

# Tower Hamlets College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1999-00**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 104 college inspections

## Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college 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 students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. 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 included.

# Summary

## **Tower Hamlets College** ***Greater London Region***

### **Inspected March 2000**

Tower Hamlets College is a general further education college situated in the heart of East London in the borough of Tower Hamlets, adjacent to the newly developed Canary Wharf business area. Of the college's students, 98% are recruited from disadvantaged areas as defined in the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions. Over 90% of the college's students live in Tower Hamlets. The college produced a self-assessment report which recognised most of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision identified by inspectors. In three cross-college areas and one curriculum area the college had underestimated the quality of its work. Insufficient weight was given in the report to some instances of poor student achievement.

The college offers a wide range of courses in eight of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in four of these areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. The management and governance are outstanding as are general and specialist resources. College managers have successfully steered the college through a period of management reorganisation, falling income and wide-ranging curriculum developments. They have improved the data relating to students' achievements, and inspectors found that they

could rely upon the accuracy of these data. Governors have an excellent range of expertise which is used effectively to help managers and other staff achieve the college's mission to raise achievement and remove barriers to educational opportunities for everyone. Since the last inspection some imaginative projects have produced a lively, welcoming working environment for students and staff. Support for students is good. The college is skilful in widening participation amongst people who would not normally attend a college, and in enabling these people to progress to further study and employment. The college has established effective quality assurance procedures. As a result, there are clear signs that retention and achievement have improved, and they are now comparable with, and in some cases above, those of all colleges which draw the bulk of their students from economically deprived areas. There is much good teaching which takes into account the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Equality of opportunity permeates all aspects of the college's work. The college should improve: the students' achievements on some courses; the sharing of good practice across teaching teams; the attendance and punctuality of students on some courses; the timeliness of additional learning support for some students; and the effectiveness of course reviews and action plans.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Business	2	General resources	1
Art, design and media	2	Quality assurance	2
Access courses	2	Governance	1
ESOL	2	Management	1
Basic skills	3		

## The College and its Mission

1 Tower Hamlets College is a general further education college in East London. It was established in 1990. The college has two main centres, one in Stepney and another next to Canary Wharf on the Isle of Dogs. It is the main provider locally of post-16 further education and training and operates in a crowded market of neighbouring colleges, seven secondary schools with sixth forms and over 30 private and voluntary sector training organisations.

2 Just over 170,000 people live in Tower Hamlets. Of the borough's residents, 45% are from minority ethnic communities; two-thirds of them are Bangladeshi. In local schools, over 64% of children are bilingual, and 55% are not fluent in English. Over 90% of the college's students live in Tower Hamlets, a much higher proportion of local people than is the case with most London colleges. Of the 5,841 students enrolled in March 2000, 69% were over 19, 74% were from minority ethnic groups and 55% were women. More than 98% of the college's students are identified as coming from economically deprived areas. This is the highest figure for colleges in the further education sector. The achievements of Tower Hamlets school pupils at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) are poor. Only 31% of 16 year olds in the borough gained five or more GCSE subjects at grades A to C in 1999 compared with a national figure of 48%.

3 Most local businesses employ fewer than 24 people. There have been significant changes in the local employment profile with the development of Canary Wharf, and the consequent influx of multinational and large companies. This has, however, had little impact on unemployment rates, which are above the London average at 13.4%. The college is working with local agencies to identify skills shortages and plan training and education accordingly.

4 The college provides courses in eight of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. Students can study courses leading to general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), GCSE, general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), national vocational qualifications (NVQs), and courses validated by the National Open College Network (NOCN). In addition, there are many other smaller specialist courses. Almost 50% of students who enrol at the college are studying on entry level programmes. This reflects the large number of people who come to the college with little or no prior educational attainment. Courses are also offered at levels 1, 2, and 3, and the college has established links with local and national higher education institutions to help students progress to higher education. The college has a contract to provide the full-time education and training New Deal programme and a training and enterprise council (TEC) youth training scheme. It has initiated a consortium of local sixth forms for the teaching of curriculum 2000.

5 The college plays a central role in community development. It works with all the major voluntary and public sector organisations in the borough and is involved in a large range of partnership projects, most of which are focused on the regeneration of the local area. A key feature of the partnerships is the promotion in the community of courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), adult basic education programmes and courses designed to develop information technology (IT) skills.

6 The college is located between the wealthiest and the poorest communities in England. It is committed to equality of opportunity and removing the barriers that divide communities and deny opportunities to individuals. This is central to the college's mission of 'raising achievement, removing barriers for everyone'.

# Context

## The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 20 March 2000. The inspection team had previously examined the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data for students' achievements for 1999 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Tables of students' achievements have been omitted from the ESOL and basic skills sections of this report as the data available do not give a true representation of achievements. Thirteen inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 55 days, carried out the inspection. They

observed 84 lessons, scrutinised a range of college documentation, and had meetings with governors, managers, teachers and students. Four of the inspectors looking at curriculum areas also gathered evidence to contribute to the Office for Standards in Education's (Ofsted's) area-wide inspection report on provision for 16 to 19 year olds in Tower Hamlets. The Training Standards Council (TSC) also inspected two occupational areas and four generic areas during the same week.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 62% were rated good or outstanding. This is slightly lower than average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The figure of 8% for lessons rated less than satisfactory or poor is slightly higher than the average.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	4	2	0	0	6
GCSE	1	1	2	0	0	4
GNVQ	1	6	3	1	0	11
NVQ	0	2	1	0	0	3
Access courses	4	5	5	0	0	14
Other vocational	1	6	1	0	0	8
Other*	6	15	11	6	0	38
Total (No)	13	39	25	7	0	84
Total (%)	16	46	30	8	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

\*includes tutorials and basic skills

# Context

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Tower Hamlets College	11.9	65
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

*Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*



# Curriculum Areas

## Mathematics and Information Technology

### Grade 3

**10 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in mathematics, computing and IT. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report gave insufficient weight to the poor achievements of some students.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- pass rates on some IT courses above national averages
- good progression routes available

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate strategies for mixed ability teaching in some lessons
- poor GCSE mathematics achievements
- insufficiently rigorous analysis and use of data for planning mathematics provision

11 There is a broad range of mathematics and IT courses that meets the needs of full-time and part-time students. IT courses range from general evening classes on topics such as 'Internet for Pensioners' to GCE A level courses. In mathematics, courses are available from entry level to advanced level.

12 In most lessons, the teaching and learning is good. Teachers give clear explanations of the topic being covered, and of what is required from the student. In some lessons they enhance the work with practical activities. In one pre-GCSE mathematics lesson, students were asked to estimate the weight and dimensions of certain objects in the classroom before measuring them to check the accuracy of their estimates. In another lesson, a potentially dull aspect of geometry was enlivened by a clear introductory exposition by the teacher, practical

work using calculators and protractors, and a careful recap of the work that had been covered. In an IT lesson, students worked in pairs and communicated with each other through the networked computers in order to investigate various file transfer systems. In some lessons in both mathematics and IT the teachers did not take sufficient account of the students' widely differing abilities. In a minority of lessons, teachers did not check that the students had understood what had just been covered. A 'drop-in' mathematics workshop is available for those students who need additional help, but take-up by students is low, particularly by GCSE students whose need is greatest. This weakness is recognised in the college's self-assessment report.

13 Most of the students' written and practical work is at an appropriate level. Good use is made of clip art downloaded from the Internet to enhance portfolios. Some students' files are disorganised. Grammatical errors in students' assessed work are not always corrected. In some lessons, students demonstrated the ability to work on their own on complex projects with assistance from the teacher, when required. Value-added data are collected for GCE A level students. Teachers identify from these data students who are at risk of poor achievement. However, the data demonstrate that few students achieve as well as predicted by their GCSE grades on entry.

14 Retention on most courses in mathematics and IT is at, or above, national averages. On the NVQ level 3 in business and the GNVQ foundation in IT, pass rates are significantly above the national average for colleges with a high widening participation factor. On the GCE A level computing course the results are poor. As recognised in the college's self-assessment report, the achievements in GCSE mathematics are poor. About half of the students who are retaking the GCSE course do not improve on their previous grade. The college has taken steps to improve this situation, but it is too soon to see if this will be successful.

# Curriculum Areas

15 Most courses are well managed. Course quality files are kept consistently across the provision. Course reviews produce a detailed account of strengths and weaknesses which is used to plan courses and to produce the self-assessment report. The very serious weakness of students' achievements in GCSE mathematics was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers had been using incorrect data on which to make their judgements. The new computerised management information system is now able to provide programme leaders with accurate data.

16 Specialist equipment for computing and IT students is good. Most computers are modern,

and are equipped with relevant software. Access to the Internet is good. There are sufficient textbooks in the library and learning centres for learning in mathematics and computing. There are some useful new specialist textbooks on programming and website building. The learning centre also has several CD-ROMs available for mathematics students and a small selection of IT journals. Teachers are appropriately qualified and almost all have a teaching qualification. The mathematics and IT accommodation is good. There are six modern dedicated teaching rooms and a 'drop-in' learning centre with 60 computers for general use.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation IT	1	Number of starters	*	19	34
		Retention (%)	*	74	77
		Achievement (%)	*	79	62
GCSE IT	2	Number of starters	30	35	37
		Retention (%)	53	80	73
		Achievement (%)	50	43	19
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	37	55	55
		Retention (%)	76	56	69
		Achievement (%)	46	52	61
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	433	527	410
		Retention (%)	86	81	72
		Achievement (%)	21	20	22
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	*	38	43
		Retention (%)	*	53	70
		Achievement (%)	*	75	77
NVQ IT	3	Number of starters	*	9	17
		Retention (%)	*	89	88
		Achievement (%)	*	88	73
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	*	38	50
		Retention (%)	*	68	62
		Achievement (%)	*	54	29
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	83	83	67
		Retention (%)	93	87	78
		Achievement (%)	56	56	60

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Business

### Grade 2

**17 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in a range of business courses. They broadly agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- key skills routinely integrated with GNVQ programmes
- good pass rates and retention for GNVQ programmes
- good progression on GNVQ programmes
- well-planned courses
- productive links with employers

#### Weaknesses

- students' poor punctuality
- low pass rates on part-time courses
- unproductive bunching of assignment work for students

18 The college offers a range of business studies courses including foundation, intermediate and advanced level GNVQ courses, NVQ programmes in administration and accounting, Association of Accounting Technicians programmes, National Examining Board for Supervisory Management, computer literacy and information technology, and a range of short courses for business. GNVQ students routinely develop their basic and key skills, and most undertake an additional IT qualification. Students can study part time or full time for most qualifications, and some courses start at several points during the year. All students' additional learning needs are assessed. Tutors monitor carefully the effectiveness of additional learning support.

19 There was good teaching in most of the lessons. In the best lessons, the teaching was

well planned, learning objectives were specified and resources were used effectively. Teachers took account of the full range of students' abilities and maintained a lively working atmosphere. In one lesson, students used the Internet to help them prepare for an external visit where they would conduct primary research for a local business. The students' interest was stimulated and maintained through relevant group exercises, and through references being made to topical issues and current business practice. In another lesson, students explored the practicalities of implementing an equal opportunities policy in a business. They considered the need for the policies to cover employees and customers, and examined relevant legislation. The students were highly motivated and fully understood what they were doing. In one training session in the college's practice office, students studying the NVQ level 3 were assessed on their skills in training students on the level 2 course. In a few lessons, teachers did not plan activities which were sufficiently demanding for the most able students. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that, overall, good-quality teaching is a strength of business courses.

20 Inspectors agreed that students are able to develop the key skills of communication, application of number and IT through the vocational units of their course. All students are required to demonstrate their achievements in developing key skills, and to attend planned learning support sessions in order to progress to the next part of their course. Students have frequent opportunities to review and assess their progress. Each student has an individual meeting with their tutor at least once a term to review progress and produce an action plan to help them improve their work. In addition, each student has a weekly group tutorial. Students receive good support from their tutors in applying for higher education.

21 Students' written work is often of a high standard. Their orderly portfolios demonstrate that they make appropriate progress and

# Curriculum Areas

develop the required skills. Teachers mark students' work accurately and provide written feedback which helps students to improve the standard of their work. However, on some courses the bunching of assignments overburdens students at certain times of the year and, as a result, students fail to meet the deadlines set for the completion of some assignments. All business students have a period of work experience. This is managed by a teacher who is responsible for links with employers. Work placements are well planned and students make use of their experience in lessons to help to link theory with current business practice. Many business students also use the college's practice office which provides realistic work experience. Guest speakers visit groups to talk about business topics. A group of employers is helping to ensure that curriculum development reflects current business practice. The chairperson of a major financial institution acts as a mentor to level 3 students, meeting them once a month. Inspectors agreed with the college that links with employers strengthen the curriculum.

22 Achievement and retention on GNVQ programmes has been consistently above the national average for the past two years. Progression on GNVQ courses is good; over 62% of students completing the GNVQ foundation progressed to the intermediate course, and over 75% of those completing the intermediate GNVQ in 1999 are now studying on the advanced level course. Achievement on part-time business application programmes is significantly below the national average. Many students who take the computer literacy and information technology course do not complete the qualification in one year.

23 Teachers have relevant professional and teaching qualifications and many have recent commercial experience. Several staff have taken part in the 'teachers into industry' scheme to update their knowledge and skills. Staff are

enthusiastic about their work in the college. All teachers contribute to the college's strategic planning and self-assessment processes. Teaching rooms for business are of a good standard. Teachers and students make good use of imaginative wall displays to enhance learning. Students have access to up-to-date computers with software similar to that found in business. There are ample paper-based and computer resources for key skills development.

# Curriculum Areas

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in business, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	91	86	37
		Retention (%)	75	76	81
		Achievement (%)	79	60	63
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	233	299	340
		Retention (%)	82	87	81
		Achievement (%)	35	35	24
NVQ accounts	2	Number of starters	32	31	38
		Retention (%)	46	87	50
		Achievement (%)	17	48	47
NVQ business administration	2	Number of starters	30	31	32
		Retention (%)	78	84	56
		Achievement (%)	80	39	83
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	*	66	65
		Retention (%)	*	79	86
		Achievement (%)	*	77	66
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	48	56	47
		Retention (%)	52	66	57
		Achievement (%)	80	70	70

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*course did not run

# Curriculum Areas

## Art, Design and Media

### Grade 2

**24 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in art and design, creative computing and media. Inspectors agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that it did not take account of some poor retention and achievements.**

#### Key strengths

- a wide range of courses for 16 to 18 year olds and adult students
- good teaching in most lessons
- well-planned lessons and courses
- the high quality of students' practical work
- good specialist accommodation and equipment for creative computing and media

#### Weaknesses

- poor accommodation and equipment for some art and design courses
- poor retention and achievement on some courses

25 The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in art, design and media including GNVQ foundation and intermediate, and national diplomas. Students can progress from entry level to higher education courses. Two higher national certificate courses are offered in collaboration with a local university. A distinctive feature of the college's offer is a range of 11 one-year vocational courses for mature students, validated by the NOCN. Specialisms include photo journalism, computer graphics, and courses in digital applications for art, design and media. These courses account for approximately 50% of the students in the programme area.

26 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that teaching is good. Teaching and

learning methods used in lessons inspected included lectures, practical work, written assignments, formal tests, group discussions and critiques. Courses in creative computing emphasise the development of traditional visual studies such as drawing, as well as screen-based work. Students on all courses follow programmes of contextual and theoretical studies. In the best lessons, teachers successfully captured the enthusiasm of students, building on the strengths of teaching identified in the college's previous inspection. In a textile design lesson, group and individual teaching was effective in consolidating students' learning. Students were working on a practical assignment which required them to work in pairs and devise presentations about each other's work. The presentations were well planned and students were articulate when talking about their work. The research carried out by the students and their practical work were of a good standard. At the end of the lesson all students were encouraged to contribute to the critique of the work completed. Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and tutorial support; this is confirmed by regular surveys of students' views.

27 Much high-quality students' work is displayed around the college. Students demonstrate high levels of practical skills across the range of disciplines. Many students enter national competitions and undertake a wide range of commissions for galleries and organisations. Students from several courses have exhibited work at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. The work of one student on the creative computing course has been featured in a national computer journal. Other students have secured work experience at the Institute of Contemporary Art and the British Museum. Students' retention and achievements for NOCN programmes are consistently high, and show a trend of improvement over three years. There is poor retention and achievement for a few courses such as the GNVQ intermediate in art and design. The college acknowledged this in

# Curriculum Areas

its self-assessment report and has now put in place strategies to address this.

28 Provision in art and design, creative computing and media was moved to the main college site from a satellite site in September 1999. Teachers were consulted about this move and involved in planning the new accommodation. Creative computing and media are accommodated in light and spacious refurbished rooms with a good standard of specialist computing equipment. The accommodation of art and design courses, including visual studies, is less satisfactory but this has been recognised by the college, and there are plans to update the area during the summer of 2000.

29 Students are enthusiastic about their courses and their teachers. Teachers are well-qualified and experienced art and design practitioners. One teacher recently won a prestigious national painting competition.

Another has undertaken design commissions for major fashion and design companies. A number of teachers regularly exhibit their work in galleries or on websites on the Internet. Teachers also ensure that their knowledge of current educational issues is maintained by attending relevant staff development. Since August 1998 this has included courses on issues relating to further education funding, curriculum 2000 and key skills, together with specialist courses on digital applications for art, design and media. Opportunities exist for staff, including part-time teachers, to gain teaching qualifications and higher degrees. There is an unusually large number of hourly paid staff in art and design, creative computing and media. While this brings benefits in terms of exposing students to current professional practice, it has also made team meetings and planning difficult to organise. This has been recognised by the college.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design and media, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation art and design	1	Number of starters	13	16	16
		Retention (%)	85	75	88
		Achievement (%)	55	33	71
GNVQ intermediate art, design and media	2	Number of starters	52	36	35
		Retention (%)	75	83	77
		Achievement (%)	41	72	30
National diploma in general art and design	3	Number of starters	23	32	42
		Retention (%)	96	88	62
		Achievement (%)	77	59	65
National diploma in creative computing	3	Number of starters	18	26	23
		Retention (%)	89	54	70
		Achievement (%)	81	79	69
NOCN and access (one-year courses)	3	Number of starters	158	162	165
		Retention (%)	81	80	78
		Achievement (%)	45	58	77

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

# Curriculum Areas

## Access Courses

### Grade 2

**30 Inspectors observed 12 lessons on access courses in social sciences and humanities; including those for nursing, teaching, youth and community work, computing, business studies, and legal studies. The self-assessment report was thorough and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college.**

#### Key strengths

- responsive, flexible access programme
- increasing progression to higher education
- high-quality tutorial and learning support
- learning themes and teaching methods appropriate to students' diverse backgrounds
- some high pass rates

#### Weaknesses

- poor student attendance and punctuality
- some inadequate marking and feedback on students' work

31 Access courses are modular and allow students to change from one subject area to another easily. Students can gain credit for parts of the qualification, and so are able to work at their own pace. Since there are no formal entry qualifications, the courses are popular with students seeking a new direction or change of career path. The college has introduced intensive one-day and evening programmes to complement the full-time courses and to accommodate the needs of students who have work or childcare commitments. The courses are popular and recruitment is increasing. The college has, this year, introduced two level 2 courses to enable

less confident students to progress to an access course proper. The access programmes are responsive to community needs. Social work and youth and community work courses have been introduced in response to requests from the local authority. The college has close links with local primary schools which provide students with opportunities for work experience.

32 Inspectors agreed that the high level of guidance and support students receive is effective and develops their confidence. During induction, students' literacy and numeracy support needs are assessed, and learning support plans are devised for those who need such support. Students can attend support sessions covering the key skills of literacy, numeracy and IT. There are also 'drop-in' workshops when they need specific help. Students value highly the support they receive from tutors in regular individual and group tutorials. Tutors play a key role in preparing students for higher education. During the inspection inspectors observed students practising the skills needed for a university interview.

33 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that most teaching is good. Teachers use a range of teaching methods to maintain students' interest. They are skilful in involving even the most reserved students in discussions. Carefully chosen themes and teaching methods which build on the knowledge and experience of the diverse backgrounds of students are successful in engaging students' interest and developing their skills and confidence. For example, in one lesson about the development of welfare benefit, and another about sexually transmitted diseases, the teacher managed the discussion effectively and ensured that it led to a sharp analysis of the topics. Analyses of the use of images and language in advertising and journalism, and social stereotypes in television soaps in another lesson led to searching discussions. Students are encouraged to present their work to the rest of the group following



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group exercises. In some lessons, students' limited skills in spoken English made it difficult for the teacher to pitch the work at the correct level. The 'use of English' module in the access to teaching programme has enabled some students to achieve a rapidly growing competence in this area. Students' attendance and punctuality is poor in some classes.

34 Courses are well managed. Course handbooks are comprehensive and contain information about the course, the college, and the expectations made of students. Most written work produced by students is of an appropriate standard. The teaching team has developed a policy and procedure for the prompt return of marked work to students. Although some work is annotated with useful comments by teachers to help students improve their work, the

self-assessment report identifies that the marking policy is not fully implemented by all teachers. The vast majority of students have work or childcare commitments in addition to their college course. They value the practical support given to them by the college, such as a subsidised crèche and assistance with travel costs. Achievement levels on all access courses are high. The number of access students progressing to higher education is rising and in 1999 over 80% of students who completed an access programme progressed to a relevant degree or higher diploma course. Teachers are well qualified. Many have relevant professional qualifications in youth work, social work and management. Team meetings are productive and well documented. Most classrooms are satisfactory.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in access courses, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Introduction to youth and community work	2	Number of starters	19	18	19
		Retention (%)	79	61	100
		Achievement (%)	100	55	100
NOCN return to study	2	Number of starters	*	*	11
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	36
Certificate in community language	2	Number of starters	*	*	29
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
Access to higher education	3	Number of starters	117	129	127
		Retention (%)	77	68	69
		Achievement (%)	88	80	73
Access to higher education (intensive)	3	Number of starters	40	33	65
		Retention (%)	68	73	62
		Achievement (%)	74	71	83
Pre social work diploma in study skills	3	Number of starters	*	*	9
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*course did not run

# Curriculum Areas

## ESOL

### Grade 2

**35 Inspectors observed 24 lessons, approximately half of which took place in community venues. They broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that the college had underestimated some of the strengths of the provision.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- effective tutorial support system contributing to improved retention
- wide range of responsive provision
- improving students' achievements within an appropriate accreditation framework
- collaborative developments responding to the report of the committee chaired by Sir Claus Moser, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start*
- coherent provision to meet the needs of 16 to 19 olds

#### Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching
- failure to apply same criteria for assessing language levels across all sites
- insufficient sharing of good practice across teaching teams

36 The college is one of the largest providers of courses in ESOL in the country. The college has responded vigorously to the findings of the committee chaired by Sir Claus Moser which tackled the issues of basic skills education. A number of partnerships have been formed in the community to help develop the curriculum and improve the employability of students. The college offers an extensive range of full-time and part-time ESOL provision, at the main college

sites, and at over 30 community venues. The adult learning programme is offered on four sites. Students can study at four different levels. An important component of the programme is specialist language and IT work. Most of this provision is at level 1 or below and most classes are of mixed ability. The foundation English course for young adults offers full-time provision at four levels with core language development units, IT and numeracy modules alongside a range of enrichment options and personal development. This provision is responsive, wide ranging and designed to encourage inclusive learning. All students are screened early in the programme to identify what course level is appropriate. However, the criteria used for the initial assessment of students' language level are not always consistently applied across sites.

37 Inspectors found that the college had underestimated the quality of teaching and learning in ESOL. Courses and lessons are well planned and supported by an effective quality assurance framework. Teachers take account of students' varying backgrounds and diverse home languages when planning lessons. Students are keen to practise their spoken and written skills and value the opportunities they have to do so. In most lessons, teachers ensure that the activities planned fulfil the needs of individual students. For example, in one lesson, students were practising their speaking skills and evaluating each other's performance. The development of options linked to vocational courses provides valuable opportunities to extend students' knowledge and skills. In a drama lesson, a group of young women had made masks and developed characters using music as a stimulus. The use of drama and music enabled the group to have confidence in expressing themselves in public. As the college recognised in its self-assessment report, there is some ineffective teaching. In poorer lessons, the tasks were insufficiently demanding, and teachers relied too much on printed worksheets which did not take into account the needs of students with widely different abilities. Students

# Curriculum Areas

do not always keep good records of what they have learned. Although there is a comprehensive marking policy, a strength identified in the self-assessment report, inspectors found that it was not being used by all teachers. Written comments on marked work were sometimes insufficiently detailed to help students to improve their work.

38 There is effective tutorial support for students. Tutors help students to monitor their progress against individual learning plans, and to produce short-term action plans. Such support is less effective for students who join courses in the middle of a term. There is an effective quality assurance system across the ESOL courses. It is implemented consistently whether in college or on a community site. The current main priority is the improvement of retention. Recent monitoring shows that actions are effective. This strength was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Students are enthusiastic and highly motivated. Relationships between students and staff are productive and friendly. Students report that they have been able to contribute to curriculum development through attending course team meetings. For example, students' concerns about improving their independence led to additional opportunities to practise speaking English in the course concerned.

39 As noted in the self-assessment report, students' retention and achievements are improving. For example, on the women-only courses, and on the full-time course for school-leavers, retention is showing marked improvements, and is now above national averages. More courses are being externally accredited each year. Many units are now accredited by NOCN and students can accumulate credits to take forward to another course. The number of students achieving NOCN credits has doubled in the past three years.

40 Teachers are qualified and experienced and there is a high proportion of bilingual tutors. The self-assessment report recognised the need to improve the sharing of effective teaching skills and good practice across sites. Regular team meetings ensure good communications across sites and across types of provision. Teachers make good use of the staff development opportunities available. The accommodation is generally good, but the facilities on some community sites, though satisfactory, do not meet the best standards in the college.

# Curriculum Areas

## Basic Skills

### Grade 3

**41 Inspectors observed 14 lessons at level 1 and below. They agreed broadly with the college's self-assessment report. However, the report did not identify some weaknesses in teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- much good initial assessment
- good teaching on foundation level literacy and numeracy courses
- good advice and guidance for students
- students' development of self-confidence and self-esteem

#### Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching
- insufficient differentiation in some learning materials
- ineffective evaluation of learning achieved by students

42 The college provides two separate specialist courses and a range of support for entry level students in basic literacy and numeracy. The entry to vocational education course is designed to enable 16 to 19 year old students develop their communication, numeracy and IT skills. It also provides vocational modules in health and social care, art and media, business studies and science. Another separate course, the essential skills programme, caters for almost 80 adults with additional learning needs. It is a modular course, which enables students to develop their basic skills in order to progress to vocational training, employment or supported employment. Students' additional learning needs are identified through pre-enrolment visits to schools, a screening programme during induction, self-referral and referral by the tutor

during the course. Tutors work with students to produce and monitor an action plan to ensure that students' learning needs are met.

43 As noted in the self-assessment report, there is some good basic skills teaching across the range of provision. It is consistently good on the cross-college foundation level literacy and numeracy support provision. In the best lessons, teachers use clearly stated learning objectives as the basis for effective learning and careful assessment. For example, on the business studies option of the entry to vocational education course, students worked on a project to raise money for an international disaster appeal. They designed garden furniture, and worked on a costed marketing plan. This well-organised and exciting approach motivated students and extended their understanding of business concepts. In most lessons, there were good relations between teachers and students, and teachers used appropriate language to ensure that all students were involved in the lesson activities. The college's observations of teaching and learning failed to identify some teaching that is less than satisfactory. Some teachers lack the necessary skills to work with entry level students. In some less effective lessons objectives are vague, and teachers use a small range of teaching methods. In some lessons the books and materials used did not meet the needs of students who had widely different abilities. Often, students do not have the opportunity to evaluate what they have learned in the lesson. In some lessons, learning support workers are used effectively in groups of students with very diverse capabilities.

44 The self-assessment report identifies some poor retention and achievement for entry level courses. Strategies put in place this year to address poor retention appear to be working, and current figures suggest that retention will be over 75% for students enrolling in September 1999. Achievement levels are similar to the national average for colleges whose students are drawn from economically deprived areas.

# Curriculum Areas

Progression is improving for entry level students and 46% of students receiving additional support in 1998-99 have now progressed to a more advanced course in the college.

45 Students speak highly of the support they receive from teachers and tutors. There is good initial assessment to ensure that students are placed on a suitable course, and a range of measures to help students to stay on courses. For example, through an attached worker scheme, guidance and support workers are attached to course teams to offer additional support to students. Students confirmed that this sort of help is invaluable when their personal and home circumstances become difficult. Most students respond to the support positively, are highly motivated, develop self-confidence, and gain in self-esteem.

46 Most courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly and plan courses and lessons effectively. There has been a progressive development of courses to meet the needs of the local population. Teachers are enthusiastic about their work with students. Basic skills teachers are working increasingly co-operatively with teachers on vocational courses to help them develop course modules suitable for students with low levels of basic skills. However, there is a need for more sharing of good teaching practice with some vocational teachers who contribute to basic skills programmes. New accreditation through the NOCN has been introduced which provides appropriate levels of work for students, and improves their prospects of progression to higher level courses.

47 Inspectors agreed with the college that the investment in specialist resources and equipment is contributing to improvements in courses. There are well-equipped learning centres which provide individual study packs and computers which help students to work more effectively. Some of the learning resources on sites other than the Poplar site are inadequate to meet the needs of the students.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**48 The college's self-assessment report identified the main strengths and weaknesses of support for students. Action had been taken to address some weaknesses by the time of the inspection but it was too early to assess the full effectiveness of some of the measures.**

#### Key strengths

- impartial advice for prospective students
- effective guidance, counselling and welfare support
- comprehensive induction arrangements
- well-managed and effective tutorial system
- effective learning support for full-time students
- good childcare provision for students

#### Weaknesses

- some failures in communication between learning support providers and course tutors
- delays in the provision of learning support for some students

49 The college is strongly committed to providing a good service to its local community. It has worked hard, as a part of its mission, to remove the barriers which prevent people from taking part in education. The college ensures that prospective students receive impartial advice, guidance and welfare information. The prospectus is attractive and has useful information about courses offered across the borough by the college. It is widely available in English, a range of community languages, and on audio tape. Leaflets about individual courses give more detailed information. Many students who attend college have childcare

responsibilities. The college offers places for over 90 children of students on its main college sites, and there are places for a further 160 children at crèches based at community venues.

50 The college has formed productive links with a number of partner schools and community groups. Prospective students can visit the college throughout the year to have an advice and guidance interview. Careers officers, student advisers, learning support staff and staff fluent in a wide range of community languages ensure that advice is available to the widest spectrum of prospective students. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. The college has established strong links with local schools, community groups, special schools and other colleges. Current students act as 'student ambassadors' in representing the college at external events such as open evenings at schools. They also telephone students who have left the college to find out their reasons for leaving and their destinations. They receive training to help them fulfil this role. College staff attend careers events, open evenings and visit partner schools and community centres.

51 There is an effective induction programme. There is a comprehensive guide for tutors which ensures that they cover the necessary topics during induction. It includes imaginative and helpful suggestions for ways to introduce students to the college. This includes college coffee mornings to introduce students to each other and to acquaint them with the college's services for students. Induction information is available through a CD-ROM. There are plans to make this information available on the college intranet.

52 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a well-established college tutorial policy and curriculum. The tutorial programme sets out core activities that should be followed by all tutor groups. Tutors carefully monitor students' progress. Tutor groups for full-time students meet weekly. There are additional individual meetings where students can discuss their progress with their tutor.

# Cross-college Provision

Tutors are supported by 12 youth and community workers who arrange a comprehensive enrichment programme which includes many multi-cultural events, women-only events and a range of sporting challenges. There is an energetic student union which organises a lively social calendar, and also ensures student representation on college decision-making bodies. There are 250 student representatives on course teams across the college. All are offered training for this role. Students' views are collected through questionnaires and surveys, and, in response, action is taken to improve services. Students can receive personal counselling from a well-qualified and experienced team.

53 Support for students who need additional help with literacy and numeracy is well organised and given in a variety of ways. All students take screening tests at an early point in their course to identify specific learning support needs. Each curriculum area has a co-ordinator appointed from its own staff who is able to highlight the specific needs of students and ensure that their needs are met. Support is offered in a variety of ways: 'drop-in' workshops held at the three main sites; one-to-one and small group sessions as part of a students' timetable or as a standalone session; and individual support from learning support workers. Attendance at all support sessions is closely monitored, and tutors are quickly alerted to any absences. A review exercise conducted with those receiving support in the past year and using clear data has demonstrated the effectiveness of learning support in raising retention and achievement on some courses. Some delays in students receiving the necessary support, particularly at community venues, have been identified, as have some communication failures between learning support providers and course tutors. The college has put in place actions to remedy these weaknesses, but the full impact of the actions has yet to be demonstrated.

54 As identified in the self-assessment report, students receive good-quality guidance when they are applying for places in higher education institutions. However, there is less advice for students wishing to progress to employment. The college is attempting to address this through the tutorial system.

## General Resources

### *Grade 1*

**55 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but noted that the report gave insufficient emphasis to the improvements brought about by recent major accommodation projects. Some weaknesses had been successfully addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- good-quality teaching accommodation in almost all parts of the college
- responsive and efficient estates management
- bold and effective improvements to accommodation
- a well-maintained and secure working environment
- well-resourced learning centres
- good IT facilities

#### Weaknesses

- a few areas of poor accommodation

56 The college has two main sites. The Poplar campus, adjacent to Canary Wharf in London Docklands, is the largest of the sites and accommodates many of the college's courses. A short distance away at East India Dock Road, a former school building with some fine architectural features houses well-equipped science laboratories. A smaller site nearby at Arbour Square provides accommodation for

# Cross-college Provision

basic education and adult programmes. The college also offers courses at a site in Bethnal Green and in over 30 smaller community venues across the borough. The standard of some accommodation in sites not owned by the college is below the standard elsewhere.

57 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there had been successful major improvements in accommodation and equipment since the last inspection. A detailed accommodation strategy was prepared in 1998. It led to the sale of unsuitable accommodation, and the use of the proceeds to initiate some imaginative and bold developments. A striking example of this is the imposing atrium at the entrance to the main site in Poplar which was opened in September 1999. This attractive central social area contains a cafeteria, a shop, and a hairdressing and beauty salon. The atrium is enhanced by colourful wall hangings depicting the life stories of Asian women, which were sewn by students as a contribution to a show of ethnic needlework at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This development has transformed a previously little used space into a focal area for the whole site. Next to the atrium the college has set up a welcoming advice centre for students.

58 Most teaching rooms are of a high standard. Those at the two main sites are well furnished and equipped to an agreed minimum standard, which includes carpets and whiteboards. Many of the changes made to teaching accommodation have been planned and implemented following careful consultation with the teachers concerned. A good example of the high-quality accommodation developed recently is the attractive hairdressing and beauty therapy facilities which include professional standard salons and a health spa. During the extensive building programme the college has aimed to improve access for students with restricted mobility. Much recent progress has been made, but a few areas remain inaccessible. Recently, the college has obtained

funding to improve the position further. Where it has not been possible to allow such access the college ensures that the facilities are provided elsewhere for students.

59 College managers, including the principal, and their assistants work in a carefully designed open-plan central office. Staff who work there maintain that it facilitates teamwork and helps communications. Open-plan work areas have been extended into work areas used by teachers and support staff. This has facilitated the sharing of ideas and materials. Whilst the self-assessment report highlights these developments as a strength, inspectors considered that it gave insufficient emphasis to the benefits being enjoyed by staff. Communal areas of the college are well maintained and kept clean and tidy. As recognised in the self-assessment report, discreet but effective security staff play a key role in maintaining an orderly environment, and have good relationships with students.

60 The college has invested almost £1million in IT equipment over the past two years. Inspectors agreed that there is a well-planned strategy for IT development across the college, and that the computer network is a significant strength. Staff and students have sufficient access to computers in classrooms, learning centres and staff work areas. All computers have Internet access. The college has developed a college intranet which provides a wide range of useful information for staff. The intranet is being expanded to help teachers and students with curriculum materials. For example, one package is designed to help adult basic learners use the Docklands Light Railway. It provides information about planning routes, purchasing tickets, and making a journey. The self-assessment report recognises some unsatisfactory computer maintenance. However, there has been a considerable improvement in the situation this year.

61 The two main sites in Poplar and Arbour Square have spacious and well-resourced



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learning centres. At Arbour Square the imaginative conversion of a hall has created functional and distinctive accommodation on several levels. There are smaller centres at Bethnal Green and East India Dock Road. The provision of books, computers and study areas in these centres is good. There are sufficient study spaces to enable students to work on their own and in small groups. Learning centre staff have produced valuable study guides for students' use. The opening of the learning centres to the public on Saturday mornings has proved popular and has led to increased enrolments. The college monitors students' satisfaction with the learning centres. Reviews show significantly increased use of centres and levels of satisfaction amongst students. Learning centre staff have sought to address a weakness identified in the self-assessment report by improving liaison with curriculum areas, but progress has been slow in some areas.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**62 Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective integration of quality assurance processes with operational planning
- comprehensive range of quality assurance procedures
- beneficial use of performance standards in business support areas
- staff development linked directly with appraisal and operational planning
- imaginative use of research activities to address persistent weaknesses

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate attention to achievements in some course reviews
- insufficient rigour in aspects of action-planning at course level

63 There is a comprehensive framework for quality assurance which covers all aspects of the college's work. Procedures are well developed and fully integrated with operational planning. A modified version of these procedures is used for the college's relatively small amount of franchised provision. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a strong commitment at all levels within the college to improving quality. The quality assurance system, overseen by the director of quality improvement, underpins the college's mission and strategic aims. The system is valued by staff. Programme areas are subject to a rigorous three-yearly inspection by teams which are led by external subject specialists. Procedures are well documented in a planning and review manual.

64 The focal point of the college's quality assurance system is the self-assessment review group. This group is responsible for monitoring the quality assurance system and verifying the college's annual self-assessment report. It reports to the senior management team, academic board and the corporation. A curriculum charter sets minimum standards and has performance indicators with measurable targets which are reviewed annually. Programme area operating plans, with measurable targets, are derived from course reviews. Performance of courses against targets is reviewed twice yearly. Target-setting for individual courses is well established. Extensive use is made of national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC to compare the performance of Tower Hamlets College with that of other colleges. Inspectors agreed that most course reviews are rigorous and identify

# Cross-college Provision

three-year trends in performance. Some course reviews are not fully completed and do not address students' achievements sufficiently. Some action plans are weak and do not focus sharply on key issues.

65 The use of quality standards for cross-college services is well established. Service charters identify minimum standards of performance users can expect from business support areas and these have performance targets against which the effectiveness of the area is judged. Inspectors agreed that many of these targets are measurable and performance against them is monitored throughout the year. Staff speak positively about this aspect of the quality assurance system which has resulted in improvements to levels of service.

66 The student charter is regularly reviewed by the college and contains clear commitments that are monitored effectively. Students are made aware of these commitments during their interviews before enrolment. There is an effective complaints procedure. Analysis of complaints leads to improvements in services and student support. Students' views on courses and services are sought through twice-yearly questionnaires and meetings between heads of programme areas and student representatives. Their views are carefully analysed and action is taken to address issues. Students are informed of any actions taken and improvements often follow.

67 The self-assessment report identifies the strong commitment to, and effective arrangements for, staff development as a strength. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. The staff development budget constitutes 1.5% of the college's staffing budget. The annual staff development plan is based on training needs identified through the operating plans, appraisal interviews and lesson observations and is directly linked to the college's strategic objectives. An internal programme of staff development is offered,

including compulsory training for teachers who have been identified through lesson observation as needing support. All staff development activity is evaluated and there are effective mechanisms for disseminating information arising from training sessions. In January 2000, the college was successfully re-assessed for the Investors in People award. All staff are appraised by their line manager. Appraisals focus on training needs and a review of individual's job descriptions.

68 There is an effective system of lesson observation which is undertaken by managers and other teachers. The system adopted is unusual in that an observer spends a day with a group of students in their lessons, which are taken by several teachers. The emphasis, therefore, is on the students' experience. Lesson observation grades contribute to each curriculum area's self-assessment report.

69 The college has clearly established procedures for self-assessment. The self-assessment report used as the basis for the inspection was the fourth annual report produced by the college. It has involved staff at all levels and is an integral part of the annual quality assurance and operational planning cycle. The report is comprehensive and evaluative. Inspectors broadly agreed with judgements in the report. Self-assessment has identified several persistent weaknesses that have proved difficult to address. A research unit in the college has recently been established to help resolve some of these difficulties. Research work on poor retention in the college has led to a better understanding of the reasons why students leave their course. Improvements are starting to be brought about. The college's data indicate that recently there have been some improvements in students' achievements but these remain poor on level 2 courses and retention is generally low.

# Cross-college Provision

## Governance

### Grade 1

**70 Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements about governance in the self-assessment report, but found that weaknesses identified had already been addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- effective use of governors' extensive range of skills and experience
- challenging yet supportive working relationship between governors and managers
- high-quality clerking and conduct of corporation and committee business
- governors' systematic monitoring of their own and the college's performance
- governors' involvement in strategic planning linked to self-assessment and review
- effective induction and training of governors

#### Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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.

72 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the membership of the corporation reflects the diversity of the local community, and provides links with key agencies and external bodies. After considering the requirements of the modified instrument of government, the corporation now comprises

18 members. There is provision for six business governors, three co-opted governors, two staff governors, one student governor, two local authority nominees, three community members and the principal. At the time of the inspection, there was one vacancy for a community governor. There are seven members from minority ethnic groups, seven women members, and three members who are under 25 years old. The governors have a good range of business, public sector and academic experience. The college has conducted a comprehensive skills audit of governors to inform governors' recruitment and development. Inspectors agreed with the college that governors' skills and experience are used effectively to advise the college's managers. The working relationship between governors and management is based on mutual respect and trust. There is a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management.

73 The corporation has established a set of values and performance indicators which it has used to monitor its own performance for the last three years. Governors regularly set priorities for action, and assess the effectiveness of the actions taken. The careful consideration of governors' performance is central to the self-assessment of governance. The self-assessment process for governors is evaluative and this has helped governors to improve their performance. For example, as noted in the self-assessment report, their average attendance has improved in the last year from 71% to 80%, meeting the performance target set by the corporation. There is a systematic approach to the induction and training of governors. New governors are provided with an induction pack which includes a detailed handbook. An experienced governor acts as mentor to each new governor and contributes to the induction programme provided by college managers. Governors' training needs are assessed annually. Each governor has a training plan and has the opportunity to take part in a range of training events. Updating of governors on curriculum

# Cross-college Provision

developments is an agenda item for meetings of the corporation. Governors are currently undertaking training in the use of the college's intranet, which will give them easy access to management information. Managers and governors together consider curriculum and development issues at an annual conference.

74 Corporation meetings are held termly, with further meetings being called as necessary to address any significant additional items of business. The corporation has four standing committees: finance and general purposes; audit; search; and remuneration. All matters for decision are referred to the corporation for approval. Committee meetings are timetabled to precede corporation meetings so that matters arising can be considered by the whole corporation. The committees have clearly defined terms of reference that accord with good practice. Corporation papers are of a high standard, and reflect orderly conduct of business. The standard of clerking is high, and the clerk is independent of management or financial responsibilities at the college.

75 The audit committee substantially operates in accordance with the Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. It provides an annual report of its activities to the corporation. Performance indicators have been set for assessing the effectiveness of both internal and external auditors. The governing body has a code of ethics, which embraces the Nolan committee's recommendations on the conduct of public life. The college keeps a register of interests which is updated annually, and which has been extended to cover the interests of members of the senior management team and others with significant financial responsibilities. Governors closely scrutinise the financial reports presented to them by managers. They have agreed key financial performance indicators covering aspects such as solvency and liquidity and receive reports on them routinely with the management accounts. Inspectors agreed with the college that governors maintain an effective oversight of the college's financial position.

76 Inspectors were able to talk to most of the governors during the inspection. They demonstrated a sound understanding of the college's mission, and enthusiasm for their work with the college. The college judged in its self-assessment report that governors' monitoring of academic performance was limited. In the four corporation meetings since the self-assessment report was produced, governors have debated students' retention and achievement. They have also considered issues relating to curriculum and service quality through the continuing self-assessment process. Each governor is paired with one or more curriculum managers and they have held several formal and informal meetings. During the meetings, they have reviewed achievements, considered targets, and discussed curriculum developments. Curriculum managers speak positively of the benefits of having close links with governors. A governor attends meetings of the college's self-assessment quality committee and reports back to the corporation. Inspectors found that curriculum links and monitoring of academic performance are no longer weaknesses of governance.

## Management

### *Grade 1*

**77 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the strengths identified by the college in its self-assessment report, but considered that some strengths had been given insufficient weight.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective leadership
- clear vision and purpose shared by managers and staff
- open, consultative management style
- good communications across the college
- extensive and productive local links

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- strong commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity
- good financial management

## Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

78 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the mission of the college is understood and shared by managers and staff. The principal and other members of the senior management team provide enthusiastic and effective leadership and show a clear commitment to the college's mission and to open and collaborative management. Management arrangements were reviewed in 1998-99. The senior management team now comprises the principal and nine directors. All other operational managers, together with the senior management team, are members of a wider middle management team. Both teams meet weekly and a well-planned schedule of management agendas reflects the college planning cycle.

79 Staff appreciate the open and consultative approach to management and the good communications within the college; both strengths were noted in the college's self-assessment. Managers have agreed a set of values to underpin their approach to management and they are assessed against them. Meetings are purposeful and recorded accurately. The principal holds team briefings with senior managers who cascade information throughout the college. In order to improve communications and managers' effectiveness, accommodation has been redesigned to provide open-plan work areas where managers, teachers and other college staff work closely together. A weekly newsletter, extensive use of electronic mail and staff conferences help to ensure that staff are made aware of current developments.

80 As noted in the college's self-assessment, there are clear planning procedures, which are closely linked to self-assessment findings. Short-term task groups, involving staff at all levels, manage the implementation of key initiatives. Recently, task groups have focused on accommodation, students' achievements, tutorials and plans for curriculum 2000. Course teams compare retention and achievement with national averages and use the information to help them set annual targets. Retention and achievement targets are reviewed after six months in the light of the students' performance. Each department prepares an action plan annually which takes account of the college's curriculum charter standards. In addition, an operational plan for each area identifies development priorities. Senior managers conduct regular checks of the provision with programme managers to highlight underperforming courses and take action where appropriate. Recently there have been a number of cross-college initiatives aimed at improving students' retention and achievements which in 1998-99 were close to the national averages for colleges with a high widening participation factor. There have been improvements in retention and achievements for a number of courses during the past two years.

81 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Since the last inspection in 1996, the college has achieved operational surpluses each year. Throughout this period, staff costs as a percentage of income have remained consistently below the 65% performance target adopted by the college. The college has historically had a strong cash position, and has managed a reduction in its overall average level of funding from £24.63 in 1996-97 to £18.65 in 1998-99. Monthly management accounts are produced promptly for senior managers and governors. They are clearly presented and reflect good accounting practice. The college has set and approved financial regulations and financial procedures

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which reflect best practice within the sector. The college has an effective finance team led by the director of finance, a qualified accountant who is a member of the senior management team.

82 Since the last inspection the college has continued to foster a wide range of productive external links. Inspectors agreed that this is a significant strength. College staff are involved in a number of high-profile local and national initiatives. For example, the principal was a member of the committee chaired by Sir Claus Moser which focused on strategies for improving literacy and numeracy. The college has successfully increased the numbers of students participating in education and training through the expansion of its community provision. Many curriculum teams have well-developed connections with local companies and other organisations which provide work experience and input for curriculum developments.

83 Actions have been taken to address the availability and reliability of data relating to students' retention and achievements and these have resulted in a marked improvement during the past 12 months. The recent development of a college intranet has provided staff at all sites with on-line access to information on courses and students, and has assisted in improving the accuracy of the data held centrally. Revised administrative support arrangements located within the departments is designed to improve the accuracy of data. Inspectors found that the data produced by the college for 1998-99 were generally accurate.

84 The college's strong commitment to equality of opportunity permeates all aspects of college life. There is a comprehensive equal opportunity strategy which covers all aspects of anti-discriminatory practice and which is monitored regularly. Staff participate in the equal opportunities forum which identifies issues or potential issues and develops actions to address them. A wide variety of strategies have been adopted to help to widen

participation for people who would not usually choose to attend a college. Careful thought has been given to the ways in which students can be supported to ensure that they are treated fairly. For example, student support workers speak community languages and are able to act as interpreters and advocates as the need arises. Staff development activities have focused on heightening staff awareness of anti-discriminatory practices. The college's stance on combating racism is clearly articulated to students by senior managers during induction.

## Conclusions

85 The self-assessment report provided to the FEFC for the inspection was the fourth full self-assessment report completed by the college. It provided a very useful basis for planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college, but considered that, in some cases, curriculum self-assessment had paid insufficient attention to some poor achievements, and the self-assessment report had underestimated the quality of teaching and learning for ESOL provision. At the time of the inspection, the college had successfully addressed a number of weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with four out of six curriculum grades awarded by the college, but in one case awarded a better grade and in another awarded a worse grade. Inspectors awarded a better grade to three of the five cross-college areas than those awarded by the college.

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

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (March 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	28
19-24 years	19
25+ years	52
Not known	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (March 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	60
Level 2 (intermediate)	16
Level 3 (advanced)	24
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (March 2000)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	491	564	18
Engineering	54	143	4
Business	180	250	7
Hotel and catering	58	79	2
Health and community care	366	322	12
Art and design	316	41	6
Humanities	427	279	12
Basic education	534	1,737	39
Total	2,426	3,415	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 98% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (March 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	130	63	0	193
Supporting direct learning contact	27	5	0	32
Other support	86	7	0	93
Total	243	75	0	318

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£15,631,000	£13,761,000	£14,010,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£24.30	£20.99	£18.65
Payroll as a proportion of income	59%	58%	60%
Achievement of funding target	122%	101%	101%
Diversity of income	14%	17%	18%
Operating surplus	£1,239,000	£133,000	£184,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	89	563	833	76	1,047	644
	Retention (%)	*	*	84	*	*	88
	Achievement (%)	*	*	61	*	*	44
2	Number of starters	326	2,171	1,673	435	1,048	708
	Retention (%)	*	*	77	*	*	81
	Achievement (%)	*	*	39	*	*	44
3	Number of starters	1,224	1,295	1,762	445	1,358	870
	Retention (%)	*	*	80	*	*	73
	Achievement (%)	*	*	46	*	*	59
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	50
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20
Short courses	Number of starters	86	986	507	1,195	4,798	2,530
	Retention (%)	*	*	84	*	*	67
	Achievement (%)	*	*	74	*	*	67
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	7	75	107	133	744	1,067
	Retention (%)	*	*	87	*	*	89
	Achievement (%)	*	*	65	*	*	60

Source: ISR

\*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable



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