

Bishop Auckland 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	6

Curriculum areas

Computing and information technology	8
Engineering	12
Business	18
Health, social and childcare	24
Basic education	29

Cross-college provision

Support for students	34
General resources	40
Quality assurance	47
Governance	54
Management	58
Conclusions	67

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

Summary

Bishop Auckland College

Northern Region

Inspected October 1997

Bishop Auckland College is a general further education college serving south-west County Durham and beyond. The college was the first in the Northern Region to be inspected in the new four-year cycle of inspections. The college's self-assessment report was comprehensive and concise. It was underpinned by the college's well-established and externally accredited quality assurance system. The report was developed after thorough self-evaluation involving college managers, staff and governors. It contained judgements on teaching and learning but few judgements on students' achievements. Inspectors concluded that the college overstated the quality of some of its provision. However, some of its strengths were understated. The college constantly seeks and responds to the views of students, employers and many others about its provision. The college did not give this strength full recognition in the report.

The college offers a wide range of courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in five of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college meets the needs of local students, employers and community groups. It has rapidly expanded its mainly vocational provision in recent years.

The college works effectively with many partners, including the County Durham and Darlington TEC, who view the college as responsive and supportive. The majority of college students attend part time and nearly 80 per cent are over 18 years of age. Many new curriculum-related projects support local business, community groups and those who would not normally enter further education. The college is well governed and well managed. It plans its provision carefully, working hard to attract students and develop their personal and career aspirations. The college provides students with outstanding personal support, whether in the college or at other centres. Accommodation is clean and well maintained. Students have good access to high-quality information technology to support their studies. Staff are committed to students and to the continuous improvement of standards. Students generally experience high-quality teaching. Retention is often excellent but it varies across courses. The quality of health and social care provision is outstanding. The college should: address the significant weaknesses in engineering; analyse the destinations of students more consistently; improve library provision; strengthen its quality assurance framework; establish a formal strategy to develop its accommodation; and rationalise its management information system to improve its operation.

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

Curriculum areas	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	2	Support for students	1
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Business	2	Quality assurance	2
Health, social and childcare	1	Governance	2
Basic education	2	Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Bishop Auckland College was established on its present site in the 1950s to provide education and training mainly for mining and railway engineering industries that no longer exist. It is situated on a semi-rural campus about one mile from the centre of town. The college gives a high priority to working in partnership with local, regional and other agencies to encourage access to, and provide, mainly post-16 vocational education and training. It offers a wide range of courses and programmes from basic education to degree level. The higher education courses offered by the college are franchised from the universities of Sunderland and Teesside, and it is an associate college for the Open University certificate of education. Five 11 to 16 schools are served by the college. The other providers of post-16 education in the area are seven 11 to 18 comprehensive schools, one private school and colleges of further education in Durham City 13 miles to the north and Darlington 12 miles to the south. Darlington also has a sixth form college. There are a number of other youth training providers nearby and an information technology centre.

2 The college sponsors the Durham Local Education Authority (LEA) adult basic education provision in the south of the county. It also provides the education service at Deerbolt Young Offenders' Institution at Barnard Castle, and operates its own managing agency for 103 youth credits and 32 modern apprenticeships. Provision is also offered in Spennymoor at the Sedgefield Borough Training Centre; the Teesdale Training Centre in Barnard Castle; South West Durham Training Centre and the Aycliffe Centre for Young People in Newton Aycliffe; and Wolsingham Community College in Weardale. In addition, the college operates in more than 20 centres based in communities across the south-west County Durham districts of Sedgefield, Teesdale, Wear Valley, and

beyond. The local participation rate in post-16 education is 49 per cent. This represents an improvement on previous years but it remains the lowest in County Durham, which is, in turn, one of the lowest nationally.

3 Student enrolments at the college have grown significantly since incorporation, from 3,353 in 1992-93 to 17,697 in 1996-97. There were 11,838 students enrolled through outward collaborative provision in 1996-97. These figures would have been higher but for cuts in funding during that year. The college had 347 full-time students in 1992. This had risen to 873 by 1997, the majority of whom were aged 16 to 19. The college's income has grown from £3.8 million in 1993-94 to £6.2 million in 1996-97. The college employs 71 full-time equivalent permanent teachers and 32 part-time teachers on fixed-term contracts. There are 105 full-time equivalent support staff, including those who directly support student learning. These figures do not include the staff and students at the Deerbolt Young Offenders' Institution.

4 The college serves a population of approximately 130,000, and an area of 300 square miles, 40 per cent of the area of County Durham. The area served by the college poses significant geographical problems for prospective students, especially those living in outlying districts. Many locations in which the college now operates are formally designated areas of severe economic and social poverty. Low levels of car ownership, problems with transport and rural deprivation all contribute to the difficulties the college faces in increasing the participation of people in education and training. Economic regeneration to improve the area has been slow to develop. The college is an active partner in many European and government-funded community projects. Unemployment in the area served by the college is currently 11 per cent compared with the national rate of 6.2 per cent. Male unemployment is substantially greater than

Context

female and decreasing at a slower rate. Ninety-four per cent of firms in the area employ fewer than 50 people and account for 44 per cent of the workforce. Under 3 per cent of firms employ 100 or more people and account for 43 per cent of the workforce. The service sector and manufacturing industries provide the majority of jobs. Regional and local strategic planning groups identify leisure, tourism and rural development as growth areas.

5 The recently revised mission of the college is 'to be the first choice provider of quality education and training, working in partnership to meet the needs of individual learners, employers and the wider community of south and west Durham'. It intends to achieve this through a range of strategic commitments including:

- encouraging lifetime learning underpinned by the principles of equal opportunity
- using information and learning technologies to improve access to learning
- contributing to economic and social regeneration in the area through partnerships
- increasing local communities' awareness and expectations of learning opportunities
- using the principles of continuous improvement to assure the quality of provision
- investing in college staff, partners and capital to harness their full potential
- managing all college resources so as to ensure effective and efficient operation.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week commencing 13 October 1997. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1994 to 1997. These were validated by an inspector against selected primary sources, including registers and class lists issued by examining bodies. The inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors working for a total of 29 days in the college and at other centres in the community used by the college. An FEFC auditor also was part of the team. Inspectors observed 55 lessons and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. They met representatives of the County Durham and Darlington Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), students, parents, employers, college governors, managers and staff, and a range of other people who have an interest in the college.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 69 per cent were rated good or outstanding and only 2 per cent were rated less than satisfactory. The profile of grades is better than the average for colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons observed was 84 per cent. The highest attendance was in computing and information technology at 85 per cent and the lowest in engineering at 62 per cent. The average class size of those inspected was 9.7. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	3	9	7	0	0	19
NVQ	3	4	2	1	0	10
Other vocational	2	10	1	0	0	13
Other*	1	6	6	0	0	13
Total	9	29	16	1	0	55

**includes basic and higher education*

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

8 The inspection covered intermediate and advanced general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), and computer literacy and information technology provision accredited by the Open College Network and other awarding bodies, including City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and RSA Examinations Board (RSA). Ten lessons were observed in the college and at other centres. The college's self-assessment of this area generally matched that of inspectors, with some exceptions. The college made little use of lesson observations to inform its grading of computing and information technology.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- good pass rates and work that is generally of a high standard
- accurate advice and guidance to students
- up-to-date and high-quality computer resources
- development of key skills, partly in college and through realistic work experience
- provision at the Sedgefield Borough Training Centre that matches the quality of provision on the main site

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates for the few students on the advanced GNVQ in information technology
- missed opportunities to involve and challenge students in some lessons
- occasional inadequate training of teachers before new software is introduced
- inconsistency in assessing the quality of students' work

9 The college offers a large number of vocationally oriented computing and information technology courses. These are available on the main site and elsewhere through partnership or outward collaborative arrangements. Courses are mostly offered part time, through the day and evening, and increasingly on Saturday mornings. The college also currently offers two full-time GNVQ programmes, one at intermediate level and one at advanced level. The college is discussing extending the range of provision to include a higher national diploma in business information technology with the University of Teesside. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment which states that students are provided with clear advice and guidance to help them with their studies.

10 Overall, students achieve a high standard of work for the level of study undertaken and most remain on their course. In 1997, 73 per cent of the 12 students on the intermediate GNVQ in information technology achieved the qualification. This is significantly better than the national average of 37 per cent in 1995-96. Retention was 92 per cent. Students on the advanced GNVQ in information technology were less successful. Of the seven students initially enrolled in 1995 only one achieved the full qualification. The achievements of the many students on other one-year programmes were excellent. Pass rates were 80 per cent or above. Inspectors concluded that the college's self-assessment report overstates the extent to which students are informed about progression to other courses prior to completing their course.

11 Teaching in this area is of a good standard. Most courses are well planned and well managed. Each course team keeps comprehensive student records, course files, schemes of work, external verifier reports and other relevant documentation. Teachers have appropriate qualifications for the level of work undertaken. They teach on both the main site and at other centres to ensure that students receive a consistent learning experience. In a

Curriculum Areas

few lessons, students are not given sufficient work to do. This is most noticeable in the intermediate GNVQ programme where tasks are generally too easy for the abilities of the students. Students appreciate the access they have to a wide range of up-to-date computer hardware and software to support their learning. The process for ensuring consistency in assessing the quality of students' work is underdeveloped and is not adequately addressed in the college's self-assessment.

Examples of students' achievements in computing and information technology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQs, national diplomas)	Retention (%)	15	+	86
	Pass rate (%)	100	+	17
Intermediate vocational (GNVQs, C&G)	Retention (%)	75	89	96
	Pass rate (%)	94	93	80
Other (Open College Network, RSA)	Retention (%)	95	89	94
	Pass rate (%)	83	79	85

*Source: college data
+course not running*

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

12 Inspectors observed 10 lessons which included elements of practice and theory, and visited the South West Durham Training Centre. Inspectors recognised some of the strengths claimed in the report but found important weaknesses which had not been included or given sufficient emphasis.

Key strengths

- the appointment of a new co-ordinator for the section
- provision which offers choice and progression for students
- use of new technologies to support learning
- sound and well-planned teaching
- good achievements on the majority of part-time courses
- well-equipped, specialist accommodation

Weaknesses

- poorly managed course files
- lack of a formal assignment and testing programme in some areas
- shortcomings in the assessment and verification of some students' portfolios of work
- generally poor retention and pass rates on the full-time programme
- insufficient full-time staff to administer and develop study programmes
- poor physical resources to support motor vehicle work

13 The college continues to support engineering provision though demand for it has been declining in line with changes in the local economy. A report into the future of the engineering provision commissioned by the

college led to increased investment and the appointment of a programme area co-ordinator. Although engineering is a relatively small provision, it offers students a good choice of specialist engineering studies and attendance modes, and opportunities for progression within the college. Course leaders have left or changed responsibilities recently and this has resulted in a heavy workload for those remaining. Some teachers are now responsible for administering and developing several courses as well as being the primary teachers on those courses.

Inspectors found that some course files were incomplete and that it was difficult to obtain accurate detailed records of course operations. The pressure on teachers was acknowledged in the self-assessment report but its effects on course administration were not.

14 The profile of lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors matched the national figures for engineering given in the chief inspector's annual report. Most of the lessons inspected had sound, well-prepared teaching. In a minority, the activity planned failed to hold the students' interest. In these lessons, the students were restive and some did not make sufficient progress. Teachers used good general and specialist resources for information technology to support students' learning and improve their proficiency. The self-assessment report recognised this as a strength of the provision. Teachers have attempted to improve the effectiveness of learning programmes with varying degrees of success. The best example is shown in the higher national certificate programme where students are encouraged to take a mix of units which takes account of their differing abilities to enable them to complete their studies in less than two years. In other programmes, attempts to encourage students to manage their work throughout their programme have been less successful.

15 Several courses lack an agreed programme of assignments and where this occurs there is no regular formal testing of students. All units

Curriculum Areas

are assessed entirely through course work. Shortcomings were evident in the method and verification of assessments in the portfolios of some students' work. These weaknesses are acknowledged within the college, and some corrective actions are being taken but it was too early for the college to evaluate their effectiveness in its self-assessment report.

16 The college's full-time engineering programmes have poor retention rates. For example, on the 1995-97 advanced GNVQ course in engineering, only half the 10 students finished the course and none gained the qualification at the first attempt. The one-year intermediate programme also lost half its students. Performances on the part-time courses are much better and results frequently exceed the national average. In 1994-96, 23 of the 25 students enrolled on the higher national certificate course remained on the course until the end and all achieved their award within the two years.

17 Full-time teachers have appropriate teaching qualifications, some industrial experience and considerable service to education. Some specialist areas, for example computer-aided design, are well resourced and housed in good accommodation. Motor vehicle studies suffers from poor equipment. This is recognised by the college in its self-assessment report and investment is planned. The college has greatly reduced its manufacturing workshop facility in the light of falling enrolments.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQs, national diploma)	Retention (%)	44	42	25
	Pass rate (%)	25	20	0
Intermediate vocational (GNVQs, NVQs, first diploma, national certificates)	Retention (%)	66	78	71
	Pass rate (%)	61	42	49
Other (C&G, RSA)	Retention (%)	71	83	76
	Pass rate (%)	82	84	47

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

18 The inspection included business management and business administration provision. Fourteen lessons were inspected, including some at a training centre used by the college. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report failed to identify accurately some strengths and weaknesses in its provision. Insufficient attention was given to examination results and to retention rates.

Key strengths

- a portfolio of courses that is responsive to the needs of young people and employers
- pass rates for full-time courses which are consistently above the national average
- well-organised lessons by teachers who use a variety of teaching methods
- good use of information technology resources
- well-presented portfolios of students' work in NVQ and GNVQ programmes

Weaknesses

- a minority of lessons which are poorly prepared and poorly taught
- full-time teachers who lack recent commercial experience
- inadequate management links between different parts of the business provision

19 The college offers a broad range of business, management and administration courses. The portfolio of courses is sensitive to the identified needs of young people and employers. New courses have been provided, or are planned, in areas such as public service, modern apprenticeships, and accounting. Enrolment targets for full-time courses in this

area have not been met for the last three years and some groups have been amalgamated to ensure that courses continue. The work of business management and business administration is managed by separate programme area co-ordinators. The self-assessment report did not clearly differentiate between the two areas when listing strengths and weaknesses. Weaknesses of the administration area, such as poor retention and completion rates for NVQ courses, do not feature in the report. The action plan effectively addresses weaknesses identified in the report.

20 Business and management courses are offered by a single programme area but business administration and secretarial courses are offered by the information technology and administration programme area. In many respects this organisation works well. For example, information technology and staff resources are shared easily between teams. However, in other respects the separation is less satisfactory. For example, inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report paid insufficient attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the business administration courses. It did not identify difficulties in course management. A number of new appointments have been made. It is too early to judge if this will lead to sustainable improvements.

21 Much of the teaching observed was good. Teachers on most full-time courses prepared their lessons well and provided students with a range of activities which sustained their interest throughout the lessons, some of which lasted two to three hours. On the intermediate GNVQ programme in business and on advanced courses some teachers organised effective group work. Teachers moved from group to group assessing students' progress. They brought the whole class together two or three times in a single lesson to review students' learning and to explain any difficulties which had arisen. Teachers broke long lessons into manageable periods and this was appreciated by students.

Curriculum Areas

In part-time higher national and national vocational courses teachers made good use of students' work experience to illustrate business concepts and practices. In a minority of classes, lessons were poorly prepared or work set for students was too low for their level of ability.

22 The quality of students' written work is generally good. However, feedback to students is sometimes insufficiently detailed to show how they might improve their work, or to justify the grade awarded. Although portfolios for the administration NVQ and advanced GNVQ in business are generally presented well, some teachers' assessments are not always justified and some work was over graded. Although the pass rates on intermediate and advanced GNVQs in business match the national average, the rates have fallen significantly in the last three years. Retention rates have also worsened. The pass rates for many part-time business and administration courses are good. The pass rates on some courses have deteriorated over the past three years. For example, pass rates on intermediate vocational NVQ level 3 and management courses were poor in 1996-97.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQs)	Retention (%)	75	83	71
	Pass rate (%)	75	40	58
Intermediate vocational (GNVQs, national certificates)	Retention (%)	89	70	89
	Pass rate (%)	93	86	81
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	69	64	70
	Pass rate (%)	100	84	73
NVQ level 3	Retention (%)	100	77	84
	Pass rate (%)	50	59	38

Source: college data

23 Teachers are generally well qualified. Over 90 per cent of full-time teachers have an appropriate teaching qualification. The few part-time teachers bring recent experience of industry and commerce. The college's self-assessment report identifies that full-time teachers lack recent commercial experience and that a programme of secondments to commerce to address this would be agreed by June 1997. At the time of the inspection, no plan for this had been produced. Lessons on the main site and at other centres take place in well-appointed and well-decorated rooms. Students enjoy easy access to a range of networked computers that are equipped with appropriate software. A model training office has been refurbished to provide a more realistic setting for business administration courses. As yet, the training office lacks a commercial identity and an appropriate entrance.

Curriculum Areas

Health, Social and Childcare

Grade 1

24 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in health and social care, childcare and nursery nursing. The college's self-assessment report is thorough and generally accurate, but a few weaknesses noted by inspectors were not identified by the college. Inspectors concluded that evaluation of students' pass rates and retention rates were not sufficiently highlighted in the self-assessment.

Key strengths

- high standards of teaching with well-prepared and detailed lesson plans
- a wide range of programmes that offer good opportunities for students to progress
- excellent pass rates
- high standards of students' work
- a good range of work placement opportunities for students
- well-motivated and enthusiastic students
- teaching staff who support individual and group needs
- well-equipped base rooms that meet specialist needs

Weaknesses

- a few students insufficiently challenged in group work activities
- variable retention rates on some courses

25 Teachers are well prepared and use detailed plans that specify the methods that teachers will use and activities for students in lessons. Key learning points are frequently reinforced in lessons through a variety of methods. Teachers successfully relate subject knowledge to professional practice. Resource

materials such as worksheets or case studies are integrated effectively with lessons encouraging high levels of student interest and activity. Such materials are well selected and relate theory to practice. Most students are actively involved in lessons, although occasionally they are not given sufficient work in group activities.

26 Students are generally well motivated, enjoy their studies and work confidently. This accords with the college's self-assessment report. Good levels of knowledge and skills are shown in students' assignments which are generally well presented. Students feel well supported and believe they are treated as equals. For example, one student who had been away from education for 30 years spoke positively of her experiences. Her self-esteem and confidence had improved appreciably during attendance at the college. Besides achieving her main certificate in caring skills, she also gained additional appropriate qualifications in first aid and health and hygiene.

27 Students' pass rates are excellent across the range of courses. Inspectors supported the college's view that there are outstanding pass rates on the foundation and advanced GNVQ courses in health and social care. For example, on the foundation programme, students achieved pass rates of 67 per cent, 90 per cent and 88 per cent respectively, over the past three years. The national average for such provision was 34 per cent in 1996. On the advanced programme, students achieved a pass rate of 92 per cent in 1995-96 compared with the national average of 56 per cent. Nursery nursing students achieved equally high standards. Results on NVQ programmes are more variable though still good. Retention rates are better than the national average except on the advanced GNVQ course in health and social care. The college is taking action to improve retention.

Curriculum Areas

28 Work placement opportunities for students are an integral part of all programmes.

Inspectors agreed with the college's view that it had good links with local employers. Most teachers are appropriately qualified. Specialist base rooms are appropriately equipped to reflect the needs of client groups, particularly in childcare. Teaching rooms are comfortable and well maintained.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, NVQ, national and advanced diplomas)	Retention (%)	85	84	77
	Pass rate (%)	88	82	81
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ, NVQ)	Retention (%)	72	65	75
	Pass rate (%)	86	59	56
Foundation vocational (GNVQ)	Retention (%)	75	71	70
	Pass rate (%)	67	90	88
Other (certificate in caring skills)	Retention (%)	96	76	86
	Pass rate (%)	100	97	93

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 2

29 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in basic education. The scope of the inspection did not include specially designed provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's self-assessment report for the programme area identified and graded five subprogramme areas. Inspectors generally acknowledged the strengths identified in the self-assessment. However, the college failed to mention important weaknesses. Most significantly, deficiencies relating to students' achievements and some aspects of curriculum management had not been identified by the college.

Key strengths

- effective teaching that is well planned and organised
- good standard of students' work
- students who are highly motivated
- good specialist teaching accommodation

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate schemes of accreditation
- insufficient distinction made between the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with basic skills needs

30 The college is expanding its provision of basic education, achieving 334 enrolments in 1996-97. The largest programme is the 'drop-in' access basic skills programme at the main college site. An increasing amount of basic education provision is offered at four other centres. One basic education programme is successfully franchised to the Aycliffe Centre for Young People. It has around 140 trainees each year. Inspection findings confirmed the college's view that it has strong links with the local

community and is taking positive action to widen participation by encouraging the attendance of students who would not normally enter further education. College management information is not effectively used by the course team and there is insufficient analysis and reporting of performance at programme level.

31 Most teaching is effective. Lessons are generally well planned and carefully organised. Teachers provide good individual teaching and give students clear instructions. In the most effective lessons, teachers ensured that learning activities took account of the interests and experience of the students. In a few lessons, teachers did not demand enough of students. Assignments are developed from the topics identified in students' action plans. In planning and organising the curriculum, staff do not adequately distinguish between the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who need to develop their basic skills. Students are interviewed and receive an effective initial assessment of their learning needs. Planning of students' individual learning programmes is not yet fully effective. For example, few tutors identify students' short-term learning targets. Students' records describe tasks that have been undertaken and not skills that have been developed. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

32 Most students are highly motivated, gain confidence during their time at the college and develop relevant skills. Students' work is of a good standard and is assessed effectively. Teachers use a wide range of accredited qualifications to endorse students' performance but some students take qualifications that are not appropriate to their learning needs. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report overstated the standard of students' achievements. Few students entered for examinations compared with the number who started courses. Only one in five students acquired a full qualification, much

Curriculum Areas

lower than the average for the programme area nationally, although more completed later.

33 Teachers work hard and are committed to the students. All the teachers have a teaching qualification and most have a specialist qualification, for example, in teaching basic skills. The college provides high-quality specialist teaching accommodation in the study centre and the adult learning workshop. In these rooms, students have access to a good range of learning materials and to personal computers with appropriate software. Effective use is made of CD-ROMs to develop students' literacy skills. Teaching equipment and learning resources are more restricted at some of the centres away from the college. This was not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

34 Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report accurately portrays this area.

Key strengths

- effective methods to inform prospective students of college provision
- initial assessment of numeracy and communication key skills and provision of follow-up support
- high-quality tutorial support for students
- an effective personal careers development programme for all students that is externally accredited
- arrangements for setting up and monitoring work experience placements
- a large nursery for students' children
- a comprehensive range of social and welfare services
- the support provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Weaknesses

- the inadequate collection and use of information relating to students' destinations
- no formal evaluation of the tutorial programme

35 The college provides a student support service of high quality to meet the needs of individual students, many of whom live in remote and sparsely populated communities. It makes efficient and effective use of community newsletters, mailshots, high-profile publicity events, press releases and mobile displays to inform prospective students of the learning opportunities which the college offers. The college successfully attracts students, many of whom have low prior achievements and personal aspirations. It provides impartial

advice and guidance to place them correctly on a programme of study. A productive induction procedure ensures that new students are effectively introduced to the college and the services it provides. The induction programme has been improved after evaluation of students' opinions on the quality of the programme. Appropriate measures are taken to ensure that late enrollers are introduced adequately to the college.

36 There are well-established and effective procedures for assessing full-time students' competence in the key skills of numeracy and communication but not their information technology skills. The tests have been developed by the college to suit students on specific courses. Part-time students are tested at the request of the course teams if students show a need for support or request it themselves. Personal tutors are informed of test results in sufficient time to enable appropriate support to be provided. Individual support is provided by either the course team in timetabled lessons or by the college student support co-ordinator.

37 Most students in the college benefit from the well-organised tutorial programme. Students value the support provided by tutors and feel able to approach them with problems. Students at other centres also have access to good tutorial support. This strength was not adequately recognised in the college's self-assessment. The effectiveness of the tutorial arrangements is not routinely monitored by managers and opportunities to share good practice are sometimes missed. Students also have access to a wide range of other welfare services provided through the student support team. The 100-place nursery is valued highly by students. Nursery staff accommodate individual students' childcare needs at short notice. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported while at college. A newly appointed co-ordinator ensures personal needs are met.

38 Students are provided with high-quality careers guidance. A personal careers

Cross-college Provision

development programme is undertaken by full-time students as part of their formal learning programme. It was designed in partnership with the careers service and results in a qualification awarded by NCFE. It ensures that students are better informed of the career options available to them. The college liaises effectively with the careers service and all students have the right to a personal interview each year. In 1996-97, over 50 per cent of students took up the opportunity to meet a careers officer. Tutorial staff assess the progress of students in their studies but there is no central co-ordination of these activities. This leads to inconsistency of practice. The collection and use of destination data are currently underdeveloped. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's statement that use could be made of destination data to improve advice to future students.

39 The college provides comprehensive and well-managed opportunities for work experience for full-time students. A work placement co-ordination team liaises well with course teams to identify students' individual needs and tries to take account of these in making placements. These arrangements enable the college to provide work experience for all its full-time students. The co-ordination team liaises with those arranging work experience for school pupils. This maximises the number of places available. A team of qualified youth workers provides effective social and welfare support to students during their leisure time in the 'Hive' youth centre, a specially designed meeting place for students on the main site.

General Resources

Grade 2

40 The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive and contains clear judgements on the quality of general resources which were, in the main, supported by inspection findings.

Key strengths

- appealing and well-maintained accommodation
- good access to high-quality computer resources
- good progress in refurbishing areas of the college and improving access for wheelchair users
- good general facilities provided for students at other centres used by the college

Weaknesses

- inadequate library space and a small range of books in some curriculum areas
- lack of a planned programme for the upgrading and replacement of equipment

41 The college's main site on the outskirts of Bishop Auckland comprises a range of interconnected buildings, dating from the 1950s, with additions in the 1960s. The college also uses over 20 other locations in community centres and schools in south-west County Durham. Since the last inspection, the main site has been refurbished and redecorated to a high standard. All areas are cleaned frequently and are free of graffiti. Students and staff report that they are proud of this environment. Photographic displays of students' work around the college reflect the college's mission by showing groups working on a range of activities in the college and in the community. Staff work areas are good.

42 In its self-assessment report the college confirms that the professional advice it sought in 1994 to assess its use of accommodation identified that the college had over 40 per cent more space than it needed, and that teaching rooms were underused. For example, teaching rooms were used for an average of only 15.8 hours a week. Since then, the college has sought to improve its performance. Several smaller rooms have been combined to accommodate more students.

Cross-college Provision

43 The college has made major improvements to some of its buildings. Its main reception area is attractive. The recently developed 'Optimum' centre for business and commercial services has been professionally fashioned from a large lecture theatre. This was achieved in partnership with the County Durham and Darlington TEC, County Durham Business Link and Wear Valley Development Agency. Video-conferencing facilities to improve communications with more remote locations have been developed with sponsorship from a national company. The college has made good progress in making more areas of the college accessible to wheelchair users, though the top three floors of the tower block still lack adequate access for people with restricted mobility.

44 Inspectors supported the college's claim that social facilities for students at the main site are good, especially the Hive youth centre provided to accommodate students during their leisure time. General facilities provided at other centres take into account the needs of students. Some of these centres have been refurbished in association with partners. The college refectory provides a welcoming environment for students and staff. The college works hard to provide a range of sports activities for students, including Muay Thai and basketball, though the number participating is not large. Activities take place in a dilapidated gym which has little equipment and only basic changing facilities.

45 Students enjoy good access to high-quality computers that are up to date, networked and have appropriate software. Over 140 workstations are located in a variety of centres around the college, including the library and resource centre. A number of other computers are located in the other centres used by the college. Twelve laptop computers are used to support students in more remote community locations. The college invests well in its information technology but lacks a rolling programme to update or replace general resources.

46 The library has some weaknesses, which the college identified in its self-assessment report. It does not have sufficient books to support all curriculum areas. Although many students on full-time courses are provided with a course textbook, in several areas more specialised texts are not available. The college has around 8,500 books of which 35 per cent have been published in the last five years. It does not carry a central catalogue of resources held in other parts of the college, such as curriculum areas. Shelf space to store and display books in the library is inadequate. Generally, students have adequate access to study spaces in the library and further study spaces are available in other parts of the college such as the learning resource centre. The centre provides students with access to computer-based resources and learning packs from the further education national consortium. Both the library and learning resource centre are open and staffed for 10 hours a day. The learning resource centre also opens on Saturday morning and is popular with part-time and full-time students. Occasionally, students in the library are disturbed by classes timetabled to use the area.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

47 The college's self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses that matched those identified by inspectors. However, the evidence cited for strengths too often related to the availability of procedures rather than the positive results of those procedures.

Cross-college Provision

Key strengths

- a comprehensive range of quality assurance procedures for most aspects of college operations
- accreditation of the college's main quality assurance systems to an internationally recognised standard
- a college-wide commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement
- extending quality assurance processes to the other centres used by the college
- evaluating and responding to many views of the college's provision
- good use of performance indicators and targets in the best team reviews

Weaknesses

- some aspects of the quality improvement cycle are not yet incorporated within the main quality system
- slow progress in systematically reviewing established courses
- variable operation of the internal verification process

48 Inspection findings confirmed the strong commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement throughout the college. The college charter is widely available and well known to staff and students. It has been subject to review recently. The quality assurance processes enable the college to satisfy the requirements of awarding bodies and the County Durham and Darlington TEC. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1995.

49 The college has been accredited to the ISO 9001 standard for most of its provision since 1993. It has a comprehensive set of procedures to assure quality in most college activities. New procedures are regularly developed, tested and incorporated into the system as needs arise. For example, the rapid development of provision in centres at a distance from the college resulted

in a new procedure being established. This ensured that clear and effective arrangements were in place to assure the quality of this provision. Some procedures relating to curriculum management are not fully operative. For example, an agreed process for reviewing, in depth, all courses on a five-year cycle is at an early stage of implementation and few courses have yet been reviewed. The college's internal verification process to moderate the assessment of students' work also operates inconsistently across the college.

50 The college in its self-assessment report underestimated the extent to which it actively seeks the views of all college users and others with an interest in the college. Questionnaires are used regularly to elicit the views of students and employers on the quality of courses and facilities. More informal methods are used to gather the views of parents. The quality assurance manager analyses and summarises these views to inform strategic planning. Summaries of the responses, and actions taken, are published in *Quality Matters* which is distributed in the college and to those outside organisations which contributed. Improvements have often resulted. For example, a suggestion from an employer that the total cost of courses should be included in the prospectus was implemented. An internal customer care process deals with suggestions, compliments and complaints made by those within the college community. External consultants have been used to advise on particular issues. For example, an independent report on benchmarking enabled the college to compare its performance in key areas with others in the sector.

51 All staff in the college are offered opportunities for personal development, and most participate. The staff development programme is largely determined by personal requests following discussions with line managers and consideration of college operational objectives. Staff teams are also asked to submit requests but few do. Records of

Cross-college Provision

staff development do not allow easy evaluation since separate systems are used for those activities which draw on the specific staff development budget and those provided within the college. The intended evaluation of the development activity after four months does not always take place. This weakness was identified in the college's self-assessment report. The college has had an agreed appraisal procedure for some years for all staff. The process is valued by those appraised but it is well behind schedule in some areas. The appraisal of teachers places an appropriate emphasis on teaching by including two lesson observations.

52 The main approach to reviewing the quality of individual courses is through the annual operating plans developed for each curriculum area. In the best cases, the development of these plans is informed by the results of questionnaires and analysis of students' retention on study programmes, pass rates and resource considerations. Targets for improvement, for example for enrolment, are used in operational plans; their achievement is reviewed in the following cycle. This process of drawing on several sources of information to inform the course review is not yet fully incorporated in the college's main quality assurance system. Practices for moderating and verifying course assessment processes vary across curriculum areas. These are currently under review with the aim of extending the use of the best procedures throughout the system.

53 The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive and concise. It results from an extensive self-assessment exercise in the period immediately before the inspection. It involved governors, managers and staff who work in all areas of the college. Evaluation of lessons helped to inform the report. The procedures used to produce the report are being developed to become an integral part of the college's main quality assurance system. The college was overgenerous in some of its judgements, particularly in relation to cross-college

provision. In addition, inspectors concluded that overall the college did not give sufficient weight to students' retention on courses and examination pass rates.

Governance

Grade 2

54 The college's self-assessment report concluded that the college is well governed. Inspectors confirmed this in most aspects although they identified shortcomings in the process for nominating new members to the corporation.

Key strengths

- the broad range of skills and experience offered by governors
- good attendance by governors at the corporate board meetings and related committees
- effective governor contributions to the development of the strategic plan
- excellent clerking arrangements
- good executive reports presented to the board

Weaknesses

- some long-standing vacancies on the board
- no systematic evaluation of board membership
- some minor discrepancies in operational procedures

55 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The college's board conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also fulfils its responsibilities under its financial memorandum. Current board membership comprises the principal, a member of staff, three co-opted members, and seven business

Cross-college Provision

members. The latter includes a TEC nominee. There are two long-standing vacancies for business members and one for a co-opted member. Although the corporation is aware of the need to fill these vacancies, the procedures for doing so have been relatively informal. There is no search committee with clearly defined terms of reference. Although new governors receive induction training, no continuing development and training programme has been established. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment. Members of the corporation play an active role in college affairs and conduct their business efficiently.

56 Clerking arrangements for the corporation and its committees are excellent. Termly meetings of the corporation are supported by clear papers and concise minutes. A record of corporation and committee meetings shows good attendance. The corporation has adopted a code of conduct but there are no standing orders to guide the conduct of the corporation and committee meetings. A register of members' interests has been established but there is little guidance on the extent of personal and financial interests which should be considered. The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure. The terms of reference of committees are reviewed and approved by the corporation each year but they do not fully accord with the FEFC's guidance. The audit committee operates effectively but has yet to appoint an independent co-opted member as required by the criteria for membership set by the corporation.

57 Members of the corporation are closely involved in the college's clear and well-established strategic planning process. They have an extended meeting on the plan, dividing into small groups working with managers to discuss and evaluate important strategic objectives. Governors evaluate the college's performance through reports from the executive and minutes of the academic board.

There is a staff member on the board. The college's strategic plans and financial forecasts relate well to the annual budget. This is closely scrutinised by governors to ensure it reflects the expected levels of activity within the college. Financial reporting is concise, clear and comprehensible with a focus on cash-flow reporting and forecasting.

Management

Grade 2

58 Inspection findings generally supported the college's self-assessment of management, although the college had difficulty in coming to a final decision about its quality.

Key strengths

- a well-established and effective strategic planning cycle
- good operational planning and monitoring of the achievement of strategic objectives
- a clear management structure devolved to appropriate levels
- effective lines of communication that include part-time staff
- good deployment of staff with careful monitoring of workloads
- a wide range of links with external agencies that have led to many fruitful partnerships

Weaknesses

- the lack of an accommodation strategy
- a computerised management information system that does not meet the requirements of all middle managers
- some college policies that are not fully updated and carried out

59 The college has a clear and recently updated mission statement that is well

Cross-college Provision

publicised both in the college and among its numerous partners. The strategic planning cycle is well documented and thoroughly implemented. Staff stated they were fully involved in the process and felt that they had scope to contribute to the plan. External agencies such as the County Durham and Darlington TEC and County Durham LEA are pleased to have been involved in discussions with the college about its strategic plan. Operational plans are effective and are cross-referenced to college strategic objectives. Each curriculum area and support service uses the relevant operational statements and deadlines to monitor its progress towards targets. The college lacks a formal strategy to develop its accommodation. The college's self-assessment report did not identify this weakness.

60 The principal and chief executive is the only senior post holder. She works with four senior managers in a closely knit and productive directorate. They work well with each other and with members of the corporation and meet frequently. Meetings have clear agendas and are well run. Minutes of meetings identify outstanding tasks, the personnel responsible and carefully considered deadlines. The management team which comprises the directorate and 15 managers also meets regularly. Although this group is large, it works well. College staff feel valued and respect managers. Industrial relations within the college are well established and constructive. New contracts of employment have been agreed across the college. All staff appointments are made with appropriate reference to equality of opportunity.

61 The college management structure evolves to ensure effective operation. Changes to the structure are smoothly introduced. Each director is responsible for a wide functional area: finance; corporate development; business and enterprise; and the curriculum. Support staff are located within appropriate directorates.

They are well managed and feel valued members of the college. Two senior curriculum managers, reporting to a director, manage the curriculum. They are responsible for all teaching staff and have too many people to appraise. The curriculum is subdivided into six programme areas with co-ordinators who are defined as managers but who are not on the management team. Most co-ordinators are responsible for a number of courses. All these middle managers and co-ordinators have well-defined roles and clear job descriptions. Meetings of senior managers result in targets that are clearly written and used by appropriate groups within the college. Both support staff and teachers welcome the participative style of college management.

62 Inspection findings confirmed the college's view that college communication is effective. All staff feel well informed and support the college's strategic aims, objectives and targets. A well-documented meetings schedule ensures that all staff are briefed regularly on important issues, usually by personal presentations from the principal. These are often followed up by written reports circulated to ensure that those unable to attend meetings are kept informed. A fortnightly staff bulletin containing interesting information is written in friendly and informal language. A comprehensive list of policies relates to college management but some are not yet fully set up or are out of date. A thorough equal opportunity policy covers appointments and induction programmes. It is carefully reviewed in the college's curriculum policy. However, inspectors agree with the college about the need to raise awareness of equal opportunities, and especially to ensure that teachers raise such issues, where appropriate, in dealing with curriculum content in lessons and in managing classes.

63 Part-time staff at the college receive a formal induction to ensure that they are aware of, and follow, college procedures. Overall, staff are well deployed. College managers state that,

Cross-college Provision

after deduction of time allocated to teachers for management duties, 95 per cent of the time available is spent on teaching. The management and development of one curriculum area was judged to be in need of improvement in the last inspection in December 1994. The shortcomings identified then have not been fully overcome. This was not mentioned in the college's self-assessment.

64 The college's self-assessment report identifies as a strength the excellent links the college has developed with external agencies. Inspectors concur with this judgement. Local school staff, careers officers, LEA and TEC representatives, employers and many community representatives praised the college on its willingness to establish partnerships in the deprived areas it serves. Many projects developed with a wide range of partners are led by, or involve, college staff.

65 The college maintains several computerised databases to provide management information. College data returns to the FEFC and responses to Council circulars are on time and generally accurate. Middle managers maintain many of their own records of data, some of which are paper based. Access by middle managers to centrally held data is limited. The college faced considerable difficulty in generating the data on students' achievements required for inspection purposes. It plans to reorganise and rationalise its management information system to improve its operation.

66 Within the scope of its review, the FEFC's audit service concludes that the financial management of the college is good. The finance team is led by a qualified accountant supported by an appropriate number of suitably qualified and experienced staff. Financial forecasts and strategic plans are well integrated and dependable. The college has turned an accumulated financial deficit into an accumulated surplus over a three-year period, exceeding its targets in this area. Management accounts are produced within 10 working days

of the month end and are closely reviewed by senior managers. Budget holders receive actual and committed financial information monthly. Financial regulations are regularly updated. The internal and external auditors of the college have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's internal control systems.

Conclusions

67 Although the self-assessment process is new and the college was inspected early in the new cycle of inspections, the college's self-assessment report reflected the robust and mature nature of its quality assurance system. Inspectors found that the self-assessment report was generally sound and evaluative. It served inspectors well in their preparations for inspection. Many of the judgements in the report were supported by sturdy evidence, except that relating to students' achievements, especially examination results and retention rates, which were rarely mentioned. Some lesson observations which informed college grades were not sufficiently evaluative. These were the main reasons for the differences in some of the grades awarded by the college and inspectors. Although the college overstated some of its strengths, it also understated others. The college had taken corrective actions in some areas following its self-assessment but it was too early for inspectors to judge whether these had been effective.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	19
19-24 years	13
25+ years	65
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	85
Intermediate	8
Advanced	5
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
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	50	2,004	12
Agriculture	10	63	0
Construction	0	160	1
Engineering	28	389	2
Business	71	1,086	7
Hotel and catering	126	173	2
Health and community care	195	11,125	63
Art and design	17	429	3
Humanities	197	1,255	8
Basic education	179	140	2
Total	873	16,824	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (September 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	71	32	0	103
Supporting direct learning contact	11	0	0	11
Other support	92	2	0	94
Total	174	34	0	208

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£4,188,000	£5,096,000	£6,189,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.65	£15.63	£18.73
Payroll as a proportion of income	73%	64%	55%
Achievement of funding target	116%	134%	214%
Diversity of income	36%	38%	36%
Operating surplus	-£388,000	£127,000	£294,000

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	14	11	16
	Average point score per entry	3.2	2.7	1.9
	Position in tables	middle third	bottom third	bottom 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	82	78	40
	Percentage achieving qualification	72%	79%	50%
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	bottom 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	48	52
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	54%	54%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	bottom third

Source: DfEE

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

Note: The majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older. The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

FEFC Inspection Report 08/98

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