

Chelmsford College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

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 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

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 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 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

Chelmsford College

Eastern Region

Inspected November 2000

Chelmsford College is a medium-sized general further education college which serves the town of Chelmsford and its hinterland of mid-Essex. The college produced a self-assessment report that was clearly presented, comprehensive and self-critical. Staff from all areas of the college contributed to its production. The report provided a good basis for carrying out the inspection. All sections contained detailed action plans. There was substantial evidence to support judgements. Inspectors agreed broadly with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, although they considered that some strengths were overstated and identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. The college was inspected by teams of inspectors from the FEFC and the TSC.

The college offers provision in all 10 FEFC programme areas, although provision in agriculture is small. Six of these areas were inspected, including the college's franchised provision in IT, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Full-time enrolments have declined over the last three years. Students' achievements are above the national average for all levels of courses. The overall retention rate is below the national average for general further education colleges and has not improved since the last inspection. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding was above the national average for

1999-2000 and has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Class sizes and attendance rates are slightly above the average for the sector. The college has productive links with external partners. Corporation members have had significant involvement in the college's strategic planning process. Managers communicate effectively with staff. The college management information system provides comprehensive data to inform college decision-making. The introduction of curriculum 2000 has been effectively planned. There have been improvements in the quality of general resources since the last inspection, including substantial investment in IT resources and the development of the spacious learning centres. Staff have a wide range of opportunities for development and training. The college should address: declining enrolments on its full-time programmes; some students' poor retention; the poor quality of some tutorials; the poor arrangements for some aspects of additional learning support; the shortcomings in many college operational plans and course action plans; the lack of rigour in course evaluation and review; the underdeveloped use of targets for improvement at course level; the poor implementation and monitoring of equal opportunities; and insufficient Internet access for students. Governors should respond more effectively to current significant financial and quality assurance issues, and should address the unsatisfactory management of some aspects of corporation business.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Information technology and computing	2	Support for students	3
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Business and administration	3	Quality assurance	3
Hospitality and catering	2	Governance	3
Health and care	3	Management	3
English, modern foreign languages, and English as a foreign language	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Chelmsford College was established in 1962. It operates from two campuses near the town centre of Chelmsford. The college draws the majority of its students from Chelmsford and the surrounding areas of mid-Essex. There are eight other general further education colleges and three sixth form colleges in the county. Chelmsford College is a regional partner of Anglia Polytechnic University which is a major provider of higher education in Chelmsford and Essex.

2 The college operates in a competitive environment. There are eight secondary schools in the immediate catchment area, all of which have sixth forms. The staying-on rate in full-time education for 16 year olds in the county is high at 74%. The Adult Community College is run by the local education authority (LEA) and is situated close to Chelmsford College. The college has developed extensive partnerships with schools, employers and voluntary organisations and many of its courses are provided in centres which it has established through franchising arrangements with its partners. There are well-developed open learning courses in subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), and a range of professional and vocational qualifications.

3 The population of Chelmsford in 1998 was 155,000. Minority ethnic groups make up 2% of the resident population. Of the college's students, 8% are drawn from minority ethnic groups. There are no areas of high social deprivation in the immediate catchment area of the college. Of the population aged 18 and over, 17% are qualified to diploma level or above, compared with 11% in the whole of Essex. The local economy has experienced steady growth despite a decline in the manufacturing sector. This decline is most evident in defence related industries. However, Chelmsford still has a

considerable manufacturing sector, particularly in its expanding high technology industries. The service sector is strong in distribution, leisure and retail trades and is expanding rapidly. There are currently 63,000 jobs in all sectors. The unemployment rate of 2.3% in February 2000 was the third lowest in Essex. Some 10,000 commuters travel from Chelmsford to London each day.

4 At the time of the inspection, the college had enrolled 1,406 full-time students and 2,761 part-time students. The college offers provision in all 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas, although provision in agriculture is small. Provision includes basic education, craft, technician and access courses, higher education, postgraduate studies and professional updating courses. Full-time students have a choice of 29 subjects in GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) and in general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in 11 vocational areas. There is a wide range of national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses for work-based trainees and other students in employment at levels 1 to 3. The college also has a training unit offering modern apprenticeships, New Deal and national traineeships.

5 The college employs 131 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 154 full-time equivalent support staff. It achieved Investors in People accreditation in January 1999 and was re-approved in March 2000. There are four senior postholders, including the principal. The curriculum is organised into nine units, or sectors of related courses and subjects.

6 The college's mission is 'to provide high-quality learning opportunities to enable individuals, groups and employers to achieve success'.

Context

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 6 November 2000. During the previous week the college's franchised provision in information technology (IT) was inspected. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college agreed that the inspection would be based on individualised student record (ISR) data for 1998 and 1999. The college's data on achievements in 2000 were checked by inspectors in advance of the inspection, using primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified approximately four months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. Thirteen inspectors and one auditor, working for a total of 59 days, carried out the inspection. This included five days inspecting franchised provision. Inspectors observed 91 lessons. They examined students'

work and college documentation and held meetings with governors, managers, staff, students and partner organisations.

8 Five inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training in construction, engineering, care and foundation for work. They also inspected trainee support, equal opportunities, management of training, and quality assurance. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 66% were judged to be good or outstanding and only 3% were rated as less than satisfactory. This compares with the national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	4	4	0	0	8
GCSE	1	3	0	0	0	4
GNVQ	5	12	9	0	0	26
NVQ	1	8	4	0	0	13
Other vocational	4	17	7	1	0	29
Other*	0	5	4	2	0	11
Total (No.)	11	49	28	3	0	91
Total (%)	12	54	31	3	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

*includes tutorials and basic skills observations

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Chelmsford College	11.4	80
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Information Technology and Computing

Grade 2

11 Inspectors observed 24 lessons in IT and computing, including those provided through the college's main franchise partner. They agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths. Some weaknesses identified by the college had been addressed before the inspection.

Key strengths

- a wide range of IT and computing courses
- good teaching
- high levels of retention on many courses
- good achievements on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses
- effective development of students' key skills
- rigorous assessment of students' work
- well-structured and well-managed franchised courses

Weaknesses

- poor retention on GCE A level computing
- low levels of achievement in GCSE IT and some franchised courses
- poor Internet access for students

12 The college offers a wide range of courses in IT and computing. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Courses for full-time students are offered at GCE A level, GCE AS, advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE), AVCE double award, GNVQ intermediate, and GCSE. Many part-time students follow computer literacy and information technology courses. The Cambridge

information technology course is offered through open learning. Franchised provision includes computer literacy and information technology, City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) diploma in networking, integrated business technology level 2 and desktop publishing. Courses are well managed and course files are well organised. However, minutes of meetings do not always show how issues are followed up. Franchised courses are well structured and well managed. Students use good-quality course manuals which have been designed specifically for each course. The organisation and teaching of key skills for IT students in the college's curriculum 2000 framework is a strength. All full-time students receive help for one hour a week for each of their key skills of application of number, communication, and IT. Teaching of key skills is carefully co-ordinated and uses standard college materials. For example, in IT a common teaching scheme is used and materials are shared across the college network. All full-time students have a weekly tutorial. These include regular reports on their progress and students find them helpful.

13 Most teaching is good, and some is outstanding. Of the lessons observed, 77% were graded at 1 or 2, which is significantly above the national average for this programme area as reported in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*. The best lessons are well structured, and teachers effectively question students and make good use of their IT experiences. Overhead transparencies are used to draw out key points. Supporting material for practical work is well produced and effective. On some courses students are able at any time to print their assignment tasks from the computer network. Course materials used in the franchised courses allow students to join the course at any stage and work individually at their own pace. Attendance levels during the inspection were high. The self-assessment report did not identify these strengths in teaching.

Curriculum Areas

14 The college has recently improved its computing facilities. Computer rooms are well equipped and pleasant places in which to work. There is a good range of appropriate software. CD-ROMs are available on the network and additional titles are available in the learning centre. There is a room especially equipped for computer-aided design. The self-assessment report recognises that there is poor Internet access for IT students. One Internet-linked computer is available in each learning centre. Three links are provided to machines in the computer rooms. Students have identified the lack of Internet access as an impediment to producing good assignments. Teachers are confident, knowledgeable and have good, varied IT experience.

15 As the self-assessment report indicates, achievements on GNVQ IT courses are good. Pass rates at intermediate and advanced levels have been consistently above the national average while retention has been maintained at a high level. The GNVQ advanced pass rate has

been 98% or above for the last three years. However, pass rates have been below the national average for the last three years at GCSE and achievement on the franchised computer literacy and information technology course is low. There are high levels of retention on most level 1 and level 2 courses. Retention is poor and declining on GCE A level computing. Data for franchised courses show high retention levels. Inspectors agreed that students' work is rigorously assessed. Coursework and portfolios are marked meticulously, and students are provided with appropriate feedback. Assignments are related to the computing industry or practical IT applications and allow students to demonstrate a good range of skills and knowledge. Course documentation and feedback to students was particularly helpful in GNVQ advanced and national diploma portfolios. On franchised computer literacy and information technology courses students' progress is recorded clearly and feedback on returned work is detailed. Internal verification arrangements for franchised courses are effective.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in information technology and computing, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Computer literacy and information technology (24 week course, non-franchised)	1	Number of starters	7	53	63
		Retention (%)	86	79	100
		Achievement (%)	100	82	86
GCSE information systems/IT	2	Number of starters	15	†	22
		Retention (%)	87	†	59
		Achievement (%)	23	†	54
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	46	43	62
		Retention (%)	35	72	85
		Achievement (%)	100	87	89
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	20	33	36
		Retention (%)	90	67	83
		Achievement (%)	98	100	100
BTEC national diploma in computing	3	Number of starters	20	19	19
		Retention (%)	65	84	56
		Achievement (%)	100	94	100
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	24	24	20
		Retention (%)	79	63	33
		Achievement (%)	50	79	80

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
 † course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

16 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in craft and technician engineering courses. TSC inspectors observed five lessons in work-based training in engineering for eight trainees. Inspectors from the TSC and the FEFC agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report and identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- high achievement rates on technician programmes
- effective links with industry
- good standard of students' work

Weaknesses

- falling retention rates on craft courses
- low achievement rates on the NVQ level 2 engineering manufacture course
- inadequate learning centre bookstock
- lack of IT-based engineering equipment

17 The college provides a broad range of courses in engineering. Technician level courses are managed by the sector of science, construction, and engineering technology. The college's training unit manages craft level courses. Facilities are shared between the two areas and there is effective collaboration between them. Inspectors agreed that links with local industries are effective and benefit students. The college is seeking to improve these links further by establishing a training consortium with local employers. Management of most courses is satisfactory. Students elect course representatives to serve on course teams or, in the case of part-time students, act as the link between course and college management. Course files contain minutes of course team

meetings, schemes of work and lesson plans though the last were often brief and learning outcomes were not identified. On some programmes, course team meetings are a recent innovation. Annual course reviews cover concerns relating to students' retention and achievements. However, the resulting action plans lack rigour and do not provide sufficient information about the improvements that are required, or how they are to be achieved. All students are allocated a tutor and attend a weekly tutorial. Students on work-based training programmes regularly discuss their progress with training managers, often on their premises. The literacy and numeracy needs of full-time students are assessed. Learning support is available but infrequently taken up. No classroom learning support was observed. Key skills are fully integrated with each subject on full-time GNVQ courses.

18 Some good teaching was observed with an overall lesson profile similar to that presented in the self-assessment report and close to the national average for engineering. In the best lessons, teachers made good use of well-produced handouts, task-sheets and assessment records. They introduced topics in clearly structured stages before the students attempted the tasks. Teachers provide good support for individual students, offering encouragement and motivation, and effectively monitoring and assessing their learning. In some practical activities, teachers did not accurately assess the students' prior knowledge of the task. In one lesson, unfamiliarity with an electronic measuring instrument prevented students from completing their work on time. Wall charts record students' progress on workshop-based tasks. They enable students to assess their own progress. Safe working practices are observed at all times in the workshops. Lateness and absence are closely monitored.

19 Some teaching spaces are unsatisfactory. Electronics classrooms are too small for the size

Curriculum Areas

of classes using them. A number of rooms are in need of decoration. Inspectors agreed that there is a lack of IT-based engineering equipment. Other equipment is dated, but is useful in the development of students' basic engineering competences. The number and range of books in the learning centre is insufficient. Books on workshop technology and manufacturing are dated. There are a few books which are specific to GNVQ courses and new technology including computer-aided design, computer numerical control, robotics and electronics. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced.

20 Inspectors broadly agreed with the trends in retention and achievement identified by the college. Retention rates on craft courses have fallen from around 90% in 1998 and 1999 to

between 43% and 61% in 2000, and are below the national average. The college did not identify in its self-assessment report that the achievement rate on the NVQ level 2 engineering manufacturing course is well below the national average. The GNVQ intermediate and advanced and national certificates all exhibit achievement rates well above the national average for each of the last three years. Students' work is of a good standard. The college did not identify this strength. Portfolios of students' work from GNVQ intermediate and advanced and national certificate programmes are well produced and maintained. Students make good use of IT in producing their assignments. Students' practical work in day-release workshop classes was of a high standard.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in engineering, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G engineering (24 weeks and over)	2	Number of starters	125	83	126
		Retention (%)	87	92	61
		Achievement (%)	88	43	75
NVQ engineering manufacture	2	Number of starters	36	37	40
		Retention (%)	92	86	43
		Achievement (%)	91	50	56
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	27	15	21
		Retention (%)	70	93	81
		Achievement (%)	100	100	73
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	22	25	13
		Retention (%)	64	92	100
		Achievement (%)	100	91	92
BTEC national certificates electrical/electronic and mechanical/manufacture	3	Number of starters	31	31	32
		Retention (%)	74	74	72
		Achievement (%)	100	100	91

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Business and Administration

Grade 3

21 Inspectors observed 12 lessons across a range of business studies courses. Inspectors agreed with some judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses
- good pass rates on most vocational programmes
- effective use of business links to enrich students' learning

Weaknesses

- some poor and undemanding teaching
- poor and declining pass rates on GCE A level business studies
- poor punctuality and irregular attendance by some students
- insufficient monitoring of performance against targets

22 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that it offers a wide range of vocational and professional business courses, including GNVQ business at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, AVCE business, and a large number of professional accounting qualifications. There are also GCSE and GCE A level courses in business studies, and short courses in business administration and office technology. Management courses include the certificate and diploma in management, and NVQs at levels 3, 4 and 5. Students are able to achieve additional qualifications and progress to higher level courses by studying in ways and at times which are convenient to them. Many students gain accounting qualifications through the college's open learning programmes.

23 Most courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly, and documentation for most provision is well organised. Schemes of work are clear and well presented. Some schemes and lesson plans lack sufficient reference to course objectives, activities and planned learning outcomes. In course reviews some teams do not analyse sufficiently their courses' performance against targets for attendance, retention and achievement. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed that effective use is made of external links to enrich students' learning. All GNVQ business students undertake work experience, and GNVQ advanced level students have enjoyed particular success on the Young Enterprise scheme. Students' own work experience forms an integral part of administration and professional courses, and is used in course assessment.

24 Most teaching is satisfactory. In some successful lessons, teachers use an appropriate variety of activities to sustain students' motivation and interest, and use questions effectively to explore issues and help their understanding. In one GNVQ advanced business lesson, students presented draft business plans to a panel of external business advisers. The students had prepared thoroughly. The advisers gave expert practical advice on how to develop their plans further. There is, however, some undemanding teaching. Teachers do not always set tasks which are sufficiently challenging. In one lesson the teacher had prepared a test on business procedures. The students worked purposefully in groups, but the task was too easy for them. In some lessons teachers relied too heavily on students taking notes. The available IT facilities are not used effectively by teachers to produce good-quality learning resources for students. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses in teaching and learning. Most students are well motivated and contribute well to lessons. Attendance rates are good on most courses, but

Curriculum Areas

are poor and erratic on the GNVQ intermediate business course.

25 Students have good access to appropriate IT resources, including workshops for administration and office technology courses. Classrooms are adequately equipped, although most lack displays of materials or students' work. The range of books and other learning materials is adequate. Staff are appropriately qualified, but some do not have up-to-date subject knowledge.

26 Students' achievements are good on some courses. There are good pass rates on GNVQ business courses at all levels, on vocational courses, including NVQ levels 2 and 3, higher accounting programmes, and some higher level

management courses. The college did not identify this strength. Pass rates on the GCSE business course are satisfactory, but retention has declined sharply, from 100% in 1998 to 43% in 2000. The pass rate on the GCE A level two-year course has declined from 80% in 1998 to 44% in 2000, which is well below the national average. On the one-year course the pass rate has been well below the national average for the last three years. The GNVQ intermediate course has experienced a decline in retention. Some poor achievements are acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students' assignments are generally well presented. Assessment methods are fair, and students understand what is expected of them.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business and administration, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	15	13	18
		Retention (%)	93	92	94
		Achievement (%)	93	58	88
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	35	41	36
		Retention (%)	77	80	67
		Achievement (%)	85	79	90
NVQ accounting (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	53	69	65
		Retention (%)	88	64	77
		Achievement (%)	100	80	75*
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	49	74	76
		Retention (%)	90	55	73
		Achievement (%)	59	49	40
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	85	71	93
		Retention (%)	55	73	76
		Achievement (%)	100	100	94
NVQ accounting (short course and one-year course)	3	Number of starters	132	130	98
		Retention (%)	83	83	73
		Achievement (%)	94	75	54

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 2

27 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering the range of full-time and part-time hospitality and catering courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- high achievement rates
- good retention in the year 2000
- comprehensive and helpful feedback on students' work

Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements for monitoring the quality of courses
- some dated equipment
- no key skills programme for NVQ students

28 The college offers a wide range of programmes in hospitality and catering. These include full-time NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 in food preparation and cookery, and in food service. Since September 2000, students have been able to take the AVCE course in hospitality and catering, which has replaced the GNVQ advanced course. Food hygiene courses and courses accredited by the Wine and Spirit Education Trust are offered, together with a variety of leisure cookery courses. Recruitment is low. However, as the self-assessment report identifies, the college has initiated links with local schools to promote its hospitality and catering courses more effectively. Teaching staff regularly attend school open evenings. Course handbooks have been improved to provide more detail about individual courses than was the case at the last inspection. Employers have little involvement in developing the provision.

29 Teaching was good. Lessons are well managed. Students are actively involved, interested, motivated, and challenged in their lessons. Teachers regularly check to ensure that students are learning and developing relevant skills. Students work in realistic settings so that their learning is related to different work environments. Students taking food service courses practise several styles of restaurant service, including silver, family, plated and bistro service. NVQ students at levels 2 and 3 work together in the kitchens and restaurant. Activities are well planned so that both groups benefit. Food service students at both levels showed courage in flambéing bananas with spectacular and successful results. Level 3 students gain valuable supervisory skills. Students who participated in a blind wine tasting to develop their appreciation of the characteristics of different wines displayed a great deal of enthusiasm for the task and a good knowledge of their subject. In a theory lesson for the AVCE course, students gave informative and interesting presentations to develop their communication skills. They were articulate, self-critical, and presented their arguments logically. Students on NVQ courses do not have a programme for the development and assessment of key skills built into their course, a weakness recognised by the college. NVQ students do not take advantage of the study skills workshops that are designed to help them in their learning.

30 Monitoring of courses is weak. Lesson observations take place regularly. Comprehensive reports are written. However, they do not record some of the significant weaknesses identified. For example, shortcomings in some lesson plans and schemes of work were not commented on in lesson observation records. There is no evidence from minutes of course team meetings that staff use targets to measure progress or discuss formally and regularly their actions to address issues they have identified.

Curriculum Areas

31 Teachers are well qualified and work regularly in the industry. They make good use of opportunities to further their own development. Some teachers have visited colleges in the Netherlands, France and Germany to study catering provision. Specialist resources include two catering kitchens, one domestic science kitchen, a training restaurant with a bar, a reception area and a shop. The self-assessment report does not identify that some of the specialist equipment is dated. The kitchens are well equipped, but some of the equipment is old and does not reflect current industrial standards. The restaurant does not have a modern billing system. The college lacks industry specific software.

32 Inspectors agreed that there are high achievement rates on most courses. Retention

rates in the year 2000 were good. The pass rate on the NVQ level 2 food preparation course has been well above the national average for each of the last three years. At level 3 the pass rate was well above the national average in 1998 and 2000. All students who took the GNVQ advanced in hospitality and catering in 1999 were successful. Many of them progressed to higher education or employment related to their work experience on the course. Students demonstrate practical skills appropriate to their level of study on most occasions. However, some full-time NVQ level 3 students lacked confidence in practical work. Tutors give detailed feedback to students on their work in the kitchens and restaurant and provide detailed and constructive written comments in students' log books.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hospitality and catering, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ catering and hospitality, food preparation and cooking (combined full-time and part-time course)	2	Number of starters	43	28	23
		Retention (%)	49	64	87
		Achievement (%)	100	100	94
Wine and Spirit Education Trust certificate (12-week course)	2	Number of starters	14	20	22
		Retention (%)	100	100	91
		Achievement (%)	100	82	86
NVQ catering and hospitality, food preparation and cooking, kitchen/larder or patisserie	3	Number of starters	11	6	15
		Retention (%)	36	67	93
		Achievement (%)	100	50	93
GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering	3	Number of starters	11	12	†
		Retention (%)	82	42	†
		Achievement (%)	63	100	†
Wine and Spirit Education Trust higher certificate	3	Number of starters	†	14	8
		Retention (%)	†	100	100
		Achievement (%)	†	79	71

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

† course not running

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 3

33 Inspectors observed 12 lessons across the range of early years, health and social care provision. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses. TSC inspectors observed work-based training in care and childcare NVQs.

Key strengths

- broad range of provision
- good achievements on most courses
- wide range of experience of part-time teachers

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory course management
- unsatisfactory assessment and support arrangements on NVQ courses
- some classrooms too small

34 The college offers a broad range of full-time courses in childcare and health and social care. These include GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced diplomas in health and social care, the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies, and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) certificate. The range of NVQ provision is increasing. Short courses are available for adults, and there is a higher national certificate in caring services. The provision gives clear progression routes for all students. Mature students following a one-year GNVQ advanced course may progress to higher education programmes at the Anglia Polytechnic University. The college care sector management group meets regularly. Meetings are well documented and pay close attention to students' retention and achievements. Course teams have considerable autonomy in the way they plan,

organise and review their courses. The college did not identify that some course management is unsatisfactory. On some courses insufficient attention is given in schemes of work and lesson plans to students' learning. Inspectors observed a lack of variety in the learning experiences of students throughout the day.

35 Teaching is satisfactory. In the best lessons, students were given a range of demanding and vocationally relevant activities. Teachers used an appropriate range of methods to help students learn. Students were encouraged to draw on their own experiences of work placement. In some less effective lessons, teachers did not set sufficiently demanding work. Students spent considerable time copying from the board or answering paper-based questions. Little account was taken of the different learning needs or abilities of students. Inspectors agreed that work placements for full-time students are effectively organised. They offer students valuable experience in a wide range of appropriate care settings. The college employs a work placement co-ordinator. Course tutors make occasional visits to work placements. Additional contact is maintained through termly meetings with workplace representatives. Meetings are well attended and often include presentations on current practices in the care sector. Students keep diaries of their work experiences which they use effectively to develop their communication skills.

36 FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed that assessment and support arrangements for students on NVQ courses are unsatisfactory. Too many of the assessments are based on written evidence. Work-based assessment of practice is underdeveloped. Opportunities for students on NVQ courses to meet with their tutors to review progress are insufficient. The college did not identify this weakness.

37 As the self-assessment report identifies, teachers are well qualified and have a good knowledge and understanding of their individual

Curriculum Areas

subject areas. The college makes effective use of the skills and experience of part-time staff who are current care practitioners. The library has an appropriate selection of books about topics in care. There is a good collection of video material. Classrooms are satisfactorily equipped. However, some of them are not large enough for group work and other learning activities planned to take place in them.

38 Inspectors agreed that the good achievements on most courses were a strength. On GNVQ courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels pass rates are above the national average. All the students who took the CACHE certificate course in 1998-99 were

successful. Retention rates are broadly in line with national averages, and on some courses they are improving. However, retention on GNVQ advanced health and social care has been poor. Student assignment work is often of a high standard and meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Teachers grade assignments accurately. Most work is marked with supportive comments and returned promptly. Students' portfolios for GNVQ advanced health and social care show that students have acquired a good range of research and presentational skills. There are satisfactory arrangements for the internal verification of assessment.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	Number of starters	15	10	11
		Retention (%)	73	80	91
		Achievement (%)	91	100	100
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	15	10	23
		Retention (%)	60	80	91
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
National Examining Board for Dental Nurses national certificate	2	Number of starters	26	18	16
		Retention (%)	85	44	75
		Achievement (%)	76	*	100
CACHE certificate childcare and education	2	Number of starters	21	22	18
		Retention (%)	76	86	78
		Achievement (%)	80	100	100
BTEC national diploma childhood studies	3	Number of starters	30	29	27
		Retention (%)	83	90	81
		Achievement (%)	93	100	100
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	28	23	25
		Retention (%)	64	39	64
		Achievement (%)	94	100	*

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*date unreliable

Curriculum Areas

English, Modern Foreign Languages, and English as a Foreign Language

Grade 2

39 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in English, modern languages and English as a foreign language (EFL). The self-assessment report was thorough and inspectors broadly agreed with its judgements and identified additional strengths

Key strengths

- good teaching
- good achievements on English literature and French GCE A level courses
- strong open learning provision
- an expanding EFL programme with good pass rates
- effective use of the relevant foreign language in advanced classes

Weaknesses

- poor retention on some courses
- lack of structured speaking practice in beginners' and intermediate languages lessons
- insufficient strategies to ensure the participation of quieter students in many lessons

40 There are opportunities for students to study English from basic to advanced level, a modern language, or to take courses in EFL. Demand for EFL courses is growing, with healthy numbers in all classes. Recruitment to Spanish courses is good but there are no French or German taught courses at either beginners' or GCSE level. Sixty employees of a major international electronics company in Chelmsford are studying Italian. Options and Pathways courses enable students to return to learning.

The open learning centre offers the chance to study English or a foreign language to GCSE or advanced level for students who are unable to attend regularly. These students are well supported by their personal tutors. One GCE A level advanced English student lives in South Africa and communicates with his tutor by electronic mail. The strengths in open learning provision are not identified in the self-assessment report.

41 Teaching was good. In modern languages, most lessons are conducted in the language the students are studying. However, at beginners' and intermediate levels there is not enough structured practice of the language to give students confidence or to improve their pronunciation. EFL lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers use an appropriate variety of activities and visual aids. In a lesson on the future tense, the teacher skilfully built up the students' grasp of the future tense through predicting the possible outcomes of a romance and filling in the missing words of the song, 'Will you still love me tomorrow?' In English lessons teachers vary their methods of teaching effectively. Inspectors agreed that teaching of GCSE English is a strength. A teacher's skilful questioning of full-time GCSE students inspired them to respond to Carol Ann Duffy's poems with sensitivity and enthusiasm. The teacher of a part-time GCSE evening class played the part of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The students questioned him to explore the character and establish his motives in the play. In small group and individual tutorials with GCE A level students, the teacher developed students' writing and study skills through detailed discussion of coursework drafts. Students are often assertive, competent speakers and take an enthusiastic part in discussions and question-and-answer sessions. However, inspectors observed many instances where quieter students were not encouraged to contribute to discussions or to speak in the foreign language.

Curriculum Areas

42 Staff are well qualified and have received appropriate training to support the introduction of curriculum 2000. Language teachers are mostly native speakers. Inspectors agreed that resources are good in all areas, with dedicated teaching rooms for modern languages and EFL. In the modern languages classroom, students have access to six computers with software in French, German and Spanish. The EFL base room also serves as a tutorial base, and has displays of photographs of course members and job advertisements. The library is well stocked. There is an extensive collection of paperback fiction which is appreciated by students.

43 The pass rates in GCE A level English literature are above the national average and

there has been an improvement in the proportion of higher grades achieved. All GCE A level French students gained the qualification in 2000. Pass rates on GCSE modern language courses are also good, although the number of students taking the examination is small. In 1999, all of the students taking courses in GCSE French, German and Spanish through the open learning centre were successful. Pass rates in the certificate of EFL are high, and well above the national average. However, inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that retention on this course is poor. Retention is also poor in GCSE French. Retention in GCSE and GCE A level English, although still below national averages, has improved.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, modern foreign languages, and English as a foreign language, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE French	2	Number of starters	19	8	12
		Retention (%)	79	50	17
		Achievement (%)	69	100	100
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	154	161	143
		Retention (%)	77	68	71
		Achievement (%)	41	56	42
Certificate in English	2	Number of starters	31	29	47
		Retention (%)	42	59	64
		Achievement (%)	93	65	46
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	91	104	39
		Retention (%)	65	71	82
		Achievement (%)	76	76	84
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	*	44	40
		Retention (%)	*	100	69
		Achievement (%)	*	98	96

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

* data unreliable

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Support for Students

Grade 3

44 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that the significance of some weaknesses had been understated.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry advice and guidance
- effective careers education and guidance
- excellent tutorial arrangements for students on open learning courses

Weaknesses

- poor arrangements for the provision of additional learning support
- some inadequate tutorial provision

45 Students are well informed about the college and its courses through recruitment events such as open days and 'taster' days. For example, the hotel and catering section runs Saturday courses for 12 to 14 year olds which include information on opportunities at the college. The college actively seeks and responds to invitations to participate in careers events in schools, circulates prospectuses and runs events to attract careers teachers and local careers officers. The college is working closely with local agencies to encourage students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to participate in further education.

46 As the self-assessment report identifies, other aspects of pre-entry advice and guidance are also effective. Students benefit from a well-situated information centre where there is a wide range of publicity and guidance materials. Most prospective students receive two interviews with subject tutors. Advice on financial issues and accommodation is provided through the admissions unit. Students speak highly of the support they receive. The

admissions service is well managed and deals with applications quickly and efficiently. All courses provide an induction programme. Guidelines and a checklist of activities are available to tutors. However, the college has yet to evaluate the effectiveness of its induction arrangements.

47 The college is piloting a new tutorial system as part of a curriculum 2000 project with the North Essex Learning Partnership. Tutors for curriculum 2000 have been identified and new job descriptions and induction and tutorial guidelines developed. A tutorial development group includes lead tutors. A handbook provides a useful list of recommended topics and guidelines for tutors, and a tutorial news sheet keeps tutors up to date. All full-time students have a weekly meeting with their tutor. Tutorial schemes of work are produced by course teams. Tutorials include group activities and a review of the progress of individual students. However, there is some inadequate tutorial provision. Records in some students' files are superficial and students do not have copies of individual progress reviews. Standards have been set for tutorial work and documentation is subject to a central audit, but the quality of tutorial support has not been thoroughly evaluated. Tutorials have been timetabled into some part-time courses, but there is no entitlement to an individual progress review for part-time students. Pastoral care issues for some part-time students are not being addressed. However, there are excellent tutorial arrangements for students on open learning courses. The college's self-assessment did not identify this strength. Arrangements are clear and encourage students to take a structured approach to their learning by agreeing tasks and deadlines for their work. Students may choose individual or group tutorials. A comprehensive and effective system is in place for monitoring contacts with students on open learning courses. Students spoke highly of the opportunities the programme provided and the support they

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received. There is effective careers education and advice on progression opportunities. The college careers adviser, supported by local careers officers, co-ordinates the programme and provides appropriate and impartial advice to full-time students. Learning packages developed by the college have been well received by students. The college's extensive European links provide some students with valuable work experience abroad.

48 The majority of full-time students are screened for basic skills needs using appropriate tests. Feedback from tutors has been used to develop several versions of the tests. Results of the tests are carefully analysed. A more specific diagnosis is carried out within their programmes of study for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some tutors have used the tests with part-time students who have welcomed this initiative. However, arrangements for the provision of additional learning support are poor. This weakness was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. There is no information available on the number of students who receive support after screening and little evidence that tutors follow up the progress of students referred to the study skills workshop. Arrangements for further diagnosis are ineffective. Learning support agreements in students' files are incomplete. Mid-term review checks are poorly documented. It is not clear how the results of screening influence the subsequent learning of students. There is no evidence that tutors are given further guidance on student referral. Students who have identified a learning difficulty or disability are contacted by the learning support manager. Additional learning support for these students is offered individually, through the study skills workshop and in class with a learning support assistant. Assistants have written guidance. Expert diagnosis is sought from external specialists when it is needed. The college also has a qualified dyslexia support co-ordinator, who provides clear guidelines to

tutors on identifying possible needs, and individual support for students. There is no evidence of further staff development for tutors. The responsibility for reviewing additional support plans for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has not been clearly allocated.

General Resources

Grade 2

49 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. One of these weaknesses was identified in the previous inspection and had not been addressed.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and clean accommodation
- high-quality IT resources
- spacious and well-managed learning centres
- good access for people with restricted mobility
- effective arrangements for shared use of the sports complex

Weaknesses

- poor space utilisation
- insufficient Internet access for students

50 The college is based on two campuses, 1 mile apart. The larger campus at Moulsham Street is close to the town centre and is well served by public transport. The main block was purpose-built in the 1960s and is used for teaching and administration. A large Victorian building, Dovedale House, and a sports complex are also on this campus. The Princes Road campus was built in the mid-1980s and accommodates catering and hospitality and construction courses.

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51 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the buildings provide an attractive place in which to learn. They are well maintained and clean, and have adequate security arrangements. Classrooms are well lit, comfortably furnished and fitted with window blinds. They are adequately equipped with basic teaching aids. Students' work is displayed only in a few areas. Reception areas are welcoming. At the Moulsham Street campus there is also an information centre and a college bookshop adjacent to reception. Signposting on both college campuses is clear, and helpful maps are displayed on each floor. There is insufficient car parking space at Moulsham Street.

52 The college owns and maintains a sports complex. It shares its use with Chelmsford Borough Council. The excellent facilities include a large multipurpose sports hall, a fitness suite, squash courts and provision for dance and other performing arts. College students have priority use in the daytime while the community, especially six to 16 year olds, uses the facilities in the evenings, at weekends and during the holidays. Social and cafeteria facilities for students are good, although students complain that the choice of food is limited by the end of the day. There is a 20-place college nursery at Moulsham Street which is used by students, staff, and the local community.

53 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there is good access for people with restricted mobility. Automatic doors, new lifts and many ramps have been provided where needed. A few rooms in Dovedale House and the female changing rooms in the sports complex are not accessible to people with restricted mobility, but alternative arrangements are made for them. The college has not updated its accommodation strategy since 1995. There have been no new-build projects since incorporation and none is planned. The college has given priority to refurbishing the existing building stock which it considers will meet its future needs. The

planned maintenance programme is clear and well managed. The college does not use all of its space fully or effectively. There is some inefficient use of classrooms, a weakness identified in the last inspection report and in the college's self-assessment report. Sometimes classes are timetabled in rooms which are too small for them.

54 The college has a spacious and well-managed learning centre at each campus. The opening times are well matched to the times when students need to use them. Staffing levels are high and staff are appropriately qualified. The provision of books, periodicals, CD-ROMs and multimedia materials is generally good and appropriately supports the curriculum. However, inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that for a few courses resources are insufficient. An automated recording system enables curriculum managers to be provided with records of learning centre use. The budget for the two centres is significantly below the average identified by the Library Association.

55 The college has high-quality IT resources. It has made a significant investment in computing facilities and plans further expansion. In the last year, the whole college has been networked, the servers upgraded and new computers provided. There are over 600 high specification computers, 336 of which are for academic use. The number of computers available for students' 'drop-in' use is insufficient. The college currently has one computer for every six full-time equivalent students. The college's information and learning strategy is carefully matched to the curriculum. A curriculum systems group is responsible for its implementation. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment and with students' views that there are insufficient opportunities for students to use the Internet. Five computers available to students are linked to the Internet and, of these, only two are in the learning centres. Students are dissatisfied with the

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cumbersome arrangements for using these computers. Staff have Internet access and use electronic mail for internal communications but external use is restricted. There are no intranet facilities.

56 There are sufficient work areas for staff but those at Princes Road are small. At Moulsham Street, the main staff room is next to an attractive suite of rooms containing a staff lounge, computer facilities and a staff training room.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

57 Inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements on quality assurance in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good improvements in teaching and learning and students' achievements
- sound arrangements to assess the quality of teaching and learning
- systematic compliance monitoring of franchised provision
- staff development linked to strategic priorities

Weaknesses

- insufficient impact of quality assurance on retention
- underdeveloped use of targets for improvement at course level
- lack of rigour in the review and evaluation of courses
- deficiencies in action plans to address weaknesses

58 The college has improved its arrangements for quality assurance since the last inspection. There is a strong commitment to continuous improvement, which is stated in the college's mission statement and illustrated in its strategic objectives. The college achieved Investors in People status in 1999. The college employs a wide range of quality assurance procedures. However, as the self-assessment report indicates, it does not have a clearly defined framework for its operations, or a published calendar describing when they should take place. Separate and appropriate procedures are in place for monitoring the quality of the college's franchised provision, and the college systematically checks to ensure that franchised partners comply with them. The college did not identify this strength.

59 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that its focus on quality has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning and students' achievements. The lesson observation scheme is well conceived with appropriate protocols and a helpful checklist for observers. Completed lesson observations are included in course team files and are being used to help improve practice in the classroom. The college's lesson observation profile is similar both to that awarded by inspectors and to the national average for the sector. However, the outcomes from lesson observations are not used sufficiently to inform staff development and to share good practice across the college. College data demonstrate that students' achievements are above national averages for all levels of courses and are improving. Some initiatives have been introduced to improve retention but, as the self-assessment report acknowledges, these have not had sufficient impact on the continuing low retention rates on many full-time courses.

60 The college produced its second self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The report is self-critical and evaluative. Appropriate use is made of

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comparative measures including national averages and benchmarking data published by the FEFC to help the college to assess its performance. The outcomes from lesson observations are used to inform judgements on teaching and learning. Action plans contained in the report address most of the weaknesses identified. Actions are prioritised according to their importance in improving college performance. However, inspectors did not agree that self-assessment at course level is a strength. Here, many reports are superficial and lack rigour. Action plans do not address the weaknesses identified in course self-assessment reports, identify the personnel responsible for taking action, establish the timescales for the completion of actions, or the arrangements to monitor the progress made towards the achievement of actions. There is insufficient systematic monitoring of in-year course performance. Course teams seldom set retention and achievement targets for improvement, although it is a requirement of self-assessment. Minutes of course team meetings rarely include a review of matters arising from previous meetings. Although most course teams meet regularly, insufficient consideration is given to monitoring and updating their action plans.

61 There is an effective system for the internal verification of students' assignments and assessed work. Lead verifiers from each sector meet regularly to review procedures. Reports from external verifiers are scrutinised to identify good practice and action points for improvement. Procedures have recently been introduced to check that prompt action is taken to address any issues that arise. The college does not routinely receive a copy of external verifier reports which have been returned to franchise partners.

62 The college has improved its arrangements for gathering the views of students. Student questionnaires are carefully analysed and have led to improvements, including the

arrangements for induction and the scheduling of students' assessments. Students on franchised courses routinely complete feedback questionnaires. The forms are reviewed by college managers but are not rigorously analysed. Procedures for gathering the views of employers are underdeveloped. There are no arrangements to gather the views of parents. The college charter outlines the service that students and employers should expect to receive. Appropriate arrangements are in place to monitor charter commitments. However, the college recognises that the majority of students are unaware of the charter and is taking steps to promote it more effectively. The complaints procedure is clearly written. It is publicised in the charter and the student handbook. Complaints are centrally logged and response times monitored. The action taken to resolve complaints is not recorded. There is no routine reporting of complaints to the academic board or the corporation. Most non-teaching areas have developed service standards and some have quantifiable performance targets. Inspectors agreed with the college that these are not yet fully developed.

63 The biennial staff appraisal scheme is well established. Staff development is informed by the outcomes of appraisal and in response to national initiatives. For example, well-planned and comprehensive staff development was undertaken in preparation for the introduction of curriculum 2000. Inspectors agreed that staff development is explicitly linked to the college's strategic objectives. There are good staff development opportunities and a good level of financial support for them. The induction of staff is well planned.

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Governance

Grade 3

64 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the judgements made in the self-assessment report. They considered that some of the strengths were overstated and identified weaknesses which had not been recognised by the college.

Key strengths

- significant involvement in strategic planning
- effective appraisal of the clerk and principal

Weaknesses

- failure to explore fully the significance of financial and quality issues
- unsatisfactory management of some aspects of corporation business

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

66 The clerk to the corporation is a member of the senior management team with significant management responsibilities. Governors have considered these arrangements carefully and confirmed their support for them. There is a separate job description for the role of clerk but it does not identify the time allocated for this role. The chair of the corporation appraises the clerk. The appraisal is informed by an annual review of governance carried out by members of the corporation. It includes governors' views of the effectiveness of committees and clerking arrangements. The appraisal of both the clerk

and the principal includes a review of progress made towards the achievement of specific targets. This strength was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Governors have recently set themselves challenging targets. They include attendance at full corporation and committee meetings. Overall attendance rates are satisfactory. However, in its recent review, the corporation failed to take action when members did not reach the target.

67 Some aspects of corporation business are not conducted satisfactorily, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. A number of corporation meetings have deferred consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting, contrary to the requirements of the instrument of government. Minutes do not provide evidence of rigorous debate by the corporation of the items of business under consideration. The corporation has not received a report every term on the college's significant franchised provision. The governance and search committee have assessed the skills of corporation members and recently agreed to identify an ideal profile of skills against which to assess candidates for future appointments. They identified a lack of specific financial skills. There is little evidence that the committee has given sufficiently detailed consideration to potential governor appointments or to its subsequent recommendations to the corporation. The corporation re-determined its composition in line with the instrument and articles of government and reduced the number of committees so that more business will be addressed at full corporation meetings.

68 Procedures for openness and accountability at the college are in place but are not fully developed. The college has a register of interests for governors and staff, a code of conduct, standing orders and a 'whistleblowing' policy. The register of interests for governors and the code of conduct do not reflect current good practice. Minutes and papers of corporation and committee meetings are

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available in the learning centre and staff rooms. Governors have recently rewritten the college mission statement. They were closely involved in formulating the strategic aims to fulfil the new mission. As the self-assessment report identifies, they take an active role in developing the operational plans for each of the college's service and curriculum areas. Progress with these plans is reported to every full meeting of the corporation.

69 Inspectors did not agree with the college that training and development of governors is a significant strength. Governors attended in-house workshops covering a range of college issues including the impact of Learning and Skills Councils and curriculum 2000. They recently completed some of the governor training modules, provided by the FEFC. Some governors have established links with individual departments and meet with staff and students.

70 Governors regularly monitor the financial position of the college. The finance and general purposes committee and the corporation review monthly management accounts. The college has substantial cash reserves but also has underlying operating deficits which it has sustained each year and which are draining the reserves. The corporation has yet to instigate appropriate action to address this. Short-term measures are being considered but governors have not fully explored the reasons for the operating deficits or determined all possible options. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Governors receive regular reports on students' retention, achievements and attendance. Information is provided on trends and comparisons are made with other colleges. Governors considered and approved targets for students' achievements and retention. While achievements have shown general improvement, retention overall and achievement in some areas remain a concern, which governors have not actively addressed.

Management

Grade 3

71 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- comprehensive management information
- effective communication by managers to staff
- well-managed introduction of curriculum 2000
- successful links with external partners

Weaknesses

- slow progress in addressing falling recruitment and low retention
- inadequate market information
- lack of specific and measurable objectives in college plans
- poor implementation and monitoring of equal opportunities

72 Since the last inspection, the college has made significant progress in improving students' achievements. FEFC performance indicators show a sustained upward trend in overall achievements over the last three years. During the same period, full-time enrolments have declined and retention has been poor on many courses. The college recognises that recruitment was below target for 1998 and 1999 and that this pattern has been repeated for full-time enrolments in September 2000. The college is in good financial health. However, its financial position has deteriorated in the last two years due to non-achievement of funding targets which was not matched by similar reduction in expenditure.

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73 Senior managers have taken some action to address these strategic issues. There has been some expansion in full-cost income through the provision of short course and commercial training. Franchised work has made a significant contribution to the generation of revenue. The college is developing a more systematic approach to tackling poor retention, for example, through tighter attendance monitoring and more systematic tutorial support. Managers have compared the staff utilisation data with that from similar colleges. They have concluded that there are inefficiencies in the deployment of staff. They recognise that the college needs to develop a strategic approach to planning human resources, but have yet to produce a detailed human resources plan. Although managers are aware of the problems facing the college, there has been slow progress in taking systematic action to resolve them. This weakness is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

74 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college forecasts that its operating deficits will continue. Falling student numbers in the last two years mean that advance funding will have to be repaid to the FEFC, depleting the college's cash balances. Budget-setting and budgetary control are documented, but a course-costing methodology has not been developed. The financial regulations are not up to date and financial procedures, which are referred to in the financial regulations, are not in place. Detailed monthly management accounts are considered at meetings of the senior management team. Appropriate financial information is regularly provided to budget holders. The head of finance is a qualified accountant and a member of the senior management team. Financial and data returns to the FEFC are made on time. There is no treasury management policy in place and a lack of regular detailed reports to management and governors on investment performance.

75 The current strategic plan identifies key corporate aims and objectives, which reflect the priorities in the college's mission. There is a college operating statement and operating action plans for each sector and unit. In many cases these lack specific objectives and quantifiable targets and do not assist the monitoring and development of the work of the college. This weakness is not noted in the self-assessment report. The college recognises that marketing is underdeveloped and that there is insufficient marketing information used to support the strategic plan. The college is planning to undertake specific market research into the perceptions of adults about the college. Management information is readily available and provides an authoritative source of accurate information. Reports on course applications, enrolments, retention rates and the number of tariff units earned are produced regularly. These data support managers in planning and monitoring the performance of the college.

76 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, managers effectively disseminate information about the college's mission and aims. A number of channels, such as bulletins, newsletters and staff meetings, are used successfully to communicate with staff. Leadership roles are clear and there is good co-operation between managers. The planning and introduction of curriculum 2000 has been well managed.

77 Inspectors agreed that the college has successful links with local business and community groups. It works closely with the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and other Essex colleges. The Essex Returners Unit, which is funded jointly by the college and the local TEC, conducts detailed research into barriers to adult participation in employment and training. It has successfully managed several externally funded projects and recently published a detailed guide to trainers designed to improve provision for minority ethnic groups in the local community. The expertise the unit

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has developed in aspects of equal opportunities is not reflected in the college's own practices. Implementation and monitoring of equal opportunities are poor. This weakness is not recognised in the self-assessment report. The launch of a revised equal opportunities policy is intended to raise the profile of equal opportunities in the college.

Conclusions

78 The college completed its second comprehensive self-assessment in preparation for the inspection. Its format followed the guidelines of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The report clearly identified strengths and weaknesses and included actions to address the weaknesses. Inspectors found that it provided a good analysis of quality in most areas and was self-critical. Lessons observed and graded by the college resulted in a profile of grades similar to the grades awarded by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with four of the six curriculum area grades in the self-assessment report. They awarded a lower grade for one area and a higher grade for one area. They agreed with three of the college's cross-college grades, but awarded lower grades in two cross-college areas.

79 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 (October 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	39
19-24 years	19
25+ years	42
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (October 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	9
Level 2 (intermediate)	27
Level 3 (advanced)	46
Level 4/5 (higher)	11
Level not specified	2
Non-schedule 2	5
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	321	259	14
Agriculture	1	1	0
Construction	118	173	7
Engineering	71	249	8
Business	229	751	23
Hotel and catering	81	75	4
Health and community care	95	271	9
Art and design	132	297	10
Humanities	320	612	22
Basic education	38	73	3
Total	1,406	2,761	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 11% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	98	31	2	131
Supporting direct learning contact	50	4	4	58
Other support	62	16	18	96
Total	210	51	24	285

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£7,982,000	£8,408,000	£8,150,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.78	£16.59	£17.06
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	70%	71%
Achievement of funding target	100%	97%	95%
Diversity of income	21%	24%	27%
Operating surplus	-£192,000	-£282,000	-£538,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	244	365	323	217	445	498
	Retention (%)	68	77	85	71	72	79
	Achievement (%)	43	63	65	58	74	65
2	Number of starters	1,008	1,695	1,230	673	1,030	1,062
	Retention (%)	76	79	77	76	68	64
	Achievement (%)	43	75	76	52	76	73
3	Number of starters	1,184	1,200	1,430	900	905	1,080
	Retention (%)	71	71	72	64	68	63
	Achievement (%)	64	74	74	54	78	78
4 or 5	Number of starters	36	30	41	432	362	471
	Retention (%)	72	90	93	84	79	71
	Achievement (%)	92	89	100	35	88	83
Short courses	Number of starters	102	339	369	2,519	3,425	5,765
	Retention (%)	92	92	96	97	98	98
	Achievement (%)	64	68	90	83	96	93
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	664	434	395	314	207	207
	Retention (%)	83	83	84	89	94	87
	Achievement (%)	46	56	100	66	91	93

Source: ISR

FEFC Inspection Report 23/01

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
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January 2001

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Reference INSREP/1167/01