

North Oxfordshire College and School of Art

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	–

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

North Oxfordshire College and School of Art

South East Region

Inspected March 1999

North Oxfordshire College and School of Art is a general further education college in Banbury. The college's comprehensive self-assessment process involved all staff and governors. In many respects, inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, but they judged that insufficient weight had been given to some significant weaknesses and some of the strengths were overstated. Inspectors also identified some weaknesses which had been missed by the college.

The college offers further education courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas, and some higher education courses. The inspection covered provision in four of the programme areas. The college has close and productive links with local schools, the local community and local business. Provision in the areas inspected is satisfactory or good. Some examination pass rates are high. The work produced by art and design students is often outstanding. The level of personal support for students is good. Since the last inspection, the college has made some significant improvements to accommodation and IT facilities for students. There is prudent financial management of the college. Governors are appropriately involved in strategic planning. The college should address: the need for better teaching in some areas; the

downward trend in examination pass rates; the low take-up of learning support by students identified as needing help; the lack of rigour in some course reviews and the need to set targets for improvement; some key aspects of governance; inadequacies in internal audit arrangements; and shortcomings in the collection of data on student performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Business studies	2	Support for students	2
Hotel and catering	3	General resources	2
Health and care	3	Quality assurance	3
Art and design	2	Governance	3
		Management	3

The College and its Mission

1 North Oxfordshire College and School of Art is a general further education college in Banbury. The college serves the mainly rural areas of north Oxfordshire, south-east Warwickshire and the southern part of Northamptonshire. The college provides daily transport for some 350 full-time students from the more rural parts of its catchment area, at an annual cost to the college of £180,000. The main college site is situated close to Banbury town centre. There is also a small annexe about 2 miles away, which is on the same site as a local secondary school. The college is the largest provider of post-16 education and training in the area. There are four secondary schools in Banbury, two of which have their own sixth forms. There are also two schools in nearby Bicester, one of which has a sixth form.

2 The college offers courses in each of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) 10 programme areas. It also offers a range of higher education courses, and is an associate college of De Montfort University. A major part of its work is in art and design which accounts for approximately 40% of the college's provision. The college also offers a wide range of recreational programmes, many of which are run at local schools. It makes special provision for a small number of disaffected school pupils. The college has steadily increased its student enrolments over the last few years. In 1998 it recruited over 5,400 students.

3 The local economy is mixed, and service industries are growing. The college's catchment area had been an area of relatively high unemployment, compared with the average for Oxfordshire, but recently employment opportunities have increased significantly and in some areas acute labour shortages have emerged. The staying-on rate for post-16 education has traditionally been relatively high, at over 72%. However, in the past year it has fallen to 68%. The college considers this a consequence of the now buoyant employment

situation which has resulted in more young people entering employment on leaving school.

4 The college has extensive and productive links with the local business and education communities. It is a partner in the Oxfordshire 'widening participation' project and is involved in a second project which includes Warwickshire colleges and other partners.

5 The college's mission is reviewed regularly by the corporation. It is 'to provide education and training of high quality', which is designed primarily to meet the needs of the local community. In some areas of its work, notably in art and design, the college extends its mission further afield because of the number of students it attracts from beyond its immediate locality.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 8 March 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. Data for 1996 and 1997 were taken from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR). In a few cases these were found to be unreliable. Data on students' achievements for 1998 were validated by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. These data were mainly accurate. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 39 days. Inspectors observed 54 lessons and two tutorials, and examined students' work and college documents. They held meetings with governors, managers, college staff and students.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 63% were judged to be good or outstanding, broadly comparable to the

Context

average figure of 65% for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Only one lesson was judged to be less than satisfactory.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	0	1	1	0	0	2
GNVQ	1	5	3	0	0	9
NVQ	0	7	3	0	0	10
Other vocational	8	12	12	1	0	33
Total (No.)	9	25	19	1	0	54
Total (%)	17	46	35	2	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

Note: excludes two tutorials

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
North Oxfordshire College and School of Art	9.1	78
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering administration, general business, accounting, marketing and management. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and with most of the detail, but considered that a number of strengths had been overstated.

Key strengths

- very good working relationships between teachers and students
- clear link between specialist curriculum developments and the college's strategic aims
- good pass rates on professional and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced courses in business
- well-planned arrangements for the assessment of students' work
- easy access to good information technology (IT) resources

Weaknesses

- failure of some teaching to interest students
- deteriorating pass rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) administration courses
- insufficient opportunities for staff to update their skills

10 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that provision in business studies is fully consistent with the strategic plan and mission. Some professional courses are arranged flexibly to allow students to attend at times which meet their needs. Courses which offer updating and 'return to work' vocational skills are well attended. Full-time programmes offered in administration recruit well, but the GNVQ business programmes face competition

from local schools and recruitment has declined in recent years. The GNVQ intermediate course in business is not running this year.

11 The standard of teaching overall is good. About three-quarters of lessons observed were judged to be good or outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that working relationships between teachers and students are productive. They also confirmed that arrangements for the assessment of students' work are effectively organised. In the best lessons, teachers used imaginative strategies to include all the students in the class. A part-time professional class included a student for whom English was her second language. The teacher used helpful handouts and frequent brief discussions to reinforce learning, varying the composition of the groups to allow for her limited English skills. In a number of lessons, the use of well-directed questions and skilful handling of discussions gave all students the opportunity to express their views and raise questions. In others, the teaching and learning strategies used did not engage the interest of all students, and this was applied equally to both the brightest and the less able students.

12 Students on courses at both professional and advanced levels achieved pass rates above the national average in 1996 and 1997. The college identified this strength in its self-assessment report. However, inspectors were unable to agree with the college that students' achievements on the GNVQ intermediate course were also a strength. Pass rates had been variable over the past three years and were below the national average in 1996 and 1997. The self-assessment report acknowledged that pass rates are falling on NVQ level 2 administration courses. Inspectors agreed that work placements for students on secretarial and administration courses are good, but found that the college's training office, designed to provide a realistic working environment, fails to include services for external clients. In at least one case, progress towards meeting awarding body requirements for internal verification is slow.

Curriculum Areas

13 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that students have good access to industry-standard IT equipment. The teaching accommodation is good. Most rooms are generally well equipped but there are minor defects such as missing parts for projection screens, and no book holders for use on computer desks. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that teachers are well qualified, but that they lack recent updating in industry. This is being addressed, and several teachers are currently undertaking relevant activities. These have yet to bring benefits to teaching and learning.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Expected completions	7	10	13
		Retention (%)	58	67	76
		Achievement (%)	57	40	54
NVQ administration	2 and 3	Expected completions	25	28	20
		Retention (%)	78	91	74
		Achievement (%)	74	63	51
NVQ accounting	2 and 3	Expected completions	28	30	25
		Retention (%)	83	71	68
		Achievement (%)	36	58	69
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	28	10	11
		Retention (%)	90	77	73
		Achievement (%)	72	78	91
Professional – includes management and marketing	3 and 4	Expected completions	31	27	28
		Retention (%)	77	77	73
		Achievement (%)	*	79	73

Source: college data

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering

Grade 3

14 Inspectors observed 9 lessons covering the college's hotel and catering provision. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report but considered that the significance of some of the weaknesses was understated.

Key strengths

- some good teaching of theory, and productive practical lessons
- helpful feedback on students' written work
- realistic working environment and good work experience arrangements
- a wide range of additional qualifications

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates and low retention rates on some courses
- some students inappropriately enrolled on level 2 courses
- lack of detail in schemes of work
- poor condition of some equipment

15 The majority of students in this small area of provision are following NVQ level 2 programmes. There are opportunities for progression to NVQ level 3 provision in 'multi-skilled hospitality' supervision, but at the time of the inspection only five students were on the course. Some students report they would welcome the opportunity to study a wider range of level 3 craft-based qualifications. The provision at NVQ level 1 is reserved for students with learning difficulties, so that other students do not have the opportunity to work at level 1 first and achieve a qualification before moving on to higher level courses. As a result, a number of students are enrolled on to NVQ level 2 courses when level 1 would be more suitable.

As identified in the self-assessment report, teaching staff have difficulty in motivating some students on NVQ level 2 courses. Recruitment to the GNVQ advanced course was poor in 1997 and only two students remain in the current second year of study. Although these students are integrated with NVQ classes for some of their learning, the small size of the group limits the teaching strategies that can be used and impoverishes the students' educational experiences. No students were recruited to the GNVQ advanced course in 1998. As identified in the self-assessment report, students have the opportunity to take a wide range of additional qualifications, including wine and spirit courses, the national licensee's certificate course, and a hygiene and first aid course. There are effective links with a wide range of employers. These links provide valuable work experience for students, and teachers and students sometimes work alongside each other providing refreshments and catering facilities at major social events organised by employers.

16 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that lessons are generally well planned and that improvement in the management of this provision has recently been achieved, though schemes of work are often no more than lists of topics to be taught. In theory lessons, teachers successfully used an appropriate variety of methods to maintain the interest and participation of students. In a practical pastry lesson, the teacher gave a good, clear demonstration of aspects of boiled sugar work. Students then successfully produced some contemporary items in design, caramel cages and sugar spirals to enhance the presentation of desserts. Students have opportunities to develop key skills throughout their courses, but some fail to understand their importance, despite the fact that key skills are separately assessed. In one of the restaurant classes there were few customers in the restaurant, and students had little to do. Students' work is effectively marked, and written feedback from tutors is informative and

Curriculum Areas

helpful. Internal verification of students' work is carefully managed, and accords with college policy.

17 Students are well disciplined in classes and work effectively, in many instances as part of food production teams. As the college self-assessment report stated, students' practical work is of a good standard. Students comply with hygiene practices and dress code. The level of attendance in lessons is generally good and student absenteeism is monitored effectively. In the last year, students have won national and local catering awards, including a 'Young Chef of the Year' prize. Pass rates on some courses are poor. No students are recorded as having achieved the qualification on a stage 1 modern cookery course, and in 1998 only two students out of 22 enrolled on a French course for catering students achieved the

qualification. The college no longer enters students for these qualifications. Data on achievements at NVQ level 2 are unreliable, and locally available data did not match ISR returns. The college has only recently begun to offer the NVQ level 3 course; the first set of results matches the national average. Significant numbers of students leave courses before they achieve their qualifications.

18 Teachers are appropriately qualified, have relevant assessor qualifications and all have good industrial experience. Teaching accommodation is of a good standard, and the modern facilities include a large hall which is used for public functions. Library and general resources are adequate. Students have good access to computers. Some small items of specialist equipment are in need of replacement.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Royal Society of Health certificate in essential food hygiene (short)	1	Expected completions	114	88	99
		Retention (%)	100	78	99
		Achievement (%)	96	89	85
NVQ food preparation and cooking	2	Expected completions	*	42	35
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	*	*	96
NVQ multi-skilled hospitality supervision	3	Expected completions	**	**	8
		Retention (%)	**	**	63
		Achievement (%)	**	**	100

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

*data unreliable

**course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 3

19 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering courses in childcare and in health and social care. They agreed with some of the strengths and most of the weaknesses. Inspectors considered that some strengths were overstated and that the college underestimated the significance of weaknesses in student retention and examination pass rates.

Key strengths

- well-organised work experience
- achievements and retention on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing
- teachers' recent relevant professional experience
- good standard of accommodation

Weaknesses

- some unimaginative teaching
- some poor student retention rates
- below national average pass rates on some courses
- lack of detail in schemes of work

20 The college offers full-time social care and childcare courses from foundation to advanced level. The small range of part-time courses includes British Sign Language and courses for dental surgery assistants. NVQs are now offered, but there are few candidates. The quality of schemes of work and lesson plans varies widely; schemes of work generally contain insufficient information.

21 Teaching is satisfactory or better, with a few examples of outstanding practice. In the better lessons, teachers relate theory to

examples of current workplace practices. They make full use of specialist facilities and their own professional expertise. For example, in a lesson planned to explore how professional social workers deal with suspected child abuse, the teacher used illustrations from her own background as a social worker. The students listened to a taped play about suspected abuse; they discussed the options for dealing with abuse which are open to various groups of professionals, such as the police and teachers, and drew conclusions about the actions to be taken. The teacher was sensitive to students' reactions and provided guidance on how to develop a professional response to such circumstances. In less effective lessons, students were required to sit and listen for too long. A few teachers failed to use appropriate teaching aids to support the learning. In other lessons, too much time was allowed for simple activities and some students lost interest in the tasks. The college did not acknowledge the variable quality of teaching and learning in its self-assessment report. The average number of students in teaching groups was just under seven, and this often limited the opportunities for group work, as well as its quality.

22 Inspectors agreed with the college that the well-organised work experience is a strength. Students are able to develop and demonstrate workplace skills and apply theory to practice in a variety of settings. Appropriate links are made between theory and practice in assignments. Most students demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge, values and skills. Students' written work is generally of an appropriate standard. While some teachers provide ample comment on students' written work to help them improve, some give students too little guidance. Internal verification processes are thorough. Key skills are assessed through vocational assignments wherever possible, and key skills teachers liaise closely with specialist teachers to ensure the relevance of assignments.

Curriculum Areas

23 The self-assessment report did not pay sufficient attention to weaknesses in student retention and pass rates. In a few cases, it identified as a strength pass rates which are well below national norms. Although in 1998, all 19 students who completed the GNVQ advanced course in health and social care achieved the qualification, college data show no students passed in 1997, and fewer than 40% passed in 1996. Retention rates on the one-year Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate course in childcare and education are similar to national figures, but college data show that pass rates fell from 86% in 1996 to 32% in 1998. For the past three years retention rates and students' achievements in the two-year Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing course have consistently met or exceeded national averages. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course were below national norms in both 1996 and 1997, and the course failed to recruit students in 1998. Out of the 10 students who started the GNVQ foundation in 1997-98, five finished the course and four achieved the full qualification. Many students progress from care courses to relevant employment, and most of the students completing the GNVQ advanced in 1998 progressed to higher education courses.

24 Teachers are well qualified, and many have recent, relevant professional experience, as the self-assessment report stated. Teachers are allowed five working days a year to update their professional skills and some take the opportunity to maintain professional registration as nurses, or to undertake work shadowing. Accommodation is good, with well-equipped, comfortable rooms in a suite in the new building. Equipment for demonstrating practical care and childcare techniques is adequate. Two of the rooms have a water supply and cooking facilities. Only one computer is available for students' use during lessons in classrooms, but students can use the computers in the learning centre during their limited free time.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation in health and social care	1	Expected completions	**	**	10
		Retention (%)	**	**	50
		Achievement (%)	**	**	80
GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	Expected completions	15	20	**
		Retention (%)	73	80	**
		Achievement (%)	45	38	**
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education	2	Expected completions	*	*	22
		Retention (%)	*	*	86
		Achievement (%)	*	*	32
GNVQ advanced in health and social care	3	Expected completions	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	63
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions	24	21	28
		Retention (%)	88	95	96
		Achievement (%)	83	94	100

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

*data unreliable

**course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

25 Inspectors observed 23 lessons covering the college's full range of specialist design and fine art courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses, and disagreed with the college's overall judgement about the quality of provision in this area.

Key strengths

- the wide range of courses
- effective lesson planning and classroom management
- much good teaching
- generally good pass rates and some high standards in students' work
- effective links with the design industry
- significant numbers of students progressing to higher education
- high standards in specialist accommodation and equipment

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning
- underdeveloped exploratory drawing and sketchbook work on some courses
- some poor student retention rates
- examples of ineffective teaching

26 The college offers a wide range of courses in vocational design and fine art, including higher education courses. There are two section leaders, one for fine art and one for vocational art and design. Roles and responsibilities in the two areas are clear and understood. Minutes of meetings record discussion of a range of topics including student recruitment and admissions, course review and evaluation, staff development

and students' performance. However, insufficient attention is given to consideration of teaching and learning. Actions and nominated responsibilities are not always recorded. These shortcomings were not identified in the self-assessment report.

27 There is much good teaching. Most of the teaching is carried out through assignment and project work. Briefs provided for students' projects are generally effective and introduce students to a wide range of topics. The best lessons were characterised by detailed planning, careful presentation, challenging aims and objectives, and thorough use of assessment criteria. For example, in a contextual studies lesson in photography, students were introduced to their final major project. They were required to produce several photographs and an extended essay. The teacher encouraged them to discuss a variety of difficult concepts involved in the use and analysis of photography. Students were clearly developing their understanding of the people and events that have influenced photography. In a stimulating lesson in sculpture, the teacher and students worked together effectively to explore and develop ideas. A well-designed project brief enabled students to work on a variety of creative activities and demonstrate their personal styles. However, the college's self-assessment failed to recognise that some aims and objectives and assessment criteria are not always made clear to students, and some teaching does not encourage students to extend their understanding. Student attendance was low in a few lessons.

28 The self-assessment report stated pass rates are good. Inspection findings confirmed this for several courses. For example, students on the national diploma in photography achieved a 100% pass rate for the last two years. In 1998, pass rates on the diploma in foundation studies and the national diplomas in general art and design and graphic design were above national figures. Student retention rates are high on the diploma in foundation studies.

Curriculum Areas

However, pass rates are below national norms on the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) art and design course and on the GNVQ intermediate art and design course. In 1998, student retention rates were poor on a number of courses. Inspectors saw some high-quality students' work in all areas. Some of the students' work in graphic design, photography and foundation studies is outstanding, but there is insufficient exploratory, drawing and sketchbook work on some courses. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. A 'professional practice unit' has helped to strengthen links with a variety of employers. It gives students on design courses valuable experience of working within commercial constraints. Inspectors agreed that the level of student progression to higher education is high.

29 Accommodation is good. Facilities for courses in design are extensive and include some high-quality simulated professional environments in computer-aided design, graphic design and photography. Students on fine art courses benefit from a wide range of studios and workshops. Teachers are well qualified in their specialist areas. The majority have a degree and many have postgraduate qualifications. Many teachers are practising artists and designers, but only a small number have a teaching qualification. Technician support in photography is less than satisfactory. The college recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report but underestimates its detrimental impact on teaching and learning.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	19	17	15
		Retention (%)	79	94	47
		Achievement (%)	87	61	71
GCE A level art and design	3	Expected completions	28	28	24
		Retention (%)	82	75	58
		Achievement (%)	56	29	47
National diplomas in design (graphic design/photography)	3	Expected completions	41	59	51
		Retention (%)	74	61	77
		Achievement (%)	80	92	96
National diploma in general art and design	3	Expected completions	42	33	34
		Retention (%)	71	79	65
		Achievement (%)	86	87	90
Diploma in foundation studies	3	Expected completions	64	82	84
		Retention (%)	83	83	93
		Achievement (%)	94	94	99
Higher national certificate in design (graphic design)	3	Expected completions	29	35	37
		Retention (%)	72	83	62
		Achievement (%)	80	78	94

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

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

30 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They considered that a few strengths were overstated and identified some weaknesses not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- impartial guidance and good centralised admission system for full-time students
- well-managed student support services
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- effective links with local schools and the careers service
- extensive childcare provision

Weaknesses

- poor take-up of learning support by students diagnosed as needing it
- inconsistent support and information for part-time students

31 Inspectors agreed that the college's support for students is well managed. Full-time students receive impartial guidance and advice. There are well-established links with schools. 'Taster' days are offered to school pupils so that they can sample college courses and experience college life before they apply. The college also organises careers conventions and open days, and conducts promotional activities in the wider community. Publicity and course information is comprehensive and clear. Students who apply to the college have detailed interviews and the guidance offered is generally effective. The college recognises that its paper-based tracking of part-time student enrolments and the information held on these students constitute a weakness.

32 When students begin their courses they receive comprehensive information on college services through handbooks, the college charter and the college induction video. Information in large print, Braille and sign language is made available for students with disabilities. Staff in the central support services and in curriculum areas work effectively together to provide support for students. The study support centre offers various types of learning support. All students are offered the opportunity of diagnostic assessment in basic literacy and numeracy to help identify any learning support needed. However, less than half the students identified as requiring learning support use the service. The college has acknowledged that it needs to improve the take-up of learning support. It has not investigated whether examination pass rates and retention rates for students who receive learning support are better than those for students who do not take it up.

33 Inspectors found much effective tutorial practice, particularly for full-time students. This includes regular reviews of students' progress and records of achievement, which students use to plan improvements in their performance. The college has made progress since the last inspection in improving tutorial records, guidance and information. There is a useful staff handbook to explain roles and responsibilities, and training is provided for tutors. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is inconsistency in the quality of support and information for part-time students.

34 The college provides effective personal counselling and careers education. Careers education is supplemented by the local careers service with which the college has service level agreements. As well as the free transport provided for students who have far to travel, the college provides financial support for students through its access and hardship funds and through appropriate referral to external agencies. Good childcare is provided at the

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college's children's centre. In addition, some students receive financial support to pay for registered childminders. There is a range of readily available information on accommodation, health matters and job vacancies. Activities in the college's personal and social education programme and its recreational programme ('Time Out') are limited and participation in recreational activities is low. Few students participate in the college's student association despite the efforts of staff and the student executive to improve students' involvement.

35 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The college's special programme for disaffected school pupils has received favourable reports following assessments by inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education and from social services. The study support centre provides specialist assessment, staff and resources for students requiring additional learning support. Students benefit from the college's effective partnerships and collaborative work with agencies such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind and local authority services for those with sensory impairments.

36 The college recognised in its self-assessment report that arrangements for co-ordinating work placements are inadequate and it has appointed a work experience co-ordinator to begin to address this weakness.

General Resources

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- well-developed accommodation strategy
- recent improvements in accommodation
- well-managed library and study centre
- considerable recent investment in IT

Weaknesses

- poor utilisation of accommodation
- few computers in teachers' work areas

38 The college is situated close to Banbury town centre. Its main site has two locations on opposite sides of a main road about 100 metres apart. The small annexe, two miles away, is used for courses in electrical installation and plumbing. The college has its own sports field and uses two local sports centres for some of its recreational programmes. Accommodation on the main site comprises 11 permanent buildings, built between 1950 and 1998. Five temporary buildings are still in use. There are few signs or site maps to assist visitors. Students have cultivated bedding plants and constructed benches, and these improve the appearance of the college's central courtyard.

39 The college has recently produced a new accommodation strategy. This has taken a long time, but is thorough and comprehensive. It includes the disposal of some accommodation and concentration of teaching in fewer spaces. An ambitious venture is being pursued with a private trust and Cherwell District Council to convert one of the college's buildings to a development centre for small local businesses in the media-related and technological fields. It is anticipated that this will help the college make

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better use of its accommodation. The college's use of space is poor, with a utilisation rate of 31%. In 1998, 40% of rooms were used for less than half of the week. Some classes have small numbers of students, which contributes to the low room occupancy rate. This weakness is recognised in the college's self-assessment report. An extensive survey of the condition of buildings has been carried out recently and will be used to inform a new maintenance programme. The existing maintenance programme is out of date and inspectors disagreed with the college's view that it is a strength. The survey has highlighted some shortcomings. For example, mechanical and electrical installations require attention and two buildings need structural renovations.

40 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the standard of most teaching accommodation is good. Students' work is displayed attractively and enhances the general environment. The majority of classrooms are clean, appropriately furnished and contain good general teaching equipment. The college has identified as a weakness the fact that internal signs are not consistent in design or systematically arranged.

41 The college library is small, and has a bookstock of 20,000. This is a modest provision of 10 books per full-time equivalent student, but 60% of the stock is modern at less than five years old. Students are satisfied with the range and availability of books, and teachers are able to request specific purchases. There is a good range of periodicals, videos, CD-ROMs and photographic slides. The library is well managed and library staff work effectively with teachers to support students' learning. A separate room provides 24 spaces for silent study. The library is adjacent to a study centre which provides individual workspaces and access to computers. Students speak highly of this facility and it is well used. The use of the centre increased by 34% in 1998. The ratio of study spaces to full-time equivalent students is 1:16, which is adequate for current demand.

42 The college's large IT centre contains over 70 modern computers. The study centre has 28 computers with access to the internet and a further room has 16 computers on open access for students' use. Technical support is effective. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is adequate at 1:9. Many students have computers at home. The college is updating the computers used for administration. However, IT facilities for teaching staff are poor. Only five of the work areas for teachers contain a computer for them to use. This shortcoming was recognised in the self-assessment report.

43 Parts of the college are inaccessible to people with restricted mobility. Some improvements have been made since the last inspection. The college responds to individual needs by retimetabling lessons to rooms that are accessible or by providing parking spaces close to the relevant building. Some doors are heavy and difficult to open. At the request of students, the student refectory was refurbished and now includes a kiosk for snacks. The use of the refectory has increased and there are not enough seats at peak times. A student centre contains music facilities, a television, and games. Older students report there is no social space which meets their needs. The college plans to provide a separate facility with a bar. Although the college's children's centre is housed in a temporary building, it is bright and welcoming.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

44 Inspectors agreed with several of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report but considered that others had been overstated. They confirmed the weaknesses recognised in the report and found others which the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- a comprehensive quality assurance system
- an effective staff appraisal system linked to professional development
- the involvement of all staff and governors in the self-assessment process
- effective monitoring of the college charter

Weaknesses

- confusion about the nature of targets for improving students' achievements
- inconsistency in the effectiveness of course reviews
- limited impact of the quality system on some key aspects of college performance
- late awareness of the overall deterioration in performance

45 The college has refined its quality assurance procedures since the last inspection and extended them to include its small outward collaborative provision. As identified in the college's self-assessment report, its quality system is comprehensive and includes guidance and documentation for use across the college. The system is managed by the quality assurance and staff development manager. It requires annual review of both teaching and service

sections. Reports and action plans arising from the reviews are produced with the help of divisional heads and are presented to the academic management team and to the monitoring and evaluation subcommittee of the academic board. Issues of concern are discussed and college action plans produced. In some areas teachers are insufficiently evaluative when reviewing their performance, and some action plans lack precision.

46 The quality and rigour of course reviews varies, and there is confusion about how performance targets should be set. Course teams are expected to use national performance standards when setting their targets. However, the overall targets set in the strategic plan are set without reference to national standards and are unrealistic. Course reviews do not generally contain targets for improving examination pass rates in spite of the fact that college-wide targets are set in the strategic plan. The college sets a target of 80% attendance, but only 50% of courses achieve this figure. Staff lack confidence in some centrally provided performance data. The quality assurance system has not stemmed the steady deterioration in examination pass rates over the last three years, a significant weakness that the college did not identify in its self-assessment report. Although managers at all levels supervise the annual reviews, this has not ensured that teams identify relevant trends. Aggregated retention and pass rate data for the last three years have only recently been considered by governors and managers. The absence of such data until now has made it difficult for the college to establish trends and strategic issues arising from them.

47 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that it demonstrates commitment to improvement in several areas of college activity. The college conducts surveys of student, employer and staff views and responds effectively to suggestions for improvements. Students are satisfied with the response of tutors

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to suggestions for improved handouts, facilities and assignments. When the college identifies a need for improvement in a specific area, a quality project is organised to try to remedy the weakness. This approach has been more effective in improving student retention rates than examination pass rates. There has been an upward trend in retention during the past three years which the college attributes to raised awareness of retention issues. There has not been a similar improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

48 The college established a staff appraisal system in 1993, which is managed by the head of the division of personnel and estates. All appraisers and appraisees are trained. The college ensures appraisals of staff and managers take place and that action plans are fulfilled. Staff development needs identified are passed to the quality and staff development manager to enable needs to be met. A comprehensive staff development handbook is produced annually. This outlines college-wide staff development programmes linked to the college's strategic plan. Staff development activities are evaluated by participants and managers. The college achieved Investor in People status in March 1999.

49 The college conducted its first self-assessment for the inspection. The quality and staff development manager led the self-assessment process and provided guidelines for governors and staff. As recognised in the college's self-assessment report, the self-assessment process was generally comprehensive. All staff and governors were involved in the process. The college established a self-assessment review group, including governors and interested parties from outside the college, to comment on the draft self-assessment report. Governors formed subgroups to assess aspects of their own performance. Action plans contained few measurable targets for improvement.

50 The charter for students was written in 1994. A charter monitoring group ensures that key charter commitments and service standards are met. Employers receive copies of the charter. It is under review and has been distributed to various interested parties for consultation. There is a clear complaints procedure which is contained in a guide for students.

Governance

Grade 3

51 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, inspectors considered that the report failed to identify some key weaknesses.

Key strengths

- detailed involvement of governors in strategic planning
- effective monitoring of the college's finances and student enrolments
- governors' awareness of strategic issues facing the college

Weaknesses

- failure to appoint nine business governors correctly
- lack of standing orders for the corporation
- shortcomings in the audit committee's work

52 The corporation has 15 members, comprising nine independent governors, a nominee from the local training and enterprise council (TEC), a governor from the local community, two staff members, a student member and the principal. At the time of the inspection, the corporation had three vacancies, including that for the TEC member. Governors conducted a skills audit to identify the skills and

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experience required of new governors. The college has developed an open process for recruiting new governors through advertising and its search committee, but the search committee has not yet identified governors to fill the vacancies.

53 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation has not substantially conducted its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. This relates to the failure of the corporation to reappoint nine business governors before their terms of office expired in March 1998. This failure was brought to the attention of the principal during the inspection and the necessary remedial action has been taken. The corporation substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

54 Governors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and of the distinction between governance and management. They have recognised their need for training, but some find it difficult to attend training events, as acknowledged in their self-assessment report. The corporation is addressing this weakness by allocating time at the start of meetings for college managers to give presentations on the work of the college and current educational issues.

55 The corporation has an appropriate committee structure, consisting of committees for finance, employment and general purposes; audit; and remuneration. It has also recently established an estates advisory committee. Each committee has clear terms of reference. The finance, employment and general purposes committee exercises effective oversight of the college's finances through consideration of monthly financial reports produced by the director of finance. These reports are not circulated to all governors. Reports on student enrolments are considered at each meeting of the finance, employment and general purposes

committee and of the corporation. Governors also receive reports on applications, student retention rates and students' achievements.

56 Papers provided for corporation meetings are normally comprehensive and enable effective decision-making. However, the paper on the pay award for 1998-99 did not identify the financial implications associated with it. Minutes of meetings concentrate on recording the decisions made and there is normally evidence of debate on key issues. Committee reports are submitted to the corporation. The value of the finance, employment and general purposes committee reports is reduced because they do not routinely go to the corporation meeting that follows the finance, employment and general purposes meeting. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings is adequate. The corporation receives an annual report on governors' attendance and has taken action where appropriate.

57 The corporation has not agreed a set of standing orders to guide the conduct of business for the corporation and its committees. It has established a register of interests which includes declarations by all governors, but this has not yet been extended to include senior college managers. The corporation has adopted a code of conduct but this has not been updated to reflect the Nolan committee's recommendations. A new clerk has recently been appointed who is independent and not otherwise employed by the college.

58 The audit committee has clear terms of reference but these do not reflect current FEFC guidance. The audit committee has not operated effectively in relation to the college's internal audit arrangements. For example, it has not ensured that internal audit plans provide adequate coverage of the college's complete system of internal control. It also has not monitored college management's implementation of internal and external audit recommendations. The audit committee has made slow progress in tendering for and

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appointing internal auditors for the current financial year.

59 Governors have a clear understanding of their role in the strategic planning process. They consider appropriately the key strategic issues facing the college. The strategic plan is produced by college managers and presented to the corporation in draft form for consideration. The plan is reviewed in detail by the finance, employment and general purposes committee and approved by the corporation at their final meeting in the academic year. The current strategic plan does not include a set of annual targets that would enable governors to monitor performance against the college's strategic objectives.

Management

Grade 3

60 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report but also identified additional weaknesses not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- clear strategic planning process
- strong links with outside bodies
- prudent financial management
- good health and safety arrangements

Weaknesses

- inadequate internal audit arrangements
- inadequate cashflow information
- late returns of student data to the FEFC
- unclear student data reports for curriculum leaders

61 The senior management team has six members, comprising the principal, the two heads of the two teaching divisions, the head of finance and management information, the head

of personnel and estates, and the head of business development. The senior management team is responsible for strategic issues such as finance and resources, policy development, and strategy and planning. A second group, the academic management team, comprises the senior management team together with the college services manager and the head of quality and staff development; it is responsible for academic management and planning, quality assurance and academic performance. The teaching divisions are organised into nine teaching sections led by section leaders. Managers' roles and responsibilities are clear and understood. Team meetings are held at all levels, though their frequency varies across the divisions. The college's self-assessment report identified some inconsistency in the effectiveness of communication channels and this is being improved.

62 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that its strategic planning process is clear. All staff contribute to the development of the strategic plan through their team plans. These plans contribute to divisional development plans which in turn contribute to the draft strategic plan. This year, for the first time, the college devised 'achievement plans' which translate the strategic plan into operating statements, containing targets and deadlines for actions to be completed. The college is successful in meeting its mission to promote access and to meet local need. This success, however, has its costs in terms of running courses with small numbers of students on them, and the college identified this as a weakness in its self-assessment report.

63 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. There is a clear budget planning process and part of the college budget is devolved to divisional managers. Budget holders receive monthly management accounts and have access to the financial accounting system. There is effective monitoring of the college's financial

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performance. However, financial reports for managers and governors do not include cashflow information. The monthly cashflow record shows the college has had to use its overdraft facility for half of the current financial year. The college's financial handbook provides guidance on the main areas of income and expenditure, but does not provide comprehensive coverage of the college's systems of financial control. The handbook has not been kept up to date. The college's internal auditors have not ensured that their reviews of the college's systems have been carried out in accordance with Her Majesty's Treasury standards. As a result, the college cannot be assured that it has adequate systems of internal control. The college's external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the systems of financial control. The college's student data returns to the FEFC have often been late and the audit of the college's 1997-98 funding unit claim has not yet been completed.

64 Governors have recently approved new terms of reference for the academic board. The organisational structure of the college has changed since incorporation and the membership of the board does not adequately reflect its current structure. Its new membership will include elected teachers, section and course leaders, students and managers of teaching and support sections. The new board has four subcommittees, and each of these has up to three subgroups reporting to it. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements.

65 The college has good links with employers, local educational institutions including schools and the other Oxfordshire colleges, the local TEC and the local community. The principal is a member of North Oxfordshire Learning Partnership, a group bringing together local secondary school head teachers, representatives of the county council and the TEC. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that these links constitute a strength. The college, in

partnership with others, has been successful in making European Regional Development Funding bids. These are concerned with economic regeneration following the withdrawal of local military bases. The college is a member of several employer organisations, enabling it to be informed about relevant developments. It earns about a third of its income from sources other than the FEFC.

66 The college has computerised management information systems for student information, finance and personnel. Reports cannot easily be produced from data held in each system. Few curriculum leaders have direct access to the college's computerised management information system. Managers and teachers can obtain management information on request, but this is not produced in an easily understandable form, which limits the effectiveness of the reports. The college has recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report and is developing a system to enable managers to produce management information reports for themselves.

67 The college has recently rewritten its equal opportunities policy and appointed an equal opportunities co-ordinator. An equal opportunities working group has been formed and, although not yet complete, has had its first meeting. The group has started to develop strategies to ensure the policy is implemented appropriately. Raising student awareness and training for staff on equal opportunities issues in the classroom are at an early stage of development. The college has a detailed health and safety policy. The health and safety working group reports directly to the senior management team through one of its members. There is a good health and safety training programme for staff.

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Conclusions

68 The college's self-assessment report, the first it had produced, was comprehensive and based on the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Each curriculum and cross-college section of the report contained an action plan. The college profile of grades arising from lesson observations is similar to that awarded by inspectors. The inspection team found the report helpful in planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college, though they considered some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were understated. Inspectors also identified weaknesses which were missed by the college. Although inspectors were broadly in agreement with the findings in the report, there was less agreement about the significance given to many of them. Most of the grades awarded by the college were judged by inspectors to be generous.

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 (November 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	28
19-24 years	16
25+ years	52
Not known	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	32
Intermediate	21
Advanced	25
Higher education	7
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	15
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	65	539	11
Agriculture	0	31	1
Construction	10	78	2
Engineering	31	133	3
Business	83	645	13
Hotel and catering	123	118	4
Health and community care	210	422	12
Art and design	701	637	25
Humanities	102	1,062	21
Basic education	109	329	8
Total	1,434	3,994	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 12% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	82	13	0	95
Supporting direct learning contact	21	1	3	25
Other support	71	4	5	80
Total	174	18	8	200

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£6,597,000	£6,918,000	£6,836,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£17.80	£17.42	£16.29
Payroll as a proportion of income	73%	71%	64%
Achievement of funding target	102%	104%	98%
Diversity of income	31%	31%	33%
Operating surplus	-£79,000	-£9,000	£33,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	94	187	477	477	422	793
	Retention (%)	74	82	87	80	78	78
	Achievement (%)	66	48	54	63	62	50
2	Expected completions	560	673	832	418	577	847
	Retention (%)	80	76	77	82	77	81
	Achievement (%)	68	51	44	73	60	55
3	Expected completions	–	614	694	–	481	583
	Retention (%)	–	86	78	–	79	76
	Achievement (%)	74	70	71	68	70	68
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	26	1	–	55	91
	Retention (%)	–	77	0	–	78	79
	Achievement (%)	67	85	n/a	70	70	60
Short courses	Expected completions	88	238	242	1,276	1,763	1,352
	Retention (%)	99	95	90	96	91	85
	Achievement (%)	79	77	60	72	72	56
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	231	352	879	520	634	539
	Retention (%)	94	81	90	86	83	90
	Achievement (%)	86	60	44	80	68	52

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

n/a not applicable

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