplus	-£1,120,000	-£1,464,000	

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

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

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

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

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	328	323	377
	Average point score per entry	5.1	4.7	5.2
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	137	148	123
	Percentage achieving qualification	75%	68%	80%
	Position in tables	middle third	bottom third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	76	128
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	46%	45%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	bottom third

Source: DfEE

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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