

Brighton College of Technology

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Brighton College of Technology *South East Region*

Inspected June 2000

Brighton College of Technology is a medium-sized general further education college that provides courses in all programme areas funded by the FEFC, from entry level to higher education. It primarily serves the communities of Brighton and Hove but some students travel from further afield. The college has strong links with the borough council and major employers in the area. Collaborative links also exist with the two local universities, schools and other further education colleges. The college produced its fifth self-assessment report for the inspection. It was well written and inspectors agreed with many of the judgements it contained. However, some weaknesses were understated and others were not identified. Not all staff were fully involved in the process of formulating the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with six of the curriculum area grades but only one of the cross-college grades.

Many of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection have not been fully addressed. The management information system still has shortcomings and is producing unreliable data. Student retention rates are still below average, and not enough is being done to improve them.

However, the college has made significant strides in improving students' achievements. Most lessons have comprehensive schemes of work. Key skills are well integrated with other aspects of vocational courses. The arrangements for identifying students' learning support needs are effective, although too few students take up the support. Some significant improvements have been made to the accommodation, and the new accommodation strategy, which is supported by the FEFC, is well thought out. The college has good financial management systems. Governors have good links with curriculum and business areas. The quality assurance system is well documented but inconsistently applied. The college should address: poor retention rates; poor attendance and punctuality; inadequate access to IT for some students; the lack of dissemination of good practice; low take up of learning support; poor space utilisation; limited range of basic skills provision; inconsistency of tutorial support; insufficient careers advice and guidance; poor access for students with restricted mobility; non compliance with quality assurance procedures; insufficiently critical lesson observations; lack of measurable targets at all levels of the organisation; inadequate governor training; inconsistent management practices; and unreliable and inaccurate management information.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	3	Support for students	4
Business	3	General resources	3
Hospitality and catering	2	Quality assurance	4
Hair and beauty	2	Governance	3
Art, design and media	2	Management	3
Humanities	3		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Brighton College of Technology is a general college of further education on the south coast. It developed from a number of separate Victorian educational institutions. In the early 1960s, Brighton College of Technology divided into Brighton Polytechnic (which became the University of Brighton), and the present further education college. Within the local authority of Brighton and Hove there are two sixth form colleges, four 11 to 18 schools in Hove, six 11 to 16 high schools in Brighton and two universities. In addition there are seven special day schools and several independent schools. Two other further education colleges are within 15 miles of the centre of Brighton. Brighton and Hove has an 'Education Action Zone' in East Brighton and a 'New Deal for Communities' programme.

2 The population of Brighton and Hove is about 255,000 and this is expected to contract slightly by 2011. Over 50% of the full-time and 75% of part-time students in the current year were recruited from the three main Brighton postcodes. The local economy is dominated by small businesses. Despite its well-known attractions, Brighton and Hove has areas of deprivation and a high proportion of casually employed people. In 1998, the average weekly wage was 19% lower than that for the rest of the South East region for men, and 9% lower for women. The college enrolls a high proportion of students from deprived backgrounds, and is in the top 25% of general further education colleges by this measure.

3 Currently the college has eight sites in and around Brighton and Hove. The Pelham Street site is within easy walking distance of the railway station and the main arterial roads serving Brighton and is within 30 minutes of Gatwick Airport by road or rail. A new accommodation strategy will concentrate the vast majority of the college's work on the Pelham Street campus. Integral to the design is

the requirement that all students with mobility problems are able to gain access to all areas of the main campus. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) approved this project for capital support in March 2000. It is planned that all major building work will be completed by January 2002.

4 The college offers a wide range of courses from entry level to higher national diploma and professional level. In the last 10 years there has been particular growth in the area of art, design and media. The area now represents approximately 20% of the college's FEFC-funded work. Higher education is provided in partnership with the University of Brighton. There are collaborative links with other Sussex colleges concerned with widening participation and the use of information and communications technology for learning. The college will become a University for Industry (Ufi) 'learnirect' hub and is one of only three Ufi development learning centres based in a college.

5 The college executive comprises the principal, the deputy principal and the finance director. There are 16 directors leading nine curriculum areas and the seven support areas. A part-time, legally qualified clerk provides services to the corporation.

6 The college claims to provide a 'Gateway to your Future' which is supported by the aim 'to provide efficient, quality education and training to students and clients'.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 27 March 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted

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its own data on students' achievements for 1999. These were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The data were of variable accuracy. The college data on the number of starters and retained students were found to be incorrect on a significant number of courses. In addition, a small number of registers could not be found, preventing any analysis of the data relating to these courses. The achievement data were mainly sound, apart from some inaccuracies in respect of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and short courses. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor, working for 55 days. The inspection team observed 86 lessons, examined students' work, reviewed open learning provision in information technology (IT) and scrutinised college documents. Meetings were held with

governors, managers and other college staff and students. In the same week as the FEFC inspection, six inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) inspected training in construction, engineering, hospitality and catering and foundation for work. New Deal provision was also inspected but no formal report was written. TSC inspectors interviewed 63 trainees, 24 employers and 53 staff. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC framework, evidence gathered by the TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 64% were judged to be good or outstanding, a similar proportion to that for all colleges observed by inspectors in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	7	6	1	0	15
GCSE	1	6	3	0	0	10
GNVQ	4	5	4	0	0	13
NVQ	2	8	2	3	0	15
Other vocational	5	4	7	0	0	16
Other	4	8	3	2	0	17
Total (No.)	17	38	25	6	0	86
Total (%)	20	44	29	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

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9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The highest attendance was in hospitality and catering at 81% and the lowest was in science at 61%.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Brighton College of Technology	9.2	72
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Science and Mathematics

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 17 lessons covering science and mathematics. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, the report gave insufficient attention to poor retention, attendance and punctuality.

Key strengths

- comprehensive and detailed schemes of work
- well-organised and well-presented written work
- good achievement and progression rates on the access course

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- poor attendance and punctuality
- lack of IT equipment in most laboratories and classrooms

11 The college offers an adequate range of general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) science and mathematics courses. Most courses are one year in length. Students can attend either during the day or in the evening. An access course on environmental and life sciences is available for both part-time and full-time students.

12 Science and mathematics courses are organised by the team responsible for academic and applied studies. The curriculum area is subdivided into nine programme areas. Each programme area manager is responsible for undertaking course reviews and evaluations. Teachers were not fully involved in the production of the self-assessment report, which

is mainly descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative. In particular, insufficient attention is given to the reasons for poor student retention or ways of improving it. Subject teachers monitor students' progress. Course teams do not use value-added analysis or track individuals' progress against target grades. All full-time students have a tutor and tutorials are generally good. They focus on academic progress and matters concerned with career and personal matters.

13 Lessons are generally well planned. Comprehensive schemes of work are used effectively to direct teaching and learning activities. The general standard of teaching is satisfactory. Appropriate teaching methods are used, although in longer lessons, some students are not given enough to do. Most students enjoy their courses and are well motivated. Individual and group work is encouraged. In an access class, students considered the Darwinian theory of evolution. The tutor provoked thoughtful contributions from a number of students leading to a lively debate. A GCSE mathematics teacher arrived very early and stayed late to help mature students with particular problems. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that rapport is good between students and teachers. Students' written work is well presented and marking is clear and informative. In science, practical work is carried out competently and confidently with due regard to health and safety issues. Some project work is excellent. One GCSE chemistry student produced an outstanding assignment on reaction rates. Both wordprocessing and data logging techniques were used to good effect. In another example, an access student produced an impressive report on the ecological development of a local site.

14 The self-assessment report acknowledges that retention is a concern but understates the significance of this weakness. The retention rates on most GCE A level and GCSE science and mathematics courses have been below the

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national averages for over three years. Over 40% of students enrolled for GCSE mathematics leave before the end of their course.

Achievement rates are generally at or above the national average. The GCE A level chemistry pass rate is significantly above the national average. GCSE chemistry, physics and astronomy results are also good. Achievement rates in GCE A level biology and human biology have improved steadily but those in GCE A level mathematics and physics are below the national average. Mathematics results are generally poor. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that most access students are successful. In the last two years, most students succeeded on the course and progressed to higher education. Attendance at many classes is poor. The average attendance in the lessons observed was 62%. In one GCSE mathematics

lesson, only four out of 11 students were present. Teachers do not always ask students to explain their late arrival at lessons. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this is a weakness.

15 Teachers are well qualified. They have appropriate degrees as well as teaching qualifications. Several have recent industrial experience. The majority of laboratories and classrooms provide a good environment for teaching and learning. Technician support is good. Laboratories are well equipped and serviced. The preparation and storage rooms are nearby. The library is well stocked with a good range of science and mathematics textbooks, videos and CD-ROMs. The lack of IT facilities in most classrooms and laboratories restricts the learning opportunities of mathematics students in particular.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in science and mathematics, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE science (chemistry, physics, biology, human biology, astronomy, science) (grades A to C)	2	Number of starters	124	115	95
		Retention (%)	66	64	68
		Achievement (%)	50	41	63
GCSE mathematics (grades A to C)	2	Number of starters	203	253	206
		Retention (%)	68	70	56
		Achievement (%)	33	48	43
GCE AS mathematics	3	Number of starters	29	38	58
		Retention (%)	59	61	67
		Achievement (%)	18	39	36
GCE A level science (chemistry, physics, biology, human biology)	3	Number of starters	122	78	85
		Retention (%)	61	62	73
		Achievement (%)	36	63	65
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	31	15	27
		Retention (%)	77	87	93
		Achievement (%)	42	46	40
Access environmental and life sciences	3	Number of starters	15	16	16
		Retention (%)	73	81	81
		Achievement (%)	100	92	92

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

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

16 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced levels in IT and business; GCE A level business; BTEC national business and finance; and secretarial and administration programmes. The inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective course planning, management and target-setting
- high standard of students' portfolio work
- effective development of students' key skills
- enthusiastic and innovative teaching on GNVQ courses

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- low achievement rates on GNVQ intermediate
- poor attendance and punctuality
- lack of dissemination of good practice

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a wide range of courses offered within the programme area. There are 10 courses in business or IT and several GNVQs. Progression routes are clear and students are encouraged to progress from foundation to advanced level courses. The NVQ in administration has been withdrawn. The diploma in administration, which has replaced it, does not adequately meet students' work-based training needs.

18 The programme area is managed effectively. Courses are generally well planned and have appropriate and detailed schemes of work. All courses have lesson plans for the full

year. The development of key skills has been thoughtfully integrated with other aspects of the courses. There are clear lines of communication. Teachers have clearly designated responsibilities. Regular meetings are supported by good documentation. Action plans are produced and outcomes monitored. Student surveys and course reviews are effectively used to review and improve the provision. Targets are set at course level and reviewed monthly. The GNVQ programme is being used to pilot a number of initiatives intended to improve student retention and achievement. Most of these are working well but the good practice being developed is not effectively disseminated to other courses.

19 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is some enthusiastic, innovative and lively teaching. However, inspectors observed fewer good or outstanding lessons than the average for this programme area. In the better lessons, teachers plan well and use appropriate learning activities and materials to sustain students' interest. In one lesson, there was a lively debate on the practice of deliberately attacking competitors' products in advertisements. All examples were well known to students. In another lesson, Edward de Bono's concept of 'six thinking hats' was used to demonstrate approaches to problem-solving. Students were instructed to take on the role associated with a particular coloured paper hat when making their decision. The result was a greater understanding of factors which affect decision-making. Some other lessons involved too much note-taking. In one lesson, when a student questioned a spelling error on a handout, the teacher gave an incorrect explanation of the word's usage, and repeated its incorrect spelling.

20 As indicated in the self-assessment report, students' assignments are of a high standard and at an appropriate level. Teachers mark fairly and provide constructive written feedback. Most students achieve a high level of IT skills.

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Secretarial students are encouraged to gain a range of qualifications in addition to their main programme. Many students identified as in need of additional literacy and numeracy support do not attend the key skills workshops. Most of these students struggle to keep up with their coursework.

21 Retention rates have been below the national average for the last three years. Attendance and punctuality at lessons is often poor. The business team is beginning to address these problems in a variety of ways. On GNVQ courses, a rigorous tutorial system has been introduced with clearly defined goals. During individual tutorials, punctuality and attendance are discussed and progress is reviewed. Each tutorial session ends with the student signing a form agreeing to personal targets. Retention on this course has already improved. The practice has not yet been adopted on other courses.

Achievement rates on most courses are good. For example, achievement rates on the BTEC national certificate in business and finance have been significantly above the national average for the last three years. Achievement rates on the GCE A level in business have been poor but last year there was a significant improvement. Achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate are poor.

22 Teachers are well qualified and have appropriate experience. They are encouraged to develop their skills and undertake appropriate staff development. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that this is a strength. Students have good access to IT equipment, industry standard software and the Internet. The library is well stocked with specialist books, journals, magazines, CD-ROMs and videos.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ business (business and IT)	2	Number of starters	53	50	44
		Retention (%)	75	74	68
		Achievement (%)	58	57	67
GNVQ business (business and IT)	3	Number of starters	33	40	68
		Retention (%)	55	40	51
		Achievement (%)	67	31	68
BTEC national certificate in business and finance	3	Number of starters	36	21	30
		Retention (%)	58	38	64
		Achievement (%)	97	100	79
GCE A level business	3	Number of starters	117	101	69
		Retention (%)	73	69	55
		Achievement (%)	33	23	63

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

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 10 practical and theoretical lessons covering all college-based NVQ and GNVQ provision in hotel and catering. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report although a number of additional strengths were identified. Inspectors from the TSC observed 10 trainees in hospitality and catering and visited eight work placements.

Key strengths

- skills and knowledge of staff and students
- broad range of provision
- good pass rates
- effective development of key skills
- extensive enrichment activities
- wide range of learning resources

Weaknesses

- most schemes of work reflect insufficient planning
- poorly planned theory lessons
- some old and out-of-date equipment

24 There is a good range of courses in hotel and catering, ranging from foundation level to higher education programmes. Most are available to both part-time and full-time students. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that the skills and knowledge of the staff are a strength. There is a strong commitment to professional standards in cookery and food service. Students are encouraged to develop a wide range of relevant skills, which include specialist pastry work and larder preparations. Menus in the training restaurant reflect contemporary styles and provide an excellent basis for skill development.

25 The curriculum area is efficiently managed. The team meets regularly. Retention and achievement data are systematically analysed by the team and used for setting targets. Actions proposed by course teams to improve achievement rates, such as improved support and guidance during admissions, have been effective. Many schemes of work are not produced in a standard format and many show a lack of careful planning and detail. Key skills are an integral part of all courses, and are developed in vocationally relevant ways. Assessment activities are well managed. Assessment logbooks are well organised and contain sufficient valid evidence of students' achievements.

26 Students work in a realistic work environment, are very well motivated and demonstrate high levels of competence. NVQ level 3 students produce food and drinks in an organised and efficient way, with a minimum of supervision. A GNVQ advanced assessment required students to work as a management team. The student nominated as restaurant manager confidently directed operations and was able to demonstrate effective customer service skills. The team planned an appealing and well-balanced menu. The food was competently produced by students in the kitchen and professionally served. Lecturers skilfully managed a debriefing after the event. Students were encouraged to draw on relevant topics from theory classes and place them into a practical context. Theory lessons are less successful, a weakness noted in the previous inspection report. Teachers make too much use of untargeted questions, to which students often do not respond. Learning aids such as overhead projector transparencies, were often of poor quality; one handout conveyed misleadingly out-of-date information.

27 Achievement rates are generally above the national average and improving. GNVQ advanced students in hotel and catering achieved a 100% pass rate last year. Retention

Curriculum Areas

rates are close to the national average for most courses. There is a wide range of enrichment activities which students enjoy and which enhance their learning experience. These include study tours, fund-raising for charity and a range of motivating competitions. An annual study tour to Alsace in France includes visits to markets and wine and food producers. Lecturers also organise meals for students in some top restaurants and hotels.

28 There is a good range of specialist resources including two realistic work environments and a purpose-built pastry kitchen. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that some specialist resources

are old but functional. Students' lockers are poorly maintained and are not secure. Some items of electrical equipment are not fitted with safety devices and may present a health and safety risk. There is low awareness of health and safety issues in some areas. Professional development opportunities for some lecturers are rare.

29 There is a wide range of learning resources. The extensive library stock includes a good range of periodicals and CD-ROMs. The curriculum area benefits from the support of a subject librarian. On-line learning material is being developed in partnership with hotel and tourism operators in the area.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hospitality and catering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ food preparation	1	Number of starters	64	57	49
		Retention (%)	70	80	73
		Achievement (%)	69	81	92
NVQ food service	1	Number of starters	27	35	31
		Retention (%)	74	77	81
		Achievement (%)	75	93	100
NVQ food preparation	2	Number of starters	83	54	55
		Retention (%)	51	57	75
		Achievement (%)	70	84	89
NVQ serving food (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	45	23	31
		Retention (%)	42	70	80
		Achievement (%)	95	94	76
NVQ hotel and catering (combined course)	3	Number of starters	22	34	23
		Retention (%)	68	57	74
		Achievement (%)	57	50	71
GNVQ advanced hotel and catering	3	Number of starters	15	17	13
		Retention (%)	73	59	69
		Achievement (%)	27	50	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Hair and Beauty

Grade 2

30 Inspectors observed 12 hairdressing and beauty therapy lessons, covering all aspects of the college's work. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but identified additional ones.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching which interests and motivates students
- recent good achievement rates in beauty therapy
- effectively organised and managed practical sessions
- professional standards promoted and encouraged
- good development of students' practical skills
- generally well-managed provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of students' IT skills
- missed opportunities to exploit existing links with employers
- inadequate arrangements for assessing students' work

31 The college offers a broad range of courses in hairdressing and beauty including some intensive part-time courses which meet the needs of the increasing numbers of mature students. All hairdressing students are required to complete NVQ level 1 before they can progress to level 2. NVQ level 3 in hairdressing is offered as an evening course. The range of programmes in beauty therapy has been extended to include holistic therapies and there are currently part-time day and evening courses in aromatherapy and reflexology. Inspectors

agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that provision in this curriculum area had been effectively expanded to meet identified demands.

32 As noted in the self-assessment report, the curriculum area is well managed and organised. There is a clear termly schedule of meetings for the programme area as a whole, and for course teams. Course teams review course delivery, monitor progress towards the achievement of attendance and retention targets, and discuss the progress of individual students. Part-time tutors are encouraged to attend these meetings and the minutes are circulated to all staff. Responsibilities are clear and understood. Course files are well organised, well maintained and well used in course reviews. The students' handbook designed by staff is informative and students are satisfied that they are provided with all the necessary information at the start of their courses.

33 Lessons are generally well planned and their content is appropriate. There are comprehensive lesson plans supported by appropriate schemes of work. Teaching strategies are well balanced and varied, combining group and individual activities, teacher input and effective use of appropriate resources. Well-designed learning packages, which combine information and assessment, are used in theory and practical sessions. Students' assignments are well marked and their portfolios are well organised. Practical sessions are well organised and attract local clients for both hairdressing and beauty therapies. Special 'Top to Toe' beauty days are organised, and at the time of the inspection two special Mothers' Day sessions were planned. Professional standards are promoted. All students are dressed appropriately and the salons are commercially realistic. Students work confidently with clients. In some hairdressing practical sessions the large group size hinders student learning as teachers are unable to give students adequate attention. Only one member

Curriculum Areas

of the full-time hairdressing staff has an internal verifier's qualification and the practice of using the external verifier to fulfil both roles is not satisfactory. Students have to wait too long for the verification of their assessments.

34 All full-time students on hair and beauty programmes undertake work experience for one or two days each week. Teachers regularly visit salons but only a few students are observed at work. Employers monitor students' progress by completing college-devised forms. Employers do not receive details of the college scheme of work, and opportunities for developing the links with employers are not being fully exploited. The college does not have a computerised till system to match the ones used by the salons. Few of the students have IT skills and most do not take advantage of the computers available in the college. This weakness was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

35 Most retention and achievement rates are near the national average, although there are some courses where they are particularly good. The 90% pass rate in beauty therapy NVQ level 2 in 1999 was well above the national average. Retention on most courses has improved in the last three years, particularly on some part-time courses. In aromatherapy, the retention rate in 1999 was 93%. More than 65% of students have been identified as in need of some additional learning support, but few take up the support they need.

36 The accommodation for both practical and theory sessions is of a reasonable standard and the college provides the necessary professional equipment for courses. New hair and beauty salons are planned as part of the college's major building programme.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hair and beauty, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ beauty therapy (students aged 16 to 18)	2	Number of starters	42	41	16
		Retention (%)	79	76	75
		Achievement (%)	76	55	92
NVQ beauty therapy (students aged 19 +)	2	Number of starters	*	33	35
		Retention (%)	*	76	83
		Achievement (%)	*	84	93
NVQ hairdressing (students aged 16 to 18)	2	Number of starters	54	32	19
		Retention (%)	57	81	79
		Achievement (%)	77	69	80
NVQ hairdressing (students aged 19 +)	2	Number of starters	*	11	20
		Retention (%)	*	91	60
		Achievement (%)	*	70	75
NVQ aromatherapy (students aged 19 +)	3	Number of starters	34	44	28
		Retention (%)	71	82	93
		Achievement (%)	83	42	100
Diploma in reflexology	3	Number of starters	81	65	69
		Retention (%)	94	82	80
		Achievement (%)	32	62	91

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Media

Grade 2

37 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in art, design and media. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good achievement rates
- high proportion of students progressing to higher education
- strong emphasis on creativity
- challenging and varied projects
- high standard of students' portfolios

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses
- some inadequacies in accommodation and facilities
- insufficient sharing of good practice

38 The college offers a good range of full-time courses in art, design and media. Most courses are offered at advanced level and include BTEC foundation art and design, BTEC national diplomas in design, photography, media and multimedia and GCE A level. The college also offers a GNVQ intermediate course in art and design. There is also a limited range of part-time professional, vocational and National Open College Network (NOCN) courses.

39 The programme area is well organised. It was recently divided into two management areas; art and design, and media and performing arts. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements. The organisational structure is clear and course managers regularly meet to review enrolment and budgetary information. The roles of course team leader are clearly understood. Courses are well planned and well documented. Teachers have extensive outside contacts. Students

benefit from visiting speakers, commercial liaison and close links with staff from higher education institutions. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that these activities directly benefit students.

40 Teaching is of a high standard. Teachers encourage creativity and the development of ideas through the use of detailed sketchbooks and worksheets. Students develop a broad visual vocabulary through well-planned projects and increasingly challenging assignments. Skills needed to manipulate line, tone, texture and colour are quickly acquired. Design students in particular use colour effectively. First-year BTEC national diploma students were given four days to research, design and make a piece of headwear based on architectural form. Students worked to strict deadlines producing highly individual pieces, with supporting worksheets and sketchbooks. Media students learn basic production skills. Students demonstrate a high level of competence when using technical equipment on photography, media and multimedia courses. The student experience in media and multimedia is enriched by planned work experience, busy production schedules and links with live projects suggested by external agencies. There are insufficient opportunities for staff and students to benefit from a scrutiny of each other's work. Good practice is not effectively disseminated across the whole programme area.

41 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' achievements in art and design are good. Students on the large BTEC diploma in foundation studies and GNVQ intermediate courses have consistently performed well. Their coursework is good. Assignments are challenging and varied. On the foundation course, teachers encourage students to undertake a range of short projects. This ensures that their work remains fresh and innovative. Portfolios are of high quality. Students' work is frequently on display. Students show a great deal of self-reliance and

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confidence and are well prepared for university interviews. A high proportion of students obtain higher education places in their first choice institutions. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that this is a strength. The high numbers of students on some courses mean that tutor time is limited. There is pressure on resources and facilities. Assessment of art and design skills is effective but the assessment of key skills on the GNVQ intermediate course is not adequate. Attendance rates are satisfactory but students frequently arrive late for their lessons. Achievement and retention rates on some media courses are below national averages. The college failed to identify this in its self-assessment report, although some improvement has occurred recently.

42 The college has made efforts to minimise the effects of accommodation inadequacies on the students' learning experience. Nevertheless, students frequently work in crowded studios. Poor studio management in some areas adds to the problem, as coats and bags are left on the floor. Kensington House has a good purpose-built recording studio. There are specialist industry standard facilities in other areas, including the radio broadcasting suites and the room of computers running commercially up-to-date software. Most accommodation is fully timetabled. However, students are frustrated at certain times by the poor access to facilities and essential equipment. Some facilities are poor and need upgrading. The college plans to reorganise and expand the accommodation for media and performing arts. Students with physical disabilities cannot reach any of the art, design and media facilities.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	*	19	17
		Retention (%)	*	89	94
		Achievement (%)	*	88	81
BTEC diploma foundation studies art and design	3	Number of starters	124	140	160
		Retention (%)	93	96	94
		Achievement (%)	97	99	98
BTEC national diploma photography	3	Number of starters	18	20	20
		Retention (%)	67	70	70
		Achievement (%)	83	93	93
BTEC national diploma design	3	Number of starters	42	40	42
		Retention (%)	69	65	71
		Achievement (%)	86	100	93
BTEC national diploma media and multimedia (combined)	3	Number of starters	36	29	27
		Retention (%)	64	55	81
		Achievement (%)	100	93	80
GCE A level art	3	Number of starters	108	91	59
		Retention (%)	79	66	68
		Achievement (%)	62	72	75

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

43 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE A level and GCSE courses in psychology and sociology and three lessons on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) further education teachers' certificate course. The inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the self-assessment report, but considered that some weaknesses were not sufficiently emphasised.

Key strengths

- good teaching and achievement rates on teacher education courses
- some good course materials
- above average achievement rates on GCSE courses

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates in sociology and psychology
- poor achievement rates in psychology
- very poor attendance in sociology and psychology lessons
- poor management of the GCSE and GCE A level provision

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a wide range of humanities courses offered. Teacher education courses are located in the business and management programme area. They are managed effectively. Teachers hold regular team meetings where they discuss and share ideas. GCSE and GCE A level teachers do not meet regularly, and no minutes of meetings were available. This part of the provision is not well managed and these weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

45 The teacher training lessons observed were all good or outstanding. Teachers used a wide variety of teaching strategies and teaching resources. In one lesson a short clip from a popular television programme was used to promote a stimulating discussion of group behaviour; in another, a similar discussion was prompted by a group game. In the humanities, the quality of teaching and learning was more variable. One humanities lesson set clear expectations about examination performance through the careful study of a past paper. In a GCSE lesson there was a lively discussion about crime and deviance, considering how different societies view behaviour which does not conform to the norm. In most lessons there was a good rapport between teachers and students. There were examples of lessons where teachers had not planned sufficiently carefully how or what students would learn, or had allowed too little time to check that learning had taken place. The teaching materials provided for students were of an adequate standard and in some good lessons topical handouts were used. Homework and assignments are set regularly and in most cases teachers provide constructive feedback. Assessment criteria are explained to students, and they are given advice on how to improve their grades. Schemes of work have been produced for all subjects but some of those in sociology and psychology were of poor quality.

46 Tutorial support for students on teacher training courses is regular and of a high standard. Achievement on these programmes is high and consistently above national averages. The courses attract large numbers of students. In most GCE A level and GCSE courses, retention rates are significantly below the national average. In GCE A level sociology, fewer than half the students remained to the end of the course. The self-assessment report acknowledged that retention rates for full-time students are low. Some modest attempts have been made to redress this by reviewing entry

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requirements, but these have yet to take effect. Attendance at lessons was often poor. In half the lessons observed there was less than 50% attendance.

47 Achievements in GCE A level and GCSE sociology are improving and pass rates are now above the national averages. However, achievement rates on the GCE A level psychology course are below average. Tutorial and other support for GCE A level and GCSE students is unsatisfactory.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the subjects they teach. The classrooms used for teacher education programmes provide a good learning environment. They are well equipped and contain appropriate and imaginative wall displays. The teaching rooms used by the GCE A level and GCSE groups are adequate, but fail

to provide any subject identity or stimulus.

Students have access to a good stock of library books and periodicals and are satisfied with the resources provided.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE psychology (grades A to C)	2	Number of starters	74	49	56
		Retention (%)	68	53	57
		Achievement (%)	28	62	59
GCSE social studies (grades A to C)	2	Number of starters	49	45	39
		Retention (%)	82	56	69
		Achievement (%)	48	64	67
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	96	72	57
		Retention (%)	60	61	51
		Achievement (%)	37	52	45
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	80	32	37
		Retention (%)	69	81	41
		Achievement (%)	49	58	87
C&G 7307 further adult education teacher certificate	3	Number of starters	59	58	58
		Retention (%)	88	90	88
		Achievement (%)	96	96	86

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

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Basic Skills

Grade 3

49 Inspectors observed 11 literacy and numeracy lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but did not agree with some of the weaknesses and identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching on discrete courses and effective learning support
- well-designed work programmes and assignments
- innovative, course-specific screening for learning support
- high levels of student concentration, interest and involvement
- good retention and achievement by students on regular learning support

Weaknesses

- range of provision which does not fully meet local needs
- lack of liaison between the three delivery strands
- lack of experience of basic skills teaching amongst staff in other curriculum areas
- low retention, attendance and progression rates from discrete courses
- inadequate resources

50 The college offers a range of basic skills provision, including learning support, key skills tuition and discrete courses. Approximately 100 students a year enrol on discrete courses in literacy and numeracy. The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) has identified an extensive need for basic skills training in Brighton. The current number of enrolments does not reflect the level of need. Existing programmes offer students between three and six hours study each week. This is

insufficient to meet many students' needs. 'Drop-in' provision, intensive courses and extended courses are not offered. The college is beginning to develop community contacts, in an effort to recruit more students.

51 Basic skills provision is not well co-ordinated. Liaison between the three delivery strands is weak. The college plans to address this issue. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is experienced, competent specialist teaching on learning support programmes. The standard of teaching on discrete programmes is generally good. Teachers work effectively to meet the challenge of students' varied physical, emotional and cognitive needs. An innovative, course-specific screening process identifies support needs effectively. Learning support is provided on an individual appointment basis. Since the last inspection, the management of learning support has been separated from the provision for students with learning difficulties. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this development has had a positive effect on increasing the take-up of learning support. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that some curriculum teachers lack experience of how to teach basic skills. More seriously, some curriculum specialists teaching on entry or level 1 courses expressed little or no interest in the teaching of basic skills. Many of the curriculum areas where this view was expressed have poor retention and achievement rates.

52 In most basic skills lessons, tasks and assignments are designed to meet students' individual ability and interest. Pair and individual work are used to stimulate learning and to maintain the interest of students. The self-assessment report understated the quality of much of the teaching and learning on discrete courses. Students of all ages demonstrate a high level of concentration and interest in their work, and work together co-operatively. In a learning support lesson, a young student with

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Asperger's syndrome suddenly became agitated due to work difficulties. The teacher patiently and skilfully ensured that the situation was defused and the student re-engaged with their work. On one discrete course, a student with physical disabilities effectively prepared notes for the rest of the group on the use of computer software for research. In another lesson, students with severe dyslexia, one with physical disabilities and one recovering from head injuries worked effectively as part of the group.

53 Over the last few years, discrete courses have been externally accredited. Most of this accreditation has been rejected by the college as not being in students' best interest. College records did not allow inspectors to form a judgement on students' achievements or their retention, and no tables of retention and achievement are included in this report. Where retention and achievement rates are meaningful, they are below national average levels. In future, the college plans to offer a limited range of accredited courses on a consistent basis. Few students progress from discrete courses to vocational programmes. Progression data are not adequately used to inform course reviews. The take-up of learning support across the college is low. Most students who attend support sessions regularly, achieve their main programme aim. Non-accredited achievements by adults include the publication of several students' poems in a local writers' anthology. All students express satisfaction with the growth of their skills and confidence, which they attribute to individual help by teachers.

54 The range of resources available to staff and students is narrow. The bookstock is small. In some cases, teachers unnecessarily prepare their own materials. There is adequate use of IT in the presentation of text and for proofreading but overall the IT facilities available to support the development of basic skills teaching are inadequate.

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Support for Students

Grade 4

55 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found that some strengths were overstated and weaknesses in tutorial and learning support were not identified.

Key strengths

- comprehensive and well-managed student services
- effective arrangements for identifying students' learning support needs
- well-organised induction programme for full-time students

Weaknesses

- weaknesses in implementing admissions procedures
- poor take up of learning support
- inconsistent quality of tutorial support
- insufficient careers advice and guidance

56 Responsibility for different aspects of support for students is dispersed across the college. Student services staff provide personal counselling and pre-entry guidance for some courses. Advice on finance, accommodation, health and welfare issues is available for all students. Curriculum directors manage tutorial support, the marketing unit is responsible for liaison with schools and the learning support co-ordinator is responsible for all aspects of learning support. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to some of these services. However, some of the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report still remain. The college has started to bring together the various arrangements connected with recruitment but co-ordination between the various teams concerned with student services remains weak.

57 The student services provision is well positioned close to the main reception area of the college in a suite of modern, well-furnished rooms. A team of experienced and well-qualified staff offers a wide range of advice and guidance services. In addition, student services staff have links with a wide range of external support agencies including the chaplaincy of the University of Brighton. Support is provided on demand and services are well publicised. In 1998-99, over 1,000 students used the services and generally expressed a high level of satisfaction with the support they received. The student union is very active and a wide range of well-supported social and sports activities takes place throughout the year.

58 As the self-assessment report recognises, admissions procedures are not always implemented effectively. Some full-time students and most late applicants do not receive an initial interview before enrolment. A significant minority of full-time students enrolled without being aware of the range of courses available. Although the college publishes entry criteria for most courses, some students felt these were not adequately explained. In some cases, there are long delays between receipt of applications and offers to students. A revised centralised admissions system is being piloted.

59 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that induction is well established, comprehensive, and effective for most full-time students. Students use a checklist in the student handbook to record the information they receive and the induction activities they complete. Late starters also complete the induction process. Most students are aware of the college charter, which is in the student handbook, and have discussed it with their tutor. Some students on two-year courses did not consider the practice of repeating the same induction programme in their second year as helpful.

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60 All full-time students undergo screening to determine their literacy and numeracy support needs. The diagnostic tests used are directly related to students' main courses. Tests are reviewed and updated every year. Curriculum area representatives analyse completed diagnostic tests and give feedback and support to individual students. In 1998-99, only two-thirds of students who were identified as in need of learning support attended a session, and in some curriculum areas, less than 20% did so. Significantly, some students attended a few sessions and then stopped. Attendance is not formalised in students' learning agreements, and reasons for non-attendance are not sought.

61 The college's tutorial policy was revised in May 1998. Each full-time student has a personal tutor. Implementation of the revised system is audited. Tutorial support received by part-time students does not always match the stated entitlement. Staffing changes within curriculum areas lead to a high turnover of tutors. Full-time student tutorials are an hour long. Some are conducted with groups of students and some with individuals. The quality of tutorials observed by inspectors varied widely. The college has recently taken steps to identify students in need of extra support, but the initiative is hampered by the inconsistencies in tutorial and learning support practices. Some tutors, for example, use group tutorials to extend normal lesson activities. Although most students value the support they receive from tutors, attendance at some group tutorials is poor. A significant minority of tutors do not follow up student absences. Reporting to parents of 16 to 18 year olds is inconsistent and many parents are not notified of recurring absences or informed of their children's progress. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

62 There is no college-based careers co-ordinator, and the services that are provided by Sussex Careers are not used effectively. For example, students leaving early are not referred

for an exit interview and many students are not aware that a careers adviser is available to give advice and guidance. Figures produced by student services show that only 213 students had careers interviews last year. The average retention rate for students receiving interviews was well above the college average.

General Resources

Grade 3

63 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-considered accommodation strategy
- effective and innovative flexible learning centre
- much-improved and welcoming entrance to the main building
- effective use of resources for producing teaching and learning materials

Weaknesses

- poor space utilisation
- poor access for students with restricted mobility
- no medium-term policy for developing information communications technology resources
- inadequate access to computers in some areas

64 The oldest of the college's 13 buildings was built almost 150 years ago and the newest 30 years ago. Four of the largest buildings, including the college's administrative centre, are situated very close to one another in central Brighton. The newest of these, Pelham Tower, has 10 floors of mainly large, bright teaching rooms. A number of improvements have been made since the last inspection. For example,

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soundproof music practice rooms have been installed and the hairdressing salons have been refurbished and re-designed. Several of the largest rooms have been adapted to allow them to be used in a variety of ways. The student refectory, which acts also as a social area for students, has been refurbished and remodelled. There is a new reception area with access to key services and the flexible learning centre. Inspectors agreed that this development constitutes a strength. Interior modernisation of the Victorian buildings has improved the quality of classrooms but their original design limits the range of activities which can take place in them. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report, which acknowledges the need to continue to improve space management and develop facilities to reflect changing curriculum needs.

65 Many of the smaller buildings owned or leased by the college are at the end of their useful life. Maintenance costs are high. The site at Stanmer Park, once the home of the Earl of Chichester, is used for horticultural and landscaping studies. Richmond Terrace, built in 1898 as Brighton's municipal technical college, is used mainly for science, construction and engineering. The entrance hall contains a beautifully crafted mosaic floor. The long sweeping staircase is made of marble and the walls are decorated with an impressive display of marble. In all the permanent buildings, large spaces such as halls and lecture theatres are underused. The premises at Connaught Street, formerly two secondary schools, need constant maintenance. Many of the rooms and corridors are poorly decorated. All the smaller buildings suffer from cramped workrooms for teachers and a lack of storage space.

66 The college has conducted a detailed space survey. Under-utilisation of space was identified during the last inspection. The new accommodation strategy takes into account space, access issues and curriculum needs. The plan is to enable the college to bring all its

provision to the main cluster of sites at Pelham Street and create a single campus. The FEFC has agreed to part fund the new building required. Currently, premises are well maintained and there is a detailed maintenance plan. Access for wheelchair users, except in Pelham Tower, is poor. The college acknowledged this as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

67 The college has appropriate security measures and a disaster recovery plan. There is a detailed assets register but no college-wide equipment replacement programme. The college has an efficiently maintained network of computers. There are 444 computers for students' use in libraries and curriculum areas. About half of the open access computers provide access to the Internet. There is a satisfactory ratio of one computer to seven full-time equivalent students on FEFC-funded courses. Nevertheless, at some sites demand exceeds availability. Access to computers was identified as a weakness in the last inspection report. Computers in some buildings are not connected to the college network. The college has not developed a comprehensive IT strategy which will see it through to the time when a new building is available.

68 The college is associated with some groundbreaking educational initiatives, such as the Ufi (learndirect) and the Adapt European Social Fund research project for on-line learning. An effective and innovative flexible learning centre makes a valuable contribution to these projects. Located close to the main entrance to emphasise its accessibility, it is well equipped with modern computers and runs a range of mainly short IT courses. The reprographic and design unit effectively uses its resources to produce good-quality college information and course materials.

69 There are libraries at the York and Richmond Terrace centres. Learning resources relate closely to courses on those or adjacent sites. The libraries contain 47,000 books, 129

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study places and 18 computers. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the number of study spaces is too low. Small specialist collections of books are available on some other sites. Two hundred students use the libraries each day and book borrowing is increasing. A book budget of £50,000 is divided amongst the curriculum areas on the basis of usage. The library provision is effectively managed, although staff are sometimes unable to service both libraries effectively.

70 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the college does not have its own sports facilities. However, the student union organises recreational activities through its association with the University of Brighton and facilitates the use of a local swimming pool and gym.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

71 Inspectors agreed with several of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report but considered that others had been overstated. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report was not sufficiently critical and found several additional weaknesses that the college had not recognised.

Key strengths

- improving achievement rates on many courses
- a well-documented quality assurance system

Weaknesses

- lack of an overall strategy to improve persistently poor retention
- some weak course reviews
- inconsistently implemented quality assurance procedures
- lesson observations not used to generate improvements in teaching quality

72 The college has recently brought together its existing policies and practices on quality assurance into a single document pack. Roles and responsibilities for the various aspects of the quality assurance system are clearly described. Links between quality assurance and the college strategic planning process are well established. Quality assurance procedures are based on review and evaluation of courses. Reports from these reviews inform an annual area or unit managers' report and three-year plan. Curriculum self-assessment reports are an appendix to the annual managers' report.

73 Annual reviews and evaluations of courses have been undertaken since 1995. There is variation in the quality of the reviews and the rigour of the analysis of data on which judgements are made. The college recently implemented a system to grade the quality of reviews. Those falling below a satisfactory level are returned for improvement. A significant number of reviews had not been completed by the required submission date. Student questionnaires are undertaken three times a year. Results are speedily and accurately analysed. However, little reference is made to the findings in course reviews and little use is made of them to develop improvement plans. Some course teams set realistic targets for improvement and devise clear strategies to raise standards but many course teams are not sufficiently critical of their own performance. Course data are insufficiently analysed and not systematically used to improve practice. Course targets, if set, are not reviewed annually in the light of performance. Poor data from the management information system has hindered critical evaluation, and, in particular, has obscured the long-standing need to tackle low retention.

74 Although the college has produced an annual self-assessment report since 1994, a significant number of course teams do not contribute to this. As a result, the effectiveness of this process as a tool for quality improvement is limited. As identified in the college's

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self-assessment report, the rigour of the college's self-assessment has improved since the last inspection. A panel validates the self-assessment reports. Three governors, including a student governor, are invited to participate. The panel's role is to examine critically the strengths claimed in area self-assessments. Corroborative statements to support claimed strengths have recently been made a requirement for all self-assessment area reports.

75 The college has made significant progress in improving students' achievements. Since the last inspection, achievement rates on most courses have risen from below to above the relevant national average. The college recognised in its self-assessment that retention on the majority of courses is poor and below the national average for the sector. The academic board has discussed the need for a coherent college strategy to improve retention, but such a strategy has not yet been developed. A number of separate initiatives have been introduced but their implementation is inconsistent. Some underperforming courses have been closed. Standards have been raised on some courses by improving recruitment and guidance procedures, so as to produce a closer match between students' abilities and the requirements of the course. Good practice is not systematically shared. A system to measure the improvements in students' achievements during their course of study is only used on a minority of courses.

76 A programme of lesson observations has been running for several years. All observers are trained and there are procedures which aim to ensure that grading is consistent. The college's own lesson observation profile identified 80% of lessons as good or outstanding, compared with 64% judged as good or outstanding by inspectors. Although outcomes of lesson observations are summarised in departments, actions which might lead to improvements are not clearly identified. The

potential that lesson observation has for improving the quality of teaching is not being fully exploited.

77 The outcomes from lesson observations are discussed during staff appraisals. All college staff are regularly appraised and welcome the opportunity to discuss their development needs. Staff development plans are linked to the college strategic planning process. Priorities are clearly identified. Requests from individual staff are generally supported. The system for recording and monitoring the quality of professional development events is in place and effective. As recognised in the college's self-assessment report, opportunities for staff to undertake industrial updating are few. The college has not given enough consideration to the training required by newly appointed managers. The college recently received Investors in People re-accreditation.

Governance

Grade 3

78 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that some of the strengths were overstated and some should be regarded as normal practice. Some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- effective use of governors' expertise
- good oversight of the college's financial position
- consistently high standard of clerking

Weaknesses

- lack of measurable targets in strategic and operating plans
- insufficient monitoring of standards
- inadequate analysis of governors' training and updating needs

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79 The board has initiated a helpful review of the mission and aims of the college and a more rigorous and coherent approach to strategic planning. The newly appointed chair is effectively leading this process. The existing strategic plan and operating statement are largely descriptive. There are no clear, measurable targets against which the corporation may monitor progress. The corporation, and its finance, policy and resources committee receive a wide range of reports and information concerning the general performance of the college. These include the minutes of the academic board and reports on retention and achievement rates aggregated to college level. The range and complexity of the information provided by management does not enable the corporation to monitor standards effectively or to identify areas for improvement. The self-assessment of governance was not sufficiently guided by national norms and good practice. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that governors have insufficient understanding of, and make insufficient use of performance indicators for monitoring and improving the quality of the college's provision.

80 An induction programme, which includes a tour of the college's many sites, has been developed for new governors. Governors find the process helpful. New governors speak highly of the support and guidance provided by the clerk. Governors take part in an annual conference and seminars run by professional trainers. However, there is no systematic training programme for governors based on a needs analysis and no reference is made to good practice. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Governors have good links with curriculum and business areas. Each governor is linked with one or more area. Guidance is not given on possible outcomes from these links, and there is no requirement for any feedback to the corporation as a whole. Governors have developed a constructive

relationship with management whilst retaining the distinction between the respective roles of governors and managers.

81 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

82 Governors have a wide range of experience, including law, finance, education and general and building management. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that projects such as the development of the accommodation strategy have benefited from governors' knowledge and experience. The corporation has a determined membership of 16, and there are currently two vacancies. The search committee uses a list of skills, identified by the corporation, to consider nominations for new governors. The corporation has formalised arrangements for identifying potential governors. It is working towards the selection of candidates in the new categories created by the modifications to the instrument of government. Discussions are under way with the local authority to identify a nominee. The search committee has still to identify community bodies from which to seek nominations. The corporation has determined the membership period of individuals. New governors are appointed at the annual general meeting for a period terminating at the end of the annual general meeting three years later.

83 An independent clerk, who works in the college for two days a week, serves the corporation. He is a barrister and chartered secretary, and provides a knowledgeable and effective service. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that clerking is of a consistently high standard. The corporation has not established standing orders for the conduct of its

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business. It has established a register of interests which governors update annually, and a public interest disclosure procedure. The November meeting of the corporation includes an open session for the public to attend. Minutes of meetings are available for public inspection and are on the college intranet.

84 The corporation has established committees for audit, remuneration, staffing, search, and finance, policy and resources. It has recently established a 'Campus 21' committee to oversee the college's major building project. The finance, policy and resources committee scrutinises the college's management accounts effectively. It includes the monitoring of academic standards within its remit and is becoming more active in this respect. The audit committee operates in accordance with the model terms of reference in Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. It presents an annual report to the corporation. Current developments include the development of performance indicators to assess the performance of the college's internal and external auditors. Governors are committed to the college. Corporation performance indicators are being developed to monitor and assess their work. The level of attendance at corporation and committee meetings is generally good.

85 The chair appraises the principal annually and sets targets that align with the aims in the strategic plan. The conclusions of the appraisal interview are not linked to pay but inform the considerations of the remuneration committee.

Management

Grade 3

86 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but felt some strengths had been overstated. They also found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good financial management
- comprehensive links with outside agencies
- clear and well-understood management structure
- effective promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities for staff

Weaknesses

- inadequate progress on weaknesses identified in the last inspection
- inconsistent management practices between curriculum areas
- shortcomings in the reliability and use of management information
- some gaps in the arrangements for communications with staff

87 The college has managed its budget carefully to cope with declining funding, and has met its key financial targets each year, building reserves to support its accommodation strategy. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Management accounts are prepared monthly for the college executive and presented to each meeting of the corporation and the finance, policy and resources committee of the corporation. Both meet four times each year. Accounts include an income and expenditure account, a balance sheet, and a rolling cashflow forecast in graphical form, together with a commentary on the college's financial position. The college is currently running a deficit budget in the expectation that it will use its reserves to part fund the 'Campus 21' project.

88 All directors collate unit managers' reports which feed into the strategic plan drafted by the deputy principal. The operating statement included in the strategic plan has targets for student recruitment. However, other sections are mainly descriptive and there are few quantifiable targets for areas such as retention

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and achievement. Unit plans are not clearly linked to the operating statement. The strategic plan is not effectively monitored, and the absence of measurable targets makes the monitoring of unit plans difficult. This was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Despite the completion of an action plan following the last inspection, inadequate progress has been made in some areas. Where actions have been taken they have not been fully evaluated. In particular, student retention has consistently stayed well below the average for general further education colleges, and even below the average for the 50 colleges in areas with the highest levels of deprivation.

89 The college has a clear, well-established management structure which is understood by all staff. All staff have job descriptions, although the accountabilities of a few have yet to be agreed. Staff are efficiently deployed, but staff shortages in some areas of the college have placed staff under pressure. Management practice varies across the college. In some curriculum areas, staff are involved in strategic planning and constructing the self-assessment report, in others they are not. General management training has not been provided for directors and there has been little opportunity for the middle management team to share good practice. Curriculum directors have a substantial teaching commitment, which, in some cases, hampers their effectiveness as managers. This weakness was identified at the last inspection.

90 Communication within teaching and support units is good. However, the college's overall communication strategy does not effectively address the problems associated with multi-site working. Some sites have no electronic mail link and communication with the main site is sometimes slow. General communication with staff is through unit meetings and a monthly bulletin. Some staff do not feel adequately informed about decisions made at higher levels in the organisation.

91 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has productive links with many external organisations including other colleges in the Brighton area. It is an active member of the East Brighton Education Action Zone forum and has recently introduced work-related learning programmes for 120 year 10 and year 11 pupils from local schools. The college is an active member of the Sussex Virtual College and has been successful in its bid to the Ufl to become the hub operator for the Sussex strategy group.

92 There are weaknesses in the college management information system. A change to the system during 1999 led to the production of inaccurate data. A register clerk now monitors student enrolment and withdrawal data. However, the college has a history of late returns to the FEFC and, at the time of the inspection, inspectors were still not confident that current student data were robust. The college acknowledged in its self-assessment that data on students' achievements have been unreliable in the past. Data held centrally and at curriculum area level have been consistently different. Data are inaccurate partly because teachers do not rigorously provide evidence of student withdrawals or awarding body certification and curriculum directors do not systematically pursue statistical returns. Although the new management information system is still being developed, staff are increasingly confident of the accuracy and reliability of the data they receive from it. Middle managers do not yet have direct access to data on students' enrolment, retention and achievements through the college computer network.

93 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that equal opportunities for both students and staff are effectively promoted and monitored by the equal opportunities committee. Equality of opportunity is embedded in the college's procedures for appointing staff. Health and safety procedures, including those for risk assessments, are thorough. Appropriate

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training is provided and a health, safety and welfare committee oversees the implementation of relevant policies. Regular reports are made to governors. Inspectors found some instances of non-compliance, which were immediately dealt with. Minutes of the committee meetings and a full annual report are sent to the finance, policy and resources committee of the corporation.

Conclusions

94 The college has conducted an annual self-assessment for the last four years. The process and documentation have been improved but the process does not involve all staff. Governors have received training in self-assessment and have conducted their own assessment. Governors are also involved in the college's internal verification process, which was recently established. The process involves scrutiny of the curricular and cross-college reports and the examination of samples of the evidence cited as having been used to make the judgements. Classroom observations form part of the college's quality review and self-assessment process.

95 The self-assessment report was clear and useful to inspectors. The provision of subgrades for each section of the self-assessment report was helpful. The omission of student data for each curriculum section made it difficult to understand some of the judgements about teaching and learning. Inspectors found that strengths were often overstated and a number of significant weaknesses were omitted. This was particularly true for cross-college areas. In general, the self-assessment report lacked critical analysis and the associated action plans did not pay sufficient attention to the poor student retention and other concerns raised at the last inspection. Inspectors awarded one curriculum grade which was higher than the self-assessment grade but awarded a lower grade to four cross-college areas.

96 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 (August 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	12
19-24 years	15
25+ years	69
Not known	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (August 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	11
Level 2 (intermediate)	15
Level 3 (advanced)	17
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	55
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (August 1999)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	73	1,775	10
Agriculture	24	273	2
Construction	67	429	3
Engineering	226	589	4
Business	169	1,669	10
Hotel and catering	218	789	5
Health and community care	263	2,651	15
Art and design	375	4,107	24
Humanities	129	4,337	24
Basic education	63	453	3
Total	1,607	17,072	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 46% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 2000)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	129	62	0	191
Supporting direct learning contact	44	2	0	46
Other support	141	19	0	160
Total	314	83	0	397

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£12,804,000	£12,214,000	£11,351,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.98	£18.73	£17.88
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	71%	74%
Achievement of funding target	101%	98%	97%
Diversity of income	40%	40%	38%
Operating surplus	-£86,000	-£51,000	-£752,000

Sources: Income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Payroll - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Diversity of income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	513	413	356	1,085	918	758
	Retention (%)	74	73	75	68	67	62
	Achievement (%)	55	65	70	45	62	62
2	Number of starters	1,072	959	779	1,876	1,418	1,329
	Retention (%)	67	70	59	71	67	70
	Achievement (%)	56	69	76	57	72	77
3	Number of starters	886	766	774	1,704	1,478	1,563
	Retention (%)	75	72	71	72	71	72
	Achievement (%)	61	70	72	58	71	77
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	7	50
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	80	86	96
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	50	68
Short courses	Number of starters	221	156	301	1,303	972	2,052
	Retention (%)	77	78	87	67	74	86
	Achievement (%)	28	44	65	62	83	59
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	224	407	326	2,135	1,792	1,292
	Retention (%)	96	91	69	91	83	59
	Achievement (%)	58	64	37	47	69	75

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

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