

Alton College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

© FEFC 1998

You may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 5

Curriculum areas

Business 8

Leisure and tourism 12

Health and social care 17

English and communication studies 21

Social sciences 25

Basic education 29

Cross-college provision

Support for students 32

General resources 40

Quality assurance 46

Governance 51

Management 56

Conclusions 62

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Alton College

South East Region

Inspected October 1997

Alton College is a tertiary college in east Hampshire. Production of the college's first self-assessment report involved staff, governors and the Hampshire TEC. The process was linked to strategic planning and review. The college sought no external advice in preparing its self-assessment report. The college makes provision in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Inspectors chose a sample of the college's work on which to base their validation of the self-assessment report. This included provision in five of the FEFC's programme areas. Most of the grades awarded as a result of the college's self-assessment are well founded, though the college overestimates some strengths, particularly the quality of teaching and learning.

The college's main provision is in academic courses for 16 to 19 year olds, for which it has a high reputation. The college also offers a small but growing number of GNVQ programmes. It has established the Wey Valley Business School as a separate department catering for the needs of local businesses. The college has close relations with local schools, employers and the TEC. Around half of the college's provision was inspected. Standards of teaching and learning on most courses are good and especially so on

advanced level courses. The quality of provision in English and communications is outstanding. Student support is well managed. The college has a coherent framework for assuring the quality of the curriculum and has recently achieved Investor in People status. Governors bring a wide range of expertise to the college and communicate effectively with senior managers, staff and students. The newly-established principal's management group is working well. Managers have been imaginative in modifying and extending accommodation to meet changing needs. The college has greatly improved the facilities for information technology without neglecting equipment for other areas. The college should address: the unreliable data on students' achievements and low levels of achievement on some courses in the Wey Valley Business School; the clarification of the priorities in the strategic plan; uneven compliance with the quality framework and slow implementation of quality procedures whose value has been demonstrated through pilot studies; underdeveloped monitoring of academic performance by governors; inadequate funding of the library; communications between library and curriculum area staff; and the need for professional updating among staff in vocational areas.

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

Curriculum areas inspected	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Business	2	Support for students	2
Leisure and tourism	3	College resources	2
Health and social care	2	Quality assurance	3
English and communications	1	Governance	2
Social sciences	2	Management	2
Basic education	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Alton College was founded as a sixth form college in 1978. It was redesignated as a tertiary college in 1983. The college has a single site in a mainly rural community in east Hampshire, close to the town centre of Alton. It is within commuting distance of London. The two largest employers in east Hampshire are the district council and the army barracks at Bordon. Only 10 per cent of private firms employ more than 25 people. Unemployment is low at 2.5 per cent. East Hampshire has a population of 109,000 with some small pockets of rural deprivation. Minority ethnic groups comprise 2 per cent of the population.

2 The college competes for full-time students with six similar colleges within a 20-mile radius. It works with four partner schools and several other maintained schools. An increasing proportion of the college's students comes from independent schools. The proportion of students in east Hampshire staying in full-time education after the age of 16 is above the national average, at 75 per cent.

3 In 1996-97, the college had over 2,800 enrolments, of whom 55 per cent were full-time students aged between 16 and 18. Most were on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) programmes. About 20 per cent of full-time students were on courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Full-time enrolments have fallen this year. Since the last Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspection in November 1994, the college has established the Wey Valley Business School to cater for the needs of local business. It offers a wide range of programmes, most of which are funded by the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). In June 1997, the college employed 146 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 51 full-time equivalents were support

staff. At the time of the inspection, the college was divided into two teaching divisions: arts and science, and humanities.

4 The college has recently modified its mission statement. It aims to provide education and training of high quality for people and organisations in east Hampshire and adjacent areas and to:

- 'encourage the self-motivation and creativity of students as a means to personal fulfilment and as preparation for citizenship and for the next stage of education and employment
- encourage all staff to contribute to the success of the college by enabling their development in a supportive environment
- sustain a local, economic and high-quality service by the efficient and effective use of resources'.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 6 October 1997, a time when there had just been substantial changes in staffing leading to a new management structure. The inspection team had previously considered the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies.

6 The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. This amounted to around half of the college's provision. The sample excluded: creative and performing arts, modern languages, mathematics, technology, and human and natural science. Science, which accounts for a significant percentage of the college's provision, was recently inspected as part of a national survey, during which this

Context

provision was judged to have many strengths and very few weaknesses. The inspection was carried out by 10 inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 42 days. They observed 70 lessons, including tutorials and learning on work placements, and examined samples of students' work and college documents. Inspectors consulted employers, a representative of the TEC and the principal of Lord Mayor Treloar College. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students, including officers of the students' union.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 64 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 4 per cent were less than satisfactory. According to the chief inspector's annual report 1996-97, 61 per cent of all lessons inspected for the year 1996-97 had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. According to the same report, 8 per cent of lessons inspected in all colleges had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The average level of attendance was good, at 87 per cent. This compares with 77 per cent recorded by inspectors for tertiary colleges in 1996-97, according to the same report. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE AS/A level	4	12	7	1	0	24
GCSE	0	2	2	1	0	5
GNVQ	2	13	6	0	0	21
Other vocational	3	9	7	1	0	20
Total	9	36	22	3	0	70

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

8 Provision in business is good. Inspectors observed 15 lessons covering the main courses in the area. Inspectors considered the college's self-assessment to be largely accurate but some strengths identified by the college were overstated.

Key strengths

- well-organised lessons
- teachers' use of topical materials
- integration of business theory and practice
- good examination results and retention rates on most courses
- information technology resources

Weaknesses

- teaching which is often inappropriate for mixed ability classes
- poor progression from intermediate to advanced level GNVQs
- erratic general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) pass rates and falling pass rates at GNVQ intermediate level
- lack of recent industrial experience among teachers

9 The college is particularly successful in recruiting students to study GCE A level business studies. The quality of teaching is generally good. Some classes are brought together and taught by more than one teacher. For example, two large first-year GNVQ advanced level classes were combined effectively for a lesson on the importance of good communication between managers; the teachers

worked well together, complementing each other's skills. In a minority of lessons, the pace of work was too slow and too little explanation of new topics was given to students to prepare them to work on their own. Lesson plans were sometimes overambitious so that lessons ended in a rush. Schemes of work do not describe what students should be able to do or understand.

10 Students' written work is generally of good quality. Their file notes are comprehensive and well ordered. GNVQ students are skilled in using information technology. Students' work is usually marked fairly and most of the comments made by teachers are detailed and constructive. Some marked work contained poor spelling, punctuation and grammar, which had not been corrected. Pass rates and retention rates on most courses are good and often exceed the national average. GCE A level results, however, have declined over the past three years. Pass rates are low for GCSE courses. They are also low for some part-time national vocational qualification (NVQ) and computer literacy and information technology programmes, which have few students enrolled on them. There is a good rate of progression from advanced level courses to higher education and employment, but progression from intermediate to advanced level GNVQ is unusually low. Some aspects of course management in the Wey Valley Business School are weak; for example, enrolments and achievement data for most of the part-time courses are incomplete and difficult to track.

11 Most of the accommodation used for business courses is good. The impressive new computer suites for students' use provide good access to business software. Most teachers are appropriately qualified but their business and industrial experience is limited or out of date.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	100	99	89
	Pass rate (%)	98	92	83
GCSE	Retention (%)	81	68	81
	Pass rate (%)	36	50	38
Advanced GNVQ	Retention (%)	90	79	82
	Pass rate (%)	100	87	100
Intermediate GNVQ	Retention (%)	94	82	86
	Pass rate (%)	63	57	58
NVQ level 3 Association of Accounting Technicians	Retention (%)	100	92	+
	Pass rate (%)	30	46	+
NVQ administration	Retention (%)	*	100	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	41	*
NVQ level 2 Association of Accounting Technicians	Retention (%)	90	88	+
	Pass rate (%)	89	59	+
Other (single subject - secretarial/information technology)	Retention (%)	88	69	+
	Pass rate (%)	44	64	+

Source: college data

*provision not available

+ data not available at time of inspection

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

12 The inspection included a sample of all of the college's provision in this area. Inspectors observed nine lessons. The college's self-assessment report makes no specific reference to leisure and tourism courses, evaluating them under the general heading of business studies. The strengths of the teaching and learning are stated clearly but there is no mention of some of the weaknesses identified by inspectors.

Key strengths

- management and teamwork at course level
- quality of teaching
- development of key skills
- good pass rates on the GNVQ advanced courses and high retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate course
- reliable internal verification

Weaknesses

- leadership of the curriculum area
- lack of market research into requirements for part-time courses
- very poor retention rates on the GNVQ advanced courses
- the low pass rate for intermediate GNVQs in 1996
- no specialist base room for leisure and tourism students

13 As the college's self-assessment report claims, the quality of teaching is often high. All but one of the lessons observed by inspectors were good or outstanding. In most cases, teachers organise their teaching well. They use an appropriate variety of teaching methods and

tasks to which students respond enthusiastically. In a few lessons, students' attention was allowed to wander without check. Students have many opportunities to develop key skills and most advanced GNVQ students achieve standards above level 3. On the GNVQ intermediate course and on the second year of GNVQ advanced courses, there is not enough opportunity for work experience.

14 Advanced and intermediate GNVQs were introduced in 1994 and 1995, respectively. Although enrolment targets have been met, the initial level of recruitment for the GNVQ advanced programme has not been sustained. Little consideration has been given to introducing part-time courses and courses for businesses. Travel and tourism trade certificates and sports coaching awards are unavailable to students on GNVQ courses. The leisure and tourism programmes are well organised and effectively managed by three programme managers. However, leadership of the programme managers is weak and the area lacks impetus.

15 Students' written work is generally good. Detailed marking and commentaries by teachers help students to analyse and improve their performance. Students' portfolios are generally well presented and they provide a clear record of progress. Teachers set appropriate assignments and expect high standards of work. Internal verification and assessment are well managed. Pass rates on the GNVQ advanced level course are well above the national average. However, retention on this course has so far been poor and the current cohort of students remains low. The pass rate for the intermediate GNVQ was well below the national average in 1996 although the retention rate was high. The pass rate improved sharply in 1997. On the GCSE course, which has few students, only 19 per cent of entries were graded C or above in 1997, a poor result.

Curriculum Areas

16 The basic resources to help students achieve good results are available.

Accommodation for leisure and tourism students is usually good but there is no base room for students where their work can be displayed.

Students have ready access to modern computers. Teachers are appropriately qualified and have arranged, on their own initiative, to keep their commercial knowledge up to date.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, national diplomas and certificates)	Retention (%)	*	66	58
	Pass rate (%)	*	95	86
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ, first diplomas and certificates)	Retention (%)	*	90	82
	Pass rate (%)	*	48	83
GCSE	Retention (%)	+	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	86	*	19

Source: college data

*provision not available

+data not available at time of inspection

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment which recognised the good quality of teaching, learning and students' achievements. Inspectors observed 11 teaching sessions, covering all courses other than counselling.

Key strengths

- the quality of teaching
- high pass rates on most courses
- the use of work experience to inform the curriculum
- good attendance and retention rates
- support for students with disabilities

Weaknesses

- lack of a consistent vocational focus for teaching and learning
- low completion rates on NVQ courses
- some ineffective use of team teaching
- teachers' lack of recent vocational experience

18 The department has increased its range of courses since the last inspection and, in most areas, enrolment targets have been met. NVQs in care are now firmly established but the NVQs in childcare have largely fallen by the wayside. All the courses are managed and taught in one department, except for the NVQs which are the responsibility of the Wey Valley Business School. Opportunities for sharing resources, good practice and vocational knowledge across the whole subject area are limited by this administrative separation. Courses are

generally well managed, but it is difficult to identify any changes which have arisen directly from the course review procedure. Accurate records of NVQ enrolments and achievement rates are hard to find.

19 Teaching is generally good. Well-organised work experience, external visits and visiting speakers enrich the curriculum. Assignments link theory and vocational applications to good effect. Students' portfolios on GNVQ and national diploma courses are well presented. Standards are high. Work is marked and returned quickly and clear guidance is given to students to enable them to improve. Use of information technology is evident in students' work and access to facilities is good. Students' attendance and timekeeping are good, encouraged by a clear departmental policy which is rooted in preparing students realistically for employment. Students' achievements exceed national averages on all courses except NVQs. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises the significance of a decline in pass rates at intermediate level from 86 per cent in 1995 to 74 per cent in 1997. In care management, results are outstanding. Many students progress to appropriate employment and higher education.

20 Some staff lack recent vocational experience. Accommodation and resources are generally good. Most areas display students' work together with appropriate press-cuttings and posters. The college claims the use of differentiated learning materials as a strength in this area but there is little evidence to support this view.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, national diplomas)	Retention (%)	95	79	78
	Pass rate (%)	89	100	88
Intermediate GNVQ	Retention (%)	71	81	75
	Pass rate (%)	86	67	74
Foundation GNVQ	Retention (%)	97	81	86
	Pass rate (%)	89	92	63 ¹
Other	Retention (%)	100	92	100
	Pass rate (%)	90	100	100

Source: college data

¹eight students have yet to complete their studies

Curriculum Areas

English and Communication Studies

Grade 1

21 Provision in English and communication studies is outstanding. Both full-time and part-time students benefit from lively teaching. Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE A level, GCSE and access to higher education programmes. Most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report are consistent with those arrived at as a result of the inspection.

Key strengths

- much good or outstanding teaching
- outstanding levels of achievement on almost all courses, sustained over several years
- high retention rates on almost all GCE A level and GCSE courses
- quality of management
- accommodation and learning resources
- learning support for full-time students and access course students

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates and retention rates among the first cohort of students, following the newly-introduced GCE A level English language course
- two lessons in which teaching was less than satisfactory

22 Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and for working with their students contributes materially to the high standard of teaching. High expectations and challenging tasks, which are introduced in an encouraging manner, help to harness students' energies. Teachers make skilful use of a variety of classroom activities and check systematically that students are

learning. In several instances, the delight of students was apparent as they mastered difficult concepts and grew in confidence. In sharp contrast, the purpose and structure of two lessons were unclear. Their shortcomings soon became evident to the students, whose attention flagged. There are good schemes of work which include arrangements for students' induction.

23 The quality of students' work is high. Written assignments are marked thoroughly and consistently. In one lesson, marked assignments, containing critical but encouraging comments from the teacher, were returned to students. The assignments were then used to highlight common errors of spelling and grammar. Students' progress is recorded systematically. Periodic reviews ensure that students receive the learning support they need. The achievements of 16 to 18 year old students in GCE A level and GCSE examinations are outstanding. Passes at the higher grades A to C are well above the national average. The pass rate in GCE A level English language in 1997, the first time students have entered for this examination, was below the national average. The pass rates at GCE A level and GCSE for students aged 19 and over are only slightly lower than for younger students. Most students, including those on access programmes, progress to higher education.

24 Teachers have experience as examiners and one is a member of an examination board advisory committee. The department is well managed and it has a clear staffing structure. Communication within the department is good. Teachers have collaborated to create a substantial bank of teaching resources for every course. The department has well-appointed classrooms, and a spacious work area for teachers. There is a wide range of specialist books and other resources in the college library.

Curriculum Areas

**Examples of students' achievements in
English and communication studies,
1995 to 1997**

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	98	93	84
	Pass rate (%)	94	91	94
GCSE	Retention (%)	84	84	84
	Pass rate (%)	84	77	81

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Social Sciences

Grade 2

25 Inspectors observed 11 classes on GCE A level and GCSE courses in government and politics, law, history and sociology. Inspectors agreed with the college's overall assessment of this curriculum area.

Key strengths

- good lesson planning
- students' use of information technology for research and presentation
- students' achievements on GCE A level and GCSE courses
- specialist accommodation including the teachers' work base

Weaknesses

- schemes of work which lack strategies to encourage students to work on their own
- lack of systematic assessment of students' learning needs
- some falling retention rates

26 The quality of teaching is sound. New topics are set in the context of earlier learning and lessons are appropriately paced to achieve the objectives set. Teachers use a range of teaching methods but there is not always sufficient encouragement or opportunity for students to work on their own where this would be appropriate. The quality of schemes of work is variable, though individual lessons are well planned. There is inadequate planning for ways of improving students' key skills. Teachers fail

to make full use of learning materials to extend the more able students. There has been some improvement in subject induction programmes but there is no systematic assessment of learning needs to determine the support which students require. Students are punctual and levels of attendance are high.

27 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that examination achievements are good. Students are given a thorough preparation for their final examinations through regular tests and assignments. With the exception of history in 1997, the proportion of students achieving GCE A level grades A to E has been consistently above the national average for the last three years. The proportion of GCSE students achieving grade C or above in sociology has also been above average. Retention rates in law and politics are low. The rates in other subjects were good for the years up to 1996. In 1997, however, there was a sharp drop in retention rates for history and sociology.

28 All teachers have first degrees and two are qualified barristers. The section has well equipped classrooms and a teachers' work room. Staff use the Internet and specialist CD-ROM databases to support teaching and learning. Some assignments are now designed to ensure that students make good use of these facilities.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in social sciences, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level students aged 16-18	Retention (%)	98	87.0	68.0
	Pass rate (%)	78	93.5	87.5
GCSE sociology students aged 16-18	Retention (%)	93	95.0	79.0
	Pass rate (%)	80	63.0	57.0
GCE A level students aged 19+	Retention (%)	67	65.0	66.5
	Pass rate (%)	54	52.5	54.5

Source: college data for subjects inspected

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 3

29 Inspection concentrated on the college's provision for adult basic skills, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), and discrete programmes for students with mild to severe learning difficulties. Inspectors observed 12 teaching sessions. Some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report could not be substantiated. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the provision has strengths but also some significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- teachers' awareness of the individual learning difficulties of students
- a supportive learning environment
- opportunities for all students to progress and gain accredited awards
- close monitoring of students' progress
- full-time students' progression to other further education courses or employment
- easy access to information technology resources

Weaknesses

- lack of reliable data on students' achievements
- some tasks for students which are inappropriate, given their abilities and prior learning
- teachers' failure to devise appropriately differentiated learning activities for students in some lessons
- inadequate staffing in some lessons
- inappropriate accommodation for some learning activities, particularly off-site

- the small proportion of students on adult basic skills courses who seek accredited awards
- lack of specialist qualifications and training among staff teaching discrete courses for students with learning difficulties
- the reduced amount of off-site provision

30 The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Teachers and assistants support students well. In the better lessons, students make progress and increase in confidence and self-esteem. Staff evaluate carefully the needs of each student and design programmes which take proper account of their learning difficulties and prior learning. In specialist lessons in information technology, the computing and keyboard skills of students are developed well, although there is little evidence of its use in routine teaching. Students' artwork is imaginative and vibrant. Standards of work in students' portfolios are appropriate and teachers keep accurate records of progress. The majority of 16 to 19 year olds who are following the full-time continuing education programmes achieve their primary learning goals. Many progress to other further education courses or find jobs. A student last year achieved a grade C in GCE A level art and progressed to an art foundation course. Most adult students on basic skills courses do not seek accredited awards. Retention levels on part-time courses are high.

31 The Wey Valley Business School delivers basic skills and ESOL, while the social studies department is responsible for discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The division of this work between two separate administrative structures contributes to its lack of identity. There is no single focus for curriculum development. Student recruitment has declined recently. Adult basic skills work in outlying community centres

Curriculum Areas

has been reduced for economic reasons. There is heavy dependence on volunteer classroom supporters. In some basic skills lessons, where this assistance is not available, teachers are unable to provide the level of individual support which is required. Teachers on discrete courses still lack specialist training and qualifications, although the college has made efforts to address the training needs of all staff teaching basic skills. Some training rooms are unsuitable. They lack both basic facilities and specialist equipment.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

32 The college's self-assessment report concludes that provision is good. Inspectors agreed with this judgement.

Key strengths

- close links with schools
- additional learning support and tutorial support for full-time and access course students
- the well-resourced higher education and careers advice centre
- a responsive counselling service
- the enrolment of students with disabilities on most college courses
- an active students' union

Weaknesses

- unhelpful publicity materials for most part-time courses
- arrangements for the care and support of evening students
- limited diagnostic testing for numeracy and literacy
- the failure to maintain students' records of achievement

33 Links with schools are effective and the college's publicity for school-leavers is attractive. Prospective students have two interviews and receive impartial advice and guidance from the college. Entry requirements are generally clear although the varied requirements for the different GNVQ intermediate programmes are sometimes a source of confusion. The college in its self-assessment recognises that arrangements for students entering part-time courses are poor. The prospectus of part-time courses is unattractive and difficult to follow, and many of the supporting course leaflets are not as helpful to applicants as they might be.

34 Induction programmes for full-time and part-time day courses help students to settle rapidly. Induction arrangements for evening class students are patchy. Diagnostic testing for literacy and numeracy is restricted to GNVQ intermediate programmes. Although it has yielded measurable benefits to course teams and students, the scheme for diagnostic testing has not been extended. In a majority of cases, students' needs for additional learning support are identified by schools or at interview. The proposed development of a study skills workshop has fallen behind schedule. Whilst the various different strands of learning support are good, co-ordination is not strong enough to secure consistency.

35 The college is strongly committed to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective support is provided for full-time students with dyslexia or hearing impairments and the service has recently been extended to include part-time day students. There are long-standing links with Lord Mayor Treloar College, a national centre for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is located nearby. About 25 students with physical disabilities attend the college and are fully integrated with other students on a range of courses. College students are increasingly involved in work at Lord Mayor Treloar College.

36 Students' support is well managed by an assistant principal, helped by six senior tutors. The senior tutors carry different levels of responsibility, and there is some overlap between their roles. It is not clear how some aspects of the senior tutor role are meant to relate to the responsibilities of the newly-created heads of department.

37 Inspectors confirmed the college's judgement that pastoral support for 16 to 19 year olds and access course students is effective. The well-established tutorial system includes regular progress reviews. Tutorials are used to provide guidance on careers, higher education,

Cross-college Provision

health education and the complementary studies programme. They also provide a vital means of communication with and between students. Full-time students' attendance is monitored carefully through an electronic registration system and there are well-documented procedures to deal with unexplained absence. The organisation and quality of tutorial work varies, although steps have been taken recently to achieve greater consistency. Procedures for maintaining students' records of achievement during tutorials have been allowed to lapse. However, the college now has plans to restore these. There is no overall policy or procedure governing pastoral support for evening class students. The amount and the quality of tutorial guidance which students receive are determined by the class teacher.

38 The college has a well-resourced higher education and careers advice centre. A careers officer is present throughout the week. The town careers office also uses the centre. Careers and higher education interviews are efficiently organised. Students seeking employment are catered for as fully as those progressing to higher education. The college's counselling service is well managed to make best use of the counsellor's time. Waiting time for initial interview has been reduced progressively over the last two years. The counsellor's responsibility for providing advice on accommodation and financial problems reduces the time available for personal counselling.

39 The college has an energetic and well-organised students' union. In addition to arranging social activities at the college, the executive committee represents the students at many levels. The president is a member of the governing body and the vice-president is a member of the academic board. Students' views are taken seriously.

General Resources

Grade 2

40 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment which concludes that levels of resourcing are generally good.

Key strengths

- well-designed modern buildings on an attractive single site
- good furnishings and equipment
- continuous adaptation of the accommodation to meet educational requirements
- intensive use of accommodation
- facilities for information technology

Weaknesses

- overcrowding in some areas
- inadequate investment in the library
- poor signposting

41 The college's buildings, the attractive landscaped areas, car parks and three sports pitches together occupy 7.2 hectares. The accommodation has been expanded in six phases. The newer buildings are architecturally distinguished structures of steel and glass. The site and the buildings are well maintained. There is good-quality furniture and equipment in most areas. The college provides a pleasing, modern environment in which to study.

42 Managers have been imaginative in modifying and extending the buildings to accommodate changing needs as the college has developed. Computing facilities have been grouped together to form the 'IT Village', making it easy for students to gain access to equipment and specialist staff. A common entrance to the library and the independent learning centre has been formed. Catering facilities have been modified so that there is both a traditional cafeteria and a coffee shop.

Cross-college Provision

Opportunities have been taken to create enough staff workrooms to give a permanent space to each full-time teacher and provide adequate facilities for part-time teachers. Managers' offices are being relocated to reflect the recent reorganisation. The college has about five square metres of accommodation for each full-time equivalent student and space utilisation is high.

43 The college regards its library as good. In many respects this is true. However, there are some significant shortcomings. Subject coverage is uneven and many books are dated. The collection was last reviewed comprehensively a decade ago. Formal links between library staff and teachers have had limited impact. The library budget of £12,365 for 1997-98 is modest, amounting to less than 1 per cent of the college's annual non-staffing expenditure and providing about £7.60 per full-time equivalent student. Only two-thirds of students had received induction to the library in 1996-97. Library opening hours extend to 19.00 hours on three evenings a week. Access for evening students is, therefore, limited.

44 In its self-assessment report, the college is critical of its resources for information technology. It has made considerable strides in improving them, however, since its report was written in May 1997. The college now has 159 computers for students' use; giving a ratio of students to computers of 10:1. Of these machines, 139 are of modern specification and about 100 are on a network with access to a wide range of general and specialist software. Students have access to Autocad 14 for engineering design and to industrial-standard programmes for graphics and media. Most of the computers for use by teachers, managers and business support staff are modern. The college has invested well in information technology equipment and improvement has been accomplished without neglecting the needs of other areas of work.

45 The college regards its social and recreational accommodation as poor, but it responds with care to the requirements of all its

students. Access for students with restricted mobility is good. There is a flourishing creche for 16 children. A small common room for adult students is to be created during the autumn term. Catering facilities are large, bright and airy, and there are two big spaces which are equipped for meetings, lectures and performances. The college notes its lack of a sports hall as a weakness, but the town of Alton is extraordinarily rich in sports facilities and the college uses a number of them. Complex circulation patterns and poor use of signs within the college make it difficult to see the totality of non-teaching facilities.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

46 Inspectors agreed with the college's overall assessment of quality assurance although they identified some weaknesses which were not included in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- a coherent framework for assuring the quality of the curriculum
- adoption of performance indicators for many areas of work
- staff commitment to high professional standards
- regular review of the college charter
- achievement of the Investor in People award

Weaknesses

- lack of rigour in ensuring compliance with the quality assurance framework
- adoption of some inappropriate targets
- overestimation of the quality of teaching and learning
- failure to extend the quality assurance framework to all areas
- slow implementation of quality assurance procedures

Cross-college Provision

47 Inspectors recognised that the college has made progress in developing its quality assurance procedures since its first FEFC inspection. Academic performance is reviewed through a quadrennial course review system and an annual review of achievements against targets, but there is incomplete coverage of cross-college services. The self-assessment report overstates the effectiveness of these procedures. Reports vary in the extent to which they adhere to the format required and in their level of self-criticism. Compliance with the system and the achievement of necessary improvements are not enforced by the academic board. Since 1996, the governors and the academic board have established retention and pass rate targets for each course. However, the targets are used to alert managers to problems rather than to encourage incremental improvement. Only two of the original four measures of achievement are being used and these are sometimes set at unrealistic or inappropriate levels. Governors have insisted that targets for the college as a whole follow a steady upward trend, but there are wide and apparently random variations between courses.

48 The academic board was reconstituted in September 1997. It mainly consists of managers. Only the student and student services representatives are now elected members. The board has received examination results, the self-assessment report, the revised mission statement and other quality assurance documents. Relatively little debate about them has been minuted and there is no record of proposed action. As part of its self-assessment process, college staff evaluated just over 100 lessons, using the same grading system as inspectors. Ninety-two per cent of classes were awarded grades 1 or 2, 28 per cent more than were judged to be of this standard during the inspection. The college has been slow to introduce formal measures of improving the quality of the curriculum, and has yet to establish fully a system for assessing the value added to students' achievements by their

experience at college. The revised quality assurance policy statement of September 1997 comprises a list of activities rather than a coherent policy. Other aspects of quality assurance are working well. The college charter is reviewed annually. Students' views are collected regularly through questionnaires.

49 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first to be produced by the college. The self-assessment process involved all staff and governors and was approached with a high degree of professionalism. The timing of the inspection did not allow sufficient time to seek formal external advice. Many of the procedures which contributed to the self-assessment are new and not fully tested, such as the grading of lesson observations by college staff. The self-assessment report is comprehensive in its coverage. The underlying self-assessment process is closely linked to the strategic planning and review cycle. Actions planned to build on strengths and remedy weaknesses are appropriate, and target dates are set, but there is no clear sense of their relative importance.

50 The college has amended its two staff appraisal schemes but has not brought them together. They operate mainly to provide staff with the opportunity to reflect on each year's work and to bring forward training or professional development needs. Staff development activity is based on these needs and on the priorities identified each year by managers. Professional skills have not been adequately addressed in staff development programmes and staff who need training are not pressed to undertake what is offered. The budget for staff development represents 2.5 per cent of staffing costs. The college achieved the Investor in People award in 1997.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 2

51 Inspectors considered that the college's assessment of governance overstated some strengths of provision. There are also some areas for development identified by inspectors which are not in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- governance arrangements which comply with statute and reflect good practice
- the expertise and experience of governors
- the efficient conduct of the board's work
- the board's close monitoring of finance
- good working relationships between governors and senior managers
- effective communication between governors and college staff

Weaknesses

- arrangements for clerkship which do not guarantee independent advice
- underdeveloped monitoring of the college's academic performance
- the college's mission statement
- governors' limited involvement in strategic planning

52 The FEFC's audit service concluded that within the scope of their assessment, the corporation conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. The corporation fulfils its responsibilities under the college's financial memorandum. The governance of the college is good. It has an effective finance and general purposes committee with appropriate terms of reference. Members are well informed about the college's financial position. The audit committee has appropriate terms of reference and it operates efficiently. However, it has sometimes

considered matters which are properly the responsibility of the finance and general purposes committee. The corporation keeps a register of members' interests. All but one governor has made an entry but some declarations are insufficiently detailed. Governors conduct their business efficiently and the formal duties of clerkship are carefully fulfilled. The clerk is also personal assistant to the vice-principal who is director of finance and planning. These circumstances compromise the clerk's independence in advising the corporation as the role requires.

53 The membership of 20 includes the principal, two members of staff and a student governor. As stated in the self-assessment report, governors take an active interest in the college and they use their wide range of expertise and experience to advise and guide it. They work well with senior managers, all of whom attend board meetings. Governors have established good relationships with staff and students.

54 Inspectors did not agree with the college's view that governors take a sufficiently strong lead in determining its mission. Strategic priorities are not made clear. Governors are insufficiently involved in framing the strategic plan. There is no specific governors' group for strategic planning. The corporation reviews strategic objectives annually, but it devotes a lessening amount of time to appraising the various drafts of the plan.

55 Governors are still developing their approach to monitoring academic performance. They have recently agreed a limited range of performance indicators and they consider students' achievements and the course reviews every year. A tighter focus for this work and careful distinction between the duties of governors and of the academic board are required. The corporation is beginning to assess its own performance. Once a term, part of a board meeting is dedicated to governor training.

Cross-college Provision

Management

Grade 2

56 A few weaknesses in management identified by inspectors were not included in the college's self-assessment report but overall the inspection findings were similar to the college's own.

Key strengths

- the new management team
- communication at all levels of the college
- strong links with the wider community
- prudent financial management
- effective deployment of staff

Weaknesses

- some outdated policies and procedures
- insufficiently firm management of moves to secure improvements in students' achievements
- the management of the Wey Valley Business School

57 The FEFC's audit service concluded that within the scope of their assessment that financial management is good. Preparation of the annual budget is well organised and carefully documented. Budgets for educational supplies and staff development are delegated to heads of department. Access to the management information system has improved since the college conducted its self-assessment. All budget holders are receiving training in financial procedures and in the use of the financial information which is available to them. The college has sound internal and external audit arrangements. Its financial regulations have not yet been updated to reflect the new management structure. The college's average level of funding for 1997-98 is £16.27 per unit. The median for tertiary colleges is £16.72 per unit.

58 Effective consultation and planning led to the introduction of a new management structure in September 1997. Senior managers have generally responded well to the changing demands made of them. The principal's newly established management group is beginning to work well. The curriculum is now managed through nine departments. The new heads of these departments are enthusiastic about their roles, their improved access to senior managers and the speed with which they can make changes. They have a slightly reduced teaching load and are receiving training to carry out their responsibilities. Communication at all levels has improved.

59 Detailed market analysis is used to inform college planning. Heads of department are consulted when projections of enrolments, staffing and funding are made. Since reorganisation, strategic planning issues have been considered at fortnightly meetings of the principal's management group and improvements are now likely to occur.

60 The Wey Valley Business School delivers professional and business courses, NVQs and all TEC-funded work. It also provides staff to act as assessors and verifiers of NVQ work which is undertaken on employers' premises. Representatives of external organisations, including the TEC, speak highly of their links with the college and of the quality of the students who undertake work placements. The self-assessment report acknowledges that: the school is not sufficiently guided by market analysis; the roles of the school's director and managers are unclear; and the level of achievement of its students is poor. An early decision on the future of the school is planned.

61 Teachers are effectively deployed. Contractual arrangements allow the college to adjust its teaching staff to match enrolments. Staffing costs account for about 70 per cent of the college's expenditure. There is a comprehensive range of personnel policies and

Cross-college Provision

procedures although many of these have not been updated to take account of changes since incorporation. The college has appropriate policies and procedures for other aspects of its work. Equal opportunities are promoted actively by a committee which works to clear targets. The college acknowledges that students' awareness of equal opportunities, environmental policy and the complaints procedure is poor.

Conclusions

62 Despite the newness of the self-assessment process, inspectors found the self-assessment report useful in planning and carrying out the inspection. They considered the findings of the self-assessment report to be generally accurate. Most of the grades determined by the college were judged by the inspection team to be well founded. However, the college overestimated some strengths, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	55
19-24 years	12
25+ years	33
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	23
Intermediate	14
Advanced	59
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	4
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	359	260	22
Agriculture	6	5	0
Engineering	47	31	3
Business	179	175	13
Hotel and catering	52	14	2
Health and community care	101	104	7
Art and design	188	69	9
Humanities	602	475	38
Basic education	13	148	6
Total	1,547	1,281	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (September 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	71	24	0	95
Supporting direct learning contact	8	6	0	14
Other support	29	8	0	37
Total	108	38	0	146

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial Data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£4,432,000	£4,930,000	£4,957,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.41	£16.54	£17.49
Payroll as a proportion of income	72%	71%	71%
Achievement of funding target	95%	107%	(est) 113%
Diversity of income	20%	17%	12%
Operating surplus	-£33,000	£56,000	£119,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	410	433	507
	Average point score per entry	5.9	5.6	5.7
	Position in tables	top 10%	top 10%	top 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	112	151	108
	Percentage achieving qualification	84%	89%	93%
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top 10 %
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	103	82
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	50%	71%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	top third

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

Source: DfEE

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	89	86	91
	Retention (%)	85	76	83
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	64	63	67
	Retention (%)	84	80	82
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	94	91	93
	Retention (%)	93	82	75
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	69	63	74
	Retention (%)	84	82	84

Source: college data

FEFC Inspection Report 03/98

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
January 1998**