Woodhouse College

Contents

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses*

- *grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*

- *grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses*

- *grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*

- *grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.*

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

- *as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course*

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

Woodhouse College

Greater London Region

Inspected April 1998

Woodhouse College is a sixth form college in the north London borough of Barnet. The college's self-assessment process was thorough and involved all staff and governors. The process followed for self-assessment of the curriculum has evolved from a well-established system of course review. The self-assessment report produced for the inspection was comprehensive, and judgements were supported by sound evidence. It included action plans to address weaknesses, which, in some cases, were already being addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors generally agreed with the report's judgements but identified a few additional weaknesses.

The college caters mainly for full-time students aged 16 to 19 whose primary aim is to progress to higher education. Ninety-four per cent of the students take GCE A level and GCE AS subjects in science, mathematics and computing, business, art and design, and humanities. A small number of students take GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses in business. Provision in three programme areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has made considerable improvements in its quality assurance processes since the last inspection. These have enabled it to increase by 16 per cent the proportion of lessons graded 1 and 2 by inspectors and to maintain high standards in spite of an increase in student numbers. Teaching is usually good, often excellent. The quality of the modern languages provision is outstanding. Retention rates are high and progression to higher education is good. Support for students is excellent. Students benefit from an extensive programme of enrichment studies and work experience in their first year. Teachers are well qualified and, especially in business studies and biology, have productive links with employers. The college is well managed. Governors bring a wide range of useful expertise to support the college. If it is to continue to improve the quality of its provision, the college should: develop more opportunities to share good practice in teaching, course and lesson planning and assessment; strengthen and co-ordinate the quality assurance arrangements; refine and extend staff appraisal, and induction for new staff; review and update college policies; and better define the role and function of governors to focus on the strategic direction of the college and the quality of its performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Computing	2
Science	2
Business	2
Modern languages	1

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	1
General resources	3
Quality assurance	2
Governance	3
Management	2

The College and its Mission

1   Woodhouse College is a sixth form college based on one site in North Finchley in the north London borough of Barnet. A former grammar school, it was established as a sixth form college in 1978. At the time of the inspection, there were 829 full-time students, an increase of 35 per cent since incorporation. Thirty-four per cent of the students come from three partner schools for which the college acts as the official sixth form. Most other schools in the borough have their own sixth forms. About half the college's students live in the borough of Barnet. Most of the others come from the neighbouring boroughs of Enfield and Haringey, which together with Barnet form the North London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) area. In addition to the college, there are five general further education colleges in the North London TEC area.

2   The mission of the college is to 'maintain and strengthen its excellent reputation by continuing to provide high-quality full-time education for students aged 16 to 19 who seek a structured and supportive, mixed sixth form college environment and intend primarily to progress to higher education or where appropriate to further education and employment'. Ninety-four per cent of students are taking general certificate of education advanced/advanced supplementary level (GCE A/AS level) subjects. These students are required at entry to have five passes in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), generally two at grade B and three at grade C. Fifty-four students are taking general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in business at advanced and intermediate levels. All GCE A level students take an enrichment studies course in the first year which includes key skills and a range of additional activities. In 1996-97, 54 per cent of students were female and 46 per cent were male; 35 per cent came from minority ethnic groups.

3   There are few large employers in the North London TEC area. Over 90 per cent of companies employ fewer than 25 people. The majority of residents work outside the area, mainly in central London. The level of unemployment in the area is about 16 per cent, compared with a national figure of 7.5 per cent.

4   The senior management team comprises the principal, the vice-principal and four directors responsible for curriculum and personnel, finance, student services and student admissions. There are four faculties led by faculty heads who oversee the work of the 20 subject departments. At the time of the inspection, the vice-principal had been acting principal for six months, following the death of the former principal who had been in post for only a short time when he was taken ill.

The Inspection

5   The college was inspected during the week beginning 27 April 1998. Before the inspection, inspectors considered the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information from other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements for three years from 1995 to 1997, and these were checked against class registers and pass lists issued by the examining bodies. The college was given about two months' notice of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by a team comprising eight inspectors working in the college for a total of 32 days and an auditor working for four days. Inspectors observed a total of 48 lessons, including a sample of tutorials, and examined students' work and college documentation about the college and its courses. Members of the team met governors, managers, staff, students and a representative of the careers service.

6   Eighty-one per cent of the lessons observed were rated as good or outstanding, and 4 per cent less than satisfactory. These percentages are significantly better than the averages of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. An average of 14 students attended each lesson observed compared with an average of 14.4 for sixth form colleges in 1996-97 as recorded in the same report. The attendance rate in lessons was 89 per cent. This is

significantly better than the average of 84 per cent for sixth form colleges in 1996-97, recorded in the chief inspector's annual report. The following table shows the grades awarded to lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level, GNVQ and tutorials	16	23	7	2	0	48

Computing

Grade 2

7   Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering all aspects of computing and information technology (IT). Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report but not with the significance given to some of its findings.

Key strengths
- courses designed to meet the different needs and skills of students
- effective teaching, and some that is imaginative
- good pass rates on many courses
- high-quality work done by some students
- good progression to higher education computing courses
- up-to-date computer hardware and software

Weaknesses
- a few lessons poorly planned
- little sharing of good teaching practices
- few links with industry and commerce
- cramped conditions in some computer workshops

8   The provision at the college includes GCE A level computing and GCE AS in both IT and computing. Students who do not have a qualification in computing or who are studying courses that do not include computing are required to complete a course in computer literacy and IT. Activities available to all students through the college's enrichment studies programme include computer programming and development of internet web pages. All computing courses are managed by the college's computing department.

9   The self-assessment report noted as a strength the variety of teaching methods used to provide a mixture of theory and practical work. Inspectors agreed that most teaching is effective. Lessons observed involved a variety of imaginative teaching and learning methods. Examples included students working effectively in teams, group discussion and tasks designed to help students work on their own. In one class, the teacher guided students through a revision task initially by discussing the approach to be taken to achieve high marks. Students then worked enthusiastically in small teams to solve the problem set. This was followed by further group discussions in which students compared their solutions with a model answer. A few lessons were poorly planned and delivered, resulting in students becoming inattentive. Where appropriate, lessons were structured to provide a mix of practical and theoretical work. The computer literacy and IT course is designed to allow students to work at their own pace, using worksheets. Students are tested regularly to check their level of competence. In general, students are supplied with good-quality learning materials.

10   Schemes of work are developed for each course and reviewed annually. The department maintains a quality file which includes data on students' retention, achievements and destinations, and an evaluation of students' views of the course. The department's annual operational plan is developed through a review of these data and includes reference to the college's strategic plan. Lesson observation has recently been introduced, but the department recognises that teachers do not discuss what constitutes good practice in teaching and learning as fully as they might.

11   Pass rates in GCE A/AS level courses are good, generally above the national average for sixth form colleges, although overall pass rates have declined over the past three years. Students' work is generally of an appropriate standard, and some is of a high standard.

Homework is set regularly, and teachers provide helpful comments on the quality of the work. In a few instances, grammatical and spelling errors are not corrected. The self-assessment report failed to note that retention rates on some courses are low. However, the department is currently developing strategies for improvement. Many students who study computing progress to computer-related higher education courses.

12   The range of resources available to computing students is satisfactory. Some of the computers have the latest specification and students are able to use industrial-standard software. Teachers are well qualified. However, because the department has few links with industry and commerce, there are few opportunities for students to visit computer installations and little opportunity for staff to gain up-to-date knowledge of current practice. Within the computer workshop, students have good access to text books and computer periodicals. However, the range of computer-based learning materials is limited. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are not enough up-to-date computer text books in the college library. The college's plan to provide purpose-built computing accommodation for the next academic year is intended to alleviate the rather cramped conditions in some of the computer workshops.

Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level computing and IT	Retention (%)	85	83	82
	Pass rate (%)	100	96	88

Source: college data

Science

Grade 2

13 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in GCE A level biology, chemistry and physics. The main strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report for science were confirmed by inspectors.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- effective additional support for students
- high pass rates in external examinations
- generally high retention rates and good progression to higher education

Weaknesses

- little opportunity to share good practice between departments
- poor accommodation
- uninterested students in a minority of lessons

14   The college offers GCE A level courses in biology, chemistry and physics. GCE AS courses are being phased out because of low take-up. Inspectors agreed with the college that teachers are well qualified and have sound knowledge of their subjects. Support staff are also well qualified, and sufficient in number to meet needs. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers use a limited range of teaching methods. Typical lessons feature exposition by the teacher followed by practical work or an exercise in which students have to apply what they have learnt. In a minority of lessons observed, teachers involved only a small number of students in activities and the others lost interest. Relationships between staff and students are good. Students value the time that teachers spend giving additional support outside timetabled lessons.

15   The self-assessment report acknowledges that the use of IT in teaching and learning is in the early stages of development. IT was not used in any of the lessons observed and students' work is rarely wordprocessed. However, GCE AS biology students are encouraged to use IT in their practical coursework. The biology curriculum is enriched by contacts with outside agencies. For example, students visit and have work experience at a cancer research centre, and a teacher undertook a work placement in the pathology laboratory at a local hospital.

16   GCE A level results are well above the national averages for sixth form colleges, especially in GCE AS subjects. In 1997, a student was awarded a certificate of excellence in biology by the GCE A level examining body. Retention rates are generally high. Significant numbers of students progress to science-related subjects in higher education. Students generally have good oral and written communication skills and can construct logical arguments. Work is set at a level appropriate to the stage reached in the course. Teachers correct errors in students' written work conscientiously and helpful written comments encourage students and indicate how they can improve. The standard of students' work is generally good and students make appropriate use of graphs and diagrams.

17   As the college notes in its self-assessment report, common schemes of work help teachers to share good practice in the biology and chemistry departments. They are being developed in physics. Each department has a number of interesting ideas, such as a newsletter for chemistry students and the practice of setting extension questions at the end of assignments in physics to challenge the more able. However, there is little opportunity for the three departments to discuss and share their good practice. Faculty meetings are almost entirely devoted to whole college matters. The departments have effective links with the college's three partner schools and these help

students make the transition from GCSE to GCE
A level.

18   The college recognises that specialist
science accommodation is poor and at times
adversely affects the quality of students' learning
experiences. The noise made by heating and
water systems sometimes makes it difficult to
hear.

**Examples of students' achievements in
science, 1995 to 1997**

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level biology	Retention (%)	81	110*	88
	Pass rate (%)	93	95	96
GCE A level chemistry	Retention (%)	97	92	94
	Pass rate (%)	91	89	92
GCE A level physics	Retention (%)	109*	88	89
	Pass rate (%)	89	90	92
GCE AS biology	Retention (%)	85	77	67
	Pass rate (%)	96	92	84
GCE AS chemistry	Retention (%)	85	100	64
	Pass rate (%)	100	63	100
GCE AS physics	Retention (%)	84	100	96
	Pass rate (%)	81	88	89

Source: college data
*includes transfers from GCE AS course

Business

Grade 2

19   The inspection covered GCE A level and GCE AS in business studies and economics, and GNVQ business programmes at intermediate and advanced level. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses of the provision identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective teaching methods
- good planning and management of GNVQ programmes
- strong emphasis in GCE A/AS level courses on developing examination techniques
- good pass rates
- good retention rates

Weaknesses

- some inadequate marking of students' work
- undue delays in returning GNVQ assignments
- insufficient planning of some GCE A level courses

20   Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and make good use of up-to-date material. Lessons are generally well structured and students understand what is expected of them. For example, in a GNVQ lesson, individual students made oral presentations to the teacher on a work experience project. Each presentation was observed by two students working together who gave general feedback and commented on the extent to which key skills had been demonstrated. The pace of lessons observed was brisk and upbeat, and teachers used a range of teaching methods. GCE A/AS level lessons often involved an initial

introduction and activity to reinforce previous learning, followed by some whole-class work and opportunities for students to work individually. Teachers encouraged students to participate in lessons through effective use of questioning and regular checking of understanding.

21   Teachers of GCE A/AS level subjects strongly emphasise the development of analytical skills and the application of principles to current economic and business issues. Efforts are made to stress the importance of developing effective examination techniques throughout both years of the courses and this is reflected in the students' work. The self-assessment judges the regular assessment of students' work and the feedback they receive as a strength. Students are set work regularly, and it is marked fairly and returned promptly. However, in some instances, written comments from teachers are not sufficiently detailed.

22   GNVQ courses are well managed and planned to cover vocational and key skills. Students' progress is carefully monitored. Effective links with employers enrich the students' learning. Work experience is arranged and monitored by teachers and forms an integral part of courses. Other productive features of GNVQ programmes include individual students supported by a mentor, European work experience, the regular use of external speakers and visits to companies by students. The department has recognised that there are unacceptably long delays in the return of students' work on the GNVQ advanced course, and this is being addressed.

23   The self-assessment recognises the high level of students' achievements as a strength. Pass rates for GCE A/AS level courses and GNVQ programmes are above national averages. The proportion of students obtaining GCE A/AS level grades A to C and GNVQ merit and distinction awards are well above the national average. In 1997, 60 per cent of GCE A level business students and 59 per cent of the GCE A level

economics students achieved grades A to C, compared with the provisional national figures of 50 and 51 per cent, respectively. On the GNVQ advanced level programme, 38 per cent of the students achieved distinctions and 50 per cent merits. The majority of GNVQ students pass unit tests at the first attempt. A high proportion of students from GCE A level and GNVQ advanced courses progress to higher education, often into business-related courses. Retention rates are good especially on GCE A level and GNVQ courses. Progression from the GNVQ intermediate to the GNVQ advanced course or to employment is also good.

24   Problems have been caused by staff changes in mid-course and difficulties in finding appropriate replacements. The additional burden this imposes on managers has led to insufficient attention being paid to planning of GCE A level courses in the department.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	*	94
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	94
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	91	92	94
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	87
GCE A level business studies	Retention (%)	100	82	90
	Pass rate (%)	97	77	94
GCE A level economics	Retention (%)	97	100	95
	Pass rate (%)	89	93	86
GCE AS business studies	Retention (%)	79	86	87
	Pass rate (%)	91	93	71
GCE AS economics	Retention (%)	87	88	91
	Pass rate (%)	96	79	81

Source: college data
***course not offered**

Curriculum Areas

Modern Languages

Grade 1

25 The inspection covered the college's modern languages provision in French, German and Spanish. Inspectors observed nine GCE A/AS level lessons. The self-assessment report identified all the main strengths and weaknesses of the provision. One of the weaknesses identified had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good, sometimes innovative, range of teaching methods
- effective use of the language being taught
- teachers' high expectations of students
- rigorous assessment of students' work and monitoring of progress
- excellent examination results
- high retention rates and good progression to higher education

Weaknesses

- no common marking scheme for routine assignments

26 About 200 students take GCE A/AS level modern languages. Other students can take GCSE Italian or a course in foreign languages at work in French in addition to their main subjects. In 1997-98 there were 14 students taking the Italian course and 17 students the French. Although the self-assessment report identifies as a strength the breadth of its provision to meet the varying needs of students, opportunities to study languages are mainly limited to students who have studied the language previously. The department is well managed and overall planning is thorough.

27 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in teaching and learning identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers are well qualified, knowledgeable about the language being taught and highly committed to the students. Teaching standards are very good, and in some cases excellent. The language being studied is almost always used by teachers in their written and spoken dealings with students. Students are occasionally reluctant to speak the language being taught, but are enthusiastic and show good understanding of the language and a wide vocabulary. Lessons are well structured and build on previous learning. Teachers use a range of varied and innovative teaching and learning methods and materials to good effect. These include role-play, and the use of television programmes and up-to-date newspaper articles in the language being studied, as well as imaginative use of the internet and foreign news service. A small minority of the lessons observed were poorly managed.

28 Staff have high expectations of students and set them challenging tasks. The standard of work produced is appropriate for the stage in the course, and is sometimes very high. The departmental action plan identified a need to encourage students to wordprocess their work. Many students now do this and make effective use of diagrams and graphs when appropriate. There is rigorous monitoring of students' progress, through regular scheduled assessments. Teachers encourage students to plan their own programme of learning and assess their own progress. They have developed a system of student individual work plans, called *fiches de travail*, in which students record and comment on work completed and plan further work. In most cases, students' work is thoroughly marked. With few exceptions, teachers are strict about grammatical accuracy and add constructive comments on how students could improve. Whilst teachers ensure that students are thoroughly familiar with the examination and grading criteria, there is no agreed marking system for routine class work and homework assignments.

29   As the self-assessment states, students' achievements in all external examinations are outstanding and consistently higher than the national average for GCE A/AS level courses. For example, in 1997, 45 students entered for GCE A level French. All of them passed the examination, 89 per cent at grades A to C compared with the national figure of 53 per cent. The college subscribes to a service which predicts students' GCE A level grades from GCSE results. This shows that the performance of students in French is significantly better than that predicted. Fewer students enter for Spanish and German, but results are also much higher than the national average. All candidates entered for GCSE Italian over the last three years passed at grades A to C. Retention rates for all subjects, except GCE AS Spanish, are high. Progression for modern languages students into higher education is good. During the past three years, between 35 and 55 per cent of those progressing to higher education have chosen languages courses.

30   Good specialist facilities include easy access to video equipment, overhead projectors and satellite television. Effective use is made of a well-designed 20-booth language laboratory and a conversation room. The self-assessment report recognises as a strength the use of language assistants. Inspectors agreed that the three language assistants, two of whom are qualified teachers, are effectively used to help students develop fluency in the language.

Examples of students' achievements in modern languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level French	Retention (%)	86	84	90
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level German	Retention (%)	88	73	80
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	88
GCE A level Spanish	Retention (%)	133*	150*	107*
	Pass rate (%)	100	93	100
GCE AS French	Retention (%)	76	77	67
	Pass rate (%)	96	100	96
GCE AS German	Retention (%)	92	86	90
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	89
GCE AS Spanish	Retention (%)	86	57	29
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100

Source: college data
*includes transfers from GCE AS course

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

31   Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some weaknesses in student support had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good management and monitoring of student support services
- effective admissions and induction procedures
- strong support from personal tutors
- wide range of enrichment activities
- effective monitoring of attendance and students' progress
- good welfare and counselling
- excellent specialist careers education and guidance

Weaknesses

- limited number of learning support and administrative staff
- lack of professional development for tutors in careers advice and guidance

32   The director of student services has overall responsibility for the support of students and the registrar is responsible for recruitment and admissions. Students receive high-quality support throughout their time in the college. Inspection findings confirmed the college's judgement that support for students is effectively organised and well managed. The student support team, which includes four senior tutors and dedicated student support staff, meets weekly, ensuring that all aspects of the service are carefully reviewed and evaluated. The college has clear policies and procedures covering all areas of student support, which it has refined and improved since the last

inspection. Administrative staffing is insufficient.

33   As the college noted in its self-assessment report, there are some difficulties in liaison with partner schools. These are being addressed through regular meetings variously involving the college senior managers, head teachers of the partner schools, groups of curriculum managers and a local careers officer. There are clear criteria for entry to the college. Pupils and parents from the partner schools are fully informed about the college and its courses. An appropriate range of clearly-written leaflets gives essential information about college courses. Well-attended open evenings and parents evenings provide opportunities for pupils and parents to receive sound, impartial information and advice. Staff are briefed thoroughly on interview techniques and experienced in making sure that students are placed on courses which are appropriate for their qualifications and career aspirations.

34   Students receive a thorough induction to the college which familiarises them with the college and enables them to settle quickly into their studies. An introductory afternoon session before the start of the academic year gives students an opportunity to meet personal tutors, subject teachers, library and careers staff. During a five-day induction programme in September, all new students have their first interview with their personal tutor. If students are unsure about their choice of courses, they can meet with a senior tutor to discuss alternatives.

35   The college identifies its tutorial programme as a significant strength, and inspectors agreed with this. Students are supported by a personal tutor throughout their studies. As well as daily contact with their personal tutors at registration, they benefit from weekly group tutorials. Tutors use these to review students' progress and support them in developing study skills, in producing action plans and in setting personal targets. If a

teacher considers that an individual student is experiencing problems, then a 'cause for concern' note is issued to the personal tutor and the senior tutor. Termly case conferences are held to discuss students who are underachieving. Despite their heavy workload senior tutors assiduously follow up issues and seek solutions. Where appropriate, parents are informed of issues arising. The college recognises that some tutorial groups are too large and that as groups increase in size, time for individual attention is reduced.

36   The director of student services, the senior tutors and personal tutors provide welfare support for students who have personal problems. When necessary, they encourage students to seek guidance from a qualified part-time counsellor who provides a confidential service for students. Although wheelchair users have difficulty accessing parts of the building, the college supports a small number of students with disabilities, some of them severe. A designated teacher provides effective help for students with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, and emotional problems. The self-assessment report identifies the need to increase resources for this expanding area of work.

37   The programme for first-year students during the autumn and spring terms is broadened by a wide range of enrichment studies in subjects such as art, cultural studies, music, sport, science and technology. Many students on the enrichment programme benefit from the discipline imposed by working towards accreditation for these activities through the Universities Award Scheme. In 1997, over 200 students were accredited, and the number of students completing the programme improved from the previous year.

38   Students receive excellent careers advice and guidance especially when applying for higher education. All students have a careers guidance interview with a specialist from the local careers service. A comprehensive programme of activities includes visits from university admissions tutors, speakers from business and relevant work placements during the summer term of their first year. Personal tutors play a major role in providing careers guidance. The college's careers co-ordinator provides sound advice in a well-resourced careers area. The college recognises that tutors require more professional development to ensure that the careers guidance they provide is kept up to date.

General Resources

Grade 3

39   The college's self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and weaknesses found during the inspection, and in most instances, gave them appropriate weight. Some facilities have improved since the college was last inspected.

Key strengths
- effective use of the accommodation available
- clear accommodation strategy
- improvements to the learning centre
- high-quality artificial grass sports pitch

Weaknesses
- some unsuitable teaching accommodation
- limited access to the learning centre
- inadequate social facilities for students
- limited access to buildings for students with restricted mobility

40   No major improvements to the buildings have been carried out since the last inspection. The limited accommodation is efficiently used. Much of the existing teaching accommodation is in a poor decorative state and some of it is poorly maintained. A few classrooms are too small for the groups being taught. The college

now has a clear accommodation strategy and has recently obtained planning permission to construct a large building which will provide an enlarged learning centre, including access to IT facilities at all times, as well as new social facilities and science laboratories. It will allow art and music provision to be moved from the huts currently used. These improvements were all identified as needed in the self-assessment report. The college has raised most of the funds required from the sale of part of its site for housing, and it plans to start construction in the summer of 1998.

41   The self-assessment report identifies a number of improvements made since the last inspection to the learning centre, which also houses the library. The college, working with several other local colleges, has been successful in gaining competitiveness funds. This has enabled it to buy nine multimedia computers and install the communications infrastructure required to access the internet. The bookstock in the library has been increased, and many items formerly held within teaching departments are now held centrally. Although the budget is low, there are no major shortages of books in the curriculum areas inspected, apart from computing. Use of the college's learning centre has increased substantially since it was improved. At certain times the study area of the library becomes overcrowded but students are also able to work in the college's hall. The learning centre is effectively managed, but staffing levels are low. As a result, opening hours are restricted and at times the centre has to be closed during the college day.

42   Over the last four years the level and quality of IT provision has improved. Overall, the quantity and standard of hardware and software available for students' use are adequate to support learning. The only computers which are always available outside timetabled lessons are those in the learning centre. Students can use others in classrooms, but only when they are not being used for lessons. The self-assessment report identifies limited access to IT facilities as a weakness. Technician support for the computing facilities is adequate.

43   The self-assessment report identifies as a weakness the fact that the refectory is the only social area for students. It is small, the opening hours are restricted, and it can become very crowded. The college has recently built a floodlit all-weather artificial grass pitch of a high standard. This is extensively used for a variety of formal and informal recreational activities. Local community groups make good use of the pitch and the hire charges generate some income for the college. The college provides transport to a wide range of off-site sports facilities. The small gymnasium is inadequate both for academic and recreational activities. Most staff have suitable work rooms within their departments while others share a quiet area situated next to the staff common room.

44   As there are no lifts, staff or students with restricted mobility have limited access to the buildings. Some specialist areas such as the science laboratories cannot be reached. The self-assessment report recognises this as a weakness, and the planned new building has been designed to address this situation.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

45   The college has improved its procedures for quality assurance since the last inspection. Inspectors' judgements about the process were broadly in line with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- rigorous quality assurance procedures for the curriculum and student services
- good use of performance indicators and targets
- effective system of lesson observation
- well-developed systems for collecting and analysing students' perceptions
- comprehensive staff development procedures

Weaknesses

- no overall policy for monitoring quality assurance procedures
- cumbersome staff appraisal procedures
- insufficiently developed quality standards for finance, estates and administrative services

46   The college has developed an effective quality assurance system which has resulted in improvements across the college since the last inspection and enabled it to maintain high levels of achievement in spite of increasing numbers of students. The senior management team acts as the college quality assurance group, receiving regular reports on progress in improving quality from faculties, departments and cross-college areas. The quality assurance framework clearly identifies management responsibilities for various aspects of college activity. Each member of the senior management team makes regular reports to the corporation on the achievement of targets for their areas of responsibility which

are clearly identified in the strategic and operating plans.

47   Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that it has introduced rigorous quality assurance procedures for the curriculum and for student services. In 1996-97, an established annual cycle of review resulted in departmental self-assessment reports, which in turn contributed to the preparation of the college's self-assessment report. All staff are involved in the review process which is well structured and thorough. Action plans are monitored throughout the year but in some instances lack quantitative targets for recruitment and retention. Quality standards have been developed in the area of student services but those for finance, estates and administrative services require further development.

48   The self-assessment report recognises that the process to monitor quality assurance procedures is not always applied rigorously. As a result, the quality of the departmental self-assessment reports is inconsistent.

49   In September 1997, the college introduced an effective system for lesson observation which contributed to the preparation of the self-assessment report and, in some cases, to appraisal. During the course of an academic year, all teachers can expect to have their lessons observed by a line manager and by a peer, and to observe a colleague's lesson themselves. A written report is prepared after each observation, and copied to the teacher and the head of department. At the time of the inspection about 70 per cent of teaching staff had been observed. The college is on target to complete the process by the end of the academic year. The process is welcomed by staff as a valuable contribution to their own personal development as well as to quality assurance.

50   The college has developed comprehensive staff development policies and procedures to help ensure that all staff receive appropriate training to meet their individual needs and those

identified in the college's strategic plan. Following a skills and qualifications audit of staff, a college staff development programme has been devised. Staff applying for external training courses must show how the course relates to the college's corporate objectives. Approximately 1 per cent of the college staffing budget is allocated to fund attendance at external events. In addition, the college has developed a supportive programme of internal training events, including three events each year for all staff. It has established a small number of action research groups to review areas of particular interest, such as helping students to learn independently, and to develop related staff development programmes for all staff. Some staff training activities are funded by North London TEC and other external agencies.

51   The college has an established system of staff appraisal which operates on a two-year cycle and involves meetings between the appraiser and the person being appraised, lesson observations, self-assessment forms and an agreed written statement. The college recognised as a weakness that appraisal had not been fully implemented by all departments. It did not recognise that the process was very time-consuming because it is unnecessarily detailed and cumbersome.

52   Students' perceptions of their courses and the college are collected systematically and analysed. Cross-college questionnaires are completed by all students in order to obtain their views on activity such as the induction programme, work experience arrangements and the effectiveness of the college's support services. In addition, students complete at least two departmental questionnaires designed to review the effectiveness of teaching. Students' views are also obtained through the tutorial system and through a programme of individual interviews with representatives of the student body. Students' responses are used to inform self-assessment reports and develop departmental action plans. As a result of

students' comments, the induction process has been improved and changes made to the structure of the GNVQ business programme and the teaching methods used.

Governance

Grade 3

53   Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and a number of the weaknesses in governance. Some additional weaknesses were identified by inspectors.

Key strengths
- effective use of governors' experience and expertise to support college managers
- governors' strong support for the college
- thorough, well-presented and timely documentation for corporation meetings
- effective contribution to the college's building development plans

Weaknesses
- insufficient involvement of governors in strategic planning and quality assurance
- no induction for new members and limited training for governors
- irregular attendance at meetings
- insufficient contact between governors and college
- no system for the appraisal of senior postholders

54   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.

55   The corporation has 18 members, comprising 15 men and three women. There are currently vacancies for one co-opted and one independent member. Governors are well qualified for their role and bring a wide range of relevant experience and expertise. They have supported the college's managers and provided stability during a difficult period. The corporation has seven committees which receive regular reports from the relevant senior manager. Meetings are chaired effectively and all governors contribute to discussions. Governors have encouraged the college in its plans to develop the new building. They monitor the college's finances carefully.

56   The self-assessment report identified that some governors have attended meetings infrequently because of their business commitments. Some meetings have been inquorate, and the number of committees exacerbates this problem. Governors do not devote enough attention to the strategic direction of the college or the monitoring of its performance. The terms of reference of committees do not sufficiently reflect the strategic role of governors. They allow governors simply to receive reports, sometimes on operational rather than strategic matters. Some issues which should be of concern to the full board, such as the quality of the provision, are not fully considered by governors. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. The corporation intends to restructure the committees and this will give them the opportunity to reconsider their function and purpose.

57   The clerk to the governors has a clearly-defined job description. Different senior managers clerk different committees, but final decisions on these arrangements will not be made until the arrival of a new principal. Documentation for governors' meetings is well presented, thorough and timely. The corporation has established an appropriate code of conduct and a register of members' interests.

The corporation places a value on openness and requires members of the senior management team to declare their interests as well. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the corporation has not established a formal procedure for the appraisal of senior postholders or appraised current senior postholders. It intends to do this once the new principal is in post. The procedures for the appointment of three governors were not correctly followed, but the board took prompt action to address this.

58   There are no formal induction procedures for new governors and no person specification for new members to assist in recruiting governors and help them fulfil their role effectively. There are terms of reference for a search committee but records indicate that it has never met to fulfil its primary role. There has been only one recent in-house training event for governors, on inspection procedures and self-assessment. During that event, governors conducted their own self-assessment of governance. They recognise the need to integrate the self-assessment of governance with the college's self-assessment cycle. Contact with college staff other than senior managers and staff governors is rare. The corporation is considering the possibility of links between individual governors and the faculties to address this and to enhance governors' knowledge of college activities.

Management

Grade 2

59 The college's self-assessment report of management was thorough and the judgements were supported by clear evidence. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses, although they concluded that the significance of some of the strengths in the report was overstated.

Key strengths

- effective contribution by all staff to departmental and college-wide plans
- clear links between planning and self-assessment
- well-defined management and committee structure
- generally effective target-setting and monitoring
- well-managed financial and staffing resources

Weaknesses

- no formal system to review and update college policies
- limited access to management information system
- no formal induction for some new staff

60 Woodhouse College is managed effectively. Staff are involved in strategic and operational planning, and in the related self-assessment process. Targets have recently been incorporated into operational plans. Performance indicators for achievements and retention are included in the strategic plan and departmental plans refer to them. The director of curriculum and personnel monitors progress towards achieving targets in meetings with heads of faculty. Job descriptions for managers clearly define their roles within the organisation. Senior managers meet regularly and decisions are communicated effectively through a structured series of faculty and departmental meetings. There are a number of college committees or working parties, and most staff sit on at least one of them, enabling wide-ranging consultation on issues facing the college. Terms of reference for the committees prevent any overlapping of functions. Essential information is relayed promptly to staff through weekly briefings from the principal. Some teachers have several different roles, and can find it difficult to attend every meeting or to fulfil all their roles effectively. Some staff, particularly support staff, do not have sufficiently detailed job descriptions. These findings support the judgements made in the self-assessment report. Staff who join the college as newly-qualified teachers receive a formal induction to help them understand their role in the college but this is not always extended to all staff.

61 As stated in the self-assessment report, managers and staff of the college liaise with a number of external bodies to enhance the work of the college. There are frequent meetings between the acting principal, North London TEC, the local education authority (LEA) and principals from other further education colleges. College staff meet representatives from universities as part of the careers education programme. Staff also work with colleagues from other educational institutions as part of their work with partner schools and on a number of projects. The college has few formal links with employers other than through work experience arrangements.

62 Little formal market research is carried out by the college, although it states in its self-assessment that it has well-developed strategies for market research. Research into students' requirements is carried out at interview and there are discussions with partner schools about the needs of their students. The college states in its strategic plan that it intends to develop income-generating activities, but it has not had time to follow through earlier research to assist it with this plan.

63   There is no system for the regular review, updating and dissemination of the college's policies. The equal opportunities policy requires reviewing and monitoring more rigorously than at present, especially in the light of the significant number of students from minority ethnic groups. This was an operational objective of the former principal, which has not yet been implemented. The college makes arrangements, if students request it, for an act of collective worship. It provides Muslim students with a prayer room and arranges the observance of religious holidays. There is a Christian society and a Jewish society for students.

64   The centralised management information system produces a range of useful data for staff and managers, on numbers of applications, enrolments, and student and staff timetables. There are separate databases for personnel and finance, and for student services, enabling them to track students' achievements. The reports from all management information systems provide the essential information required for the running of the organisation on a day-to-day basis. However, access to management information is currently limited and time-consuming. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the system needs to be improved. The college has already purchased a new management information system to be installed during summer 1998.

65   Staffing and financial resources are well managed. Departmental funding allocations are based on a bidding process, and heads of faculty advise senior management on areas of need. Controls are in place to prevent overspending.

66   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The reports of the internal and external auditors do not indicate any significant weaknesses in internal control. Financial regulations do not include procedures for capital project management. A small but effective finance department produces reports for budget holders on actual and committed expenditure. The college's financial position is monitored effectively by senior managers and governors. The monthly financial reports include an updated forecast of income and expenditure to the end of the year, but do not contain a comparison of actual spending against budgeted spending for the year to date. Cashflow is forecast to the end of the year but not beyond, and so is of decreasing use as the year progresses.

Conclusions

67   The college's self-assessment report process has evolved from an established annual cycle of course review linked to departmental and strategic planning. All staff were involved in the production of the first departmental self-assessment reports in 1996-97, which contributed to the whole college report. The college's self-assessment report was clear and concise, generally comprehensive and evaluative. Sources of evidence to support judgements were provided. The report included detailed action plans showing how weaknesses were to be addressed and some had already been addressed at the time of inspection. Some of the departmental reports were more accurate and evaluative than others. Inspectors generally agreed with the findings of the college report. They agreed with all but one of the grades awarded by the college.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	99
19-24 years	0
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	0
Intermediate	3
Advanced	97
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	300	0	36
Business	142	0	17
Art and design	46	0	6
Humanities	341	0	41
Total	829	0	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	42	3	0	45
Supporting direct learning contact	7	1	0	8
Other support	11	2	0	13
Total	60	6	0	66

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£2,291,000	£3,127,000	£2,652,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.31	£18.78	£19.14
Payroll as a proportion of income	79%	60%	*
Achievement of funding target	101%	103%	*
Diversity of income	5%	27%	*
Operating surplus	£14,000	£733,000	£481,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)
ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)
Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)
Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)
Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)
*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	284	350	316
	Average point score per entry	6.5	6.4	6.4
	Position in tables	top 10%	top 10%	top 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	+	+	16
	Percentage achieving qualification	+	+	94%
	Position in tables	+	+	top 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	16	22
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	100%	95%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	top 10%

Source: DfEE
+course not running
*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	95	93	94
	Retention (%)	92	89	90

Source: college data
Note: retention over two years

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