

Coulsdon College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100
Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

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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 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	–

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

Coulsdon College

Greater London Region

Inspected February 1999

Coulsdon College is a sixth form college in the London borough of Croydon. The college produced a clear, comprehensive self-assessment report which drew on established quality assurance procedures. The self-assessment process involved all staff and managers of the college. The self-assessment report was evaluative but provided insufficient analysis of data on student achievement and retention rates. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report but found several additional weaknesses. The report was well evidenced and contained action plans for remedying weaknesses. The college is making good progress in implementing these. Three of the grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those given in the self-assessment report.

The college offers courses ranging from foundation to advanced level in eight of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in four programme areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college is well managed and the mission and strategic objectives of the college are fully supported by staff. Governors closely monitor the college's financial position, which is sound. There is a

strong commitment in the college to quality improvement and an effective use of management information. The college provides good pastoral care for its students and has an effective tutorial system for full-time students. Students have access to good IT facilities. Teaching and students' achievements were good in all the subjects inspected, and outstanding in art and design. The college should improve: some poor retention rates; target-setting at course level; recruitment of governors; access to the college for students with restricted mobility; and monitoring and reporting of equal opportunities.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	2	Support for students	2
Business	2	General resources	2
Art, design, theatre studies and drama	1	Quality assurance	3
Modern foreign languages	2	Governance	3
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Coulsdon College is a sixth form college located in the south of the London borough of Croydon. It was established in 1988 as a result of a reorganisation of secondary education in Croydon. The college is situated in a suburban area but most students travel from urban areas to the north. The main employment opportunities in the Croydon area are in the wholesale and retail trades, real estate, property renting, transport, storage, communications and health and social work. Men predominate in managerial and administrative posts and women in clerical and secretarial posts. Of Croydon's residents, 14% are in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations. Only 54% of Croydon's residents actually work in Croydon. The unemployment rate for the borough of Croydon was 4.8% in January 1999, the same rate as the national figure but below the figure for Greater London of 6.2%.

2 The post-16 participation rate in the borough of Croydon is high; 80% in 1998. Within the Croydon area there are 33 schools and four higher and further education institutions. In addition, there are other schools and colleges nearby in Surrey and in other south London boroughs. Despite this competition, Coulsdon College has recruited well from over 80 feeder schools and colleges and has expanded both its vocational and general education provision. In November 1998, there were 1,308 students at the college, of whom 86% were full time. Just over half of the full-time students were taking general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses. Others were taking general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and similar qualifications. Approximately 42% of students went on to higher education in autumn 1998. Over 40% of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is far higher

than the percentage of people from minority ethnic groups living in the immediate vicinity of the college.

3 In October 1998, the college employed 87 full-time equivalent staff of whom 23 full-time equivalents were support staff. The college is organised into five faculties: creative and expressive arts; leisure and tourism, languages and computing; mathematics, economics and business studies; science and sports studies; and social, environmental, legal and secretarial studies. Each faculty is led by a head of faculty, with curriculum subdivisions managed by curriculum directors. Student support is organised by an associate principal. There is also a finance and business development manager and a deputy principal. Overall responsibility for cross-college functions lies with the senior management team, headed by the principal.

4 Through its mission statement, the college is committed to caring for its students and promoting their achievements. The college supports students with a wide range of abilities who come from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week commencing 22 February 1999. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Data on students' achievements in 1995-96 and 1996-97 were derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1997-98 were provided by the college before the inspection. This information was checked against class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the inspection agenda three months before inspection. The inspection was carried out by

Context

nine inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 38 days. Inspectors observed 49 lessons, examined students' work and a variety of documentation, and held meetings with governors, managers, students and staff. They discussed the work of the college with local employers, and representatives of partner schools, the local education authority (LEA) and the careers service.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons observed, 74% were rated good or outstanding and none were less than satisfactory. This compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed by inspectors during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	6	10	8	0	0	24
GNVQ and NVQ	7	5	5	0	0	17
Other, including other vocational	3	5	0	0	0	8
Total (No)	16	20	13	0	0	49
Total (%)	33	41	26	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. The average level of attendance during the

inspection was 88% compared with an average of 84% for sixth form colleges. The average number of students in each class was 12 which is above the national average.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Coulsdon College	12.0	88
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

8 Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, some aspects of students' achievements were given insufficient emphasis.

Key strengths

- good retention and achievement on GNVQ courses
- well-motivated, experienced teachers
- effectively planned lessons and good teaching in practical lessons
- good computing facilities and accommodation

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses
- insufficient use of information technology (IT) software applications in teaching

9 The college offers an appropriate range of computing and IT courses. These include GCSE computing, GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses in IT, GCE A level computing science and certificated courses in computer literacy and integrated business technology. The GNVQ provision is of a high standard. The number of students enrolling on computing and IT courses is growing. Most students are on full-time courses but the number of part-time students is increasing. There are significantly more men than women on computing courses. Students' IT skills are effectively assessed during induction. There is a policy that all full-time students at the college should obtain appropriate IT skills. Some students who complete a basic IT course part way through the year, are still required to attend lessons, but are not provided

with more advanced work. Additional, more challenging modules for these students are being considered but are not yet available. The college's self-assessment report did not identify this weakness.

10 Courses are effectively managed. Course and curriculum teams meet regularly, minutes are recorded and actions are agreed. The outcomes of actions already taken are reviewed. Target-setting at course level is at an early stage of development and there is little evidence of the use of the national benchmarks published by the FEFC, a weakness not identified by the college. The computing teachers work very effectively as a team. Currently, 60% of all teaching materials are available to students and teachers on the college's internal IT network. A scheme to monitor students' achievements has recently been introduced. Tutors predict students' pass grades at GCE A level on the basis of their GCSE grades at the start of their course and monitor performance against these predicted grades. However, it is too early to judge the scheme's effectiveness.

11 Staff are well qualified and mostly very experienced. Teaching is generally of a good standard and lessons are well planned. The college recognised these strengths in its self-assessment report. Inspectors found that in practical lessons an appropriate variety of teaching methods were used that developed students' IT skills effectively. In theory lessons, teaching was often dull. On foundation level IT courses, students are encouraged to work at their own pace. There are well-designed learning materials on all courses. Most teachers make effective use of combinations of text books and other study materials to support learning. Teachers' relationships with students are good. Students in need of additional help with computing and IT receive support outside formal lessons. The assessment of students' key skills on GNVQ courses is good.

12 Retention and achievement rates on GNVQ courses are good. The achievement rate was

Curriculum Areas

100% at intermediate and advanced levels in 1998. Pass rates on other courses are generally satisfactory. Progression from GNVQ intermediate to advanced courses and from advanced level courses to higher education is good. Retention rates on some courses are poor, notably on computer literacy and integrated business technology courses. Most IT work experience placements are well organised and appropriate to the needs of students. However, some placements in the college are inappropriate.

13 The college has good IT accommodation and resources. All IT rooms have sufficient

modern computers for the number of students in lessons. All the college's computers are connected to a single network which all students are able to access. Specialist software and students' files can be accessed anywhere in the college including the 80 workstations in the learning centre. This good facility is not yet being used by teachers to its full potential. Insufficient use is made of IT software applications to enhance learning. This was not recognised as a weakness in its self-assessment report.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in computing and information technology, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Expected completions	578	331	472
		Retention (%)	33	60	53
		Achievement (%)	75	60	76
GCSE computing and information studies	2	Expected completions	79	67	89
		Retention (%)	80	82	54
		Achievement (%)	70	48	73
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Expected completions	*	33	32
		Retention (%)	*	76	78
		Achievement (%)	*	88	100
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Expected completions	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	92
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCE A level computer science	3	Expected completions	40	54	42
		Retention (%)	60	67	76
		Achievement (%)	79	59	72

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

14 Inspectors observed 13 lessons and agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, the report did not identify some of the weaknesses in the teaching.

Key strengths

- effective planning and management of courses
- regular target-setting and review of students' progress
- high standard of most students' work
- good pass rates on most courses

Weaknesses

- some unimaginative teaching
- poor retention rates on some courses

15 The college provides a range of business courses including national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in administration at levels 1 and 2; GCSE accounting and business; GNVQ business at intermediate and advanced levels; GCE A level accounting, business and information studies, and business studies; and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) accounting. Courses are generally well planned and have appropriately detailed schemes of work prepared to a common standard and format, a strength noted by the college. Induction programmes enable students to understand the requirements of their courses. Course documentation and the information which students receive during induction clearly set out college policies and assessment procedures. Assessment plans and deadlines are carefully explained. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report.

16 Lessons are generally well planned. The aims and objectives of lessons are explained to

students at the beginning of each lesson. Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods and ensure that students make effective use of their time in lessons. Teachers ensure that students understand what is expected of them and set tasks that match the ability of students. In the better lessons, teachers linked new topics to material covered in previous lessons and made good use of students' experiences and cultural backgrounds to make the lessons more interesting and relevant. Some teachers used stories from national and regional newspapers to add further relevance to lessons. For example, references were made to recent debates on the Euro, genetically modified food and the use of child labour. However, some of the teaching was unimaginative and failed to maintain the students' interest. In a few lessons, teachers spent too much time writing copious notes on the whiteboard which the students were required to copy out. Other teachers used task sheets with which they were not familiar. Consequently, they were not sufficiently prepared for the questions which students asked. Although there is much good teaching taking place in business supported by good teaching materials, this practice is not effectively disseminated to all teachers within the faculty. Teachers have kept their knowledge up to date. There is a programme of outside visits and guest speakers to improve students' knowledge of commerce and industry and to relate the theory to practice. Work experience placements are used effectively to enable NVQ students to have their competences assessed in a workplace setting.

17 Most students' work is of an appropriate standard. The portfolios of work produced by students on courses leading to GNVQ and NVQ qualifications are well organised and provide clear evidence of competences acquired. Inspectors agreed with the college that GCE A level assessment is well organised, clear and regular. Teachers grade assignments accurately and provide students with constructive feedback

Curriculum Areas

on their performance. Strict deadlines are set to ensure that students do not fall behind with their studies. On some courses, achievement rates have been above the national averages. All students have the opportunity to gain additional qualifications and pass rates in RSA Examinations Board (RSA) text processing, wordprocessing and audio examinations have been good. The college recognises that retention rates on some courses are poor, for example GCE A level accounting, GCSE business and NVQ level 1 administration. However, tightly organised attendance monitoring has

recently led to improved retention and attendance.

18 Students have good access to IT equipment, industry standard software, textbooks, publications, CD-ROMs, the internet and multiple-choice questions. Through the use of the college intranet, teachers can access data for their lessons. Teachers are well qualified and have appropriate experience for the courses on which they teach. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in business, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ administration	1 and 2	Expected completions	37	32	42
		Retention (%)	92	85	74
		Achievement (%)	88	82	55
GCSE business	2	Expected completions	36	25	40
		Retention (%)	81	76	58
		Achievement (%)	56	42	78
GNVQ intermediate and advanced business	2 and 3	Expected completions	101	102	91
		Retention (%)	73	71	80
		Achievement (%)	81	70	92
GCE A level courses	3	Expected completions	117	112	142
		Retention (%)	63	75	75
		Achievement (%)	77	84	80

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design, Theatre Studies and Drama

Grade 1

19 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering courses in art, design, theatre studies and drama. The college's self-assessment report identified the many strengths and few weaknesses on these courses.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses and lessons
- good teaching and effective learning
- productive links with arts organisations and schools
- good pass rates on most art and design courses
- good specialist resources

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some GCSE and GCE A level courses

20 The college offers a good range of established courses in the programme area. There are courses leading to GNVQ intermediate and advanced art and design, GCSE and GCE A level art and design, drama and theatre studies, and photography. GCE A/AS level courses are available in design, design technology and graphical communication. In addition there is a certificate course in life drawing and painting. A few of the courses have low student numbers. Students studying GCE A level and GCE AS design and technology are taught together because the numbers are too low to justify separate groups. This is also the case for GCE A level and GCE AS design. In its self-assessment report the college noted the weak recruitment to these courses and set out its plans to replace GCE A level and GCE AS design and GCE A level graphical communication with a course in graphical products.

21 Teaching is well organised and courses and lessons are well planned. GNVQ art and design project briefs are well crafted; they include tasks organised sequentially and clear aims, objectives, assessment criteria and deadlines for completion. However, there is insufficient use of IT on graphical communication courses. The good quality of students' work demonstrates that students are learning effectively. Productive links have been developed with local arts organisations and schools. These are used to stimulate students' imagination and develop their skills of research, image making and presentation. For example, staff from a local museum recently worked with the visual arts teachers and some students to create an exhibit to promote a painting of a local second world war scene. The end product, a large-scale jigsaw puzzle, has attracted much attention since it was installed in the gallery. In a GNVQ advanced art lesson, students were asked to make a study of a mass of tree roots. Under skilful guidance from the teacher, the students were given imaginative new insights into how the tangled web could be viewed and explored. In a lively GCE A level drama and theatre arts lesson, highly motivated students worked in pairs on a piece from a Greek tragedy, taking turns to direct and act. The teacher deftly laid the foundation for the task and set the right mood at the start of the lesson by organising a game which led into an improvisation of the opening scene of the play. The students immersed themselves in the work and developed performances that were both convincing and intense. Teachers are highly motivated and students appreciate their professionalism, dedication and commitment. In particular, they acknowledged the amount of extra time the staff are willing to give to them outside timetabled lessons.

22 The self-assessment report identified students' achievements as a strength. Inspectors found this to be valid for most courses. Most pass rates are good and most

Curriculum Areas

retention rates compare well or satisfactorily with national averages. Examination pass rates on the GCSE art and design and photography courses, GNVQ advanced and intermediate level courses and GCE A level courses in art, design and technology and theatre studies are above sector benchmarks. However, in GCSE drama and theatre arts, the pass rate is below sector benchmarks. Retention rates are below national averages on some GCSE and GCE A level courses but are particularly good on GNVQ courses.

23 Art and design studio areas are well resourced and there are versatile multiple-activity spaces with IT facilities in each teaching area. A new computing suite has been installed and an exterior store has been converted for three-dimensional project work. The graphical communication area is resourced to a very high standard. These areas also provide a stimulating environment for practical work.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art, design, theatre studies and drama, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE courses	2	Expected completions	91	86	66
		Retention (%)	80	73	76
		Achievement (%)	100	87	83
GNVQ intermediate and advanced art and design	2 and 3	Expected completions	22	18	36
		Retention (%)	86	72	87
		Achievement (%)	89	77	84
GCE A level drama and theatre studies	3	Expected completions	23	31	42
		Retention (%)	70	68	76
		Achievement (%)	88	100	91
GCE A level art and design, design and technology and graphical communication	3	Expected completions	102	98	107
		Retention (%)	82	60	78
		Achievement (%)	87	90	93

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

24 Twelve lessons were observed. In its self-assessment report, the college identified some of the key strengths of the provision but understated some weaknesses in relation to retention.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- extensive use of the target language
- detailed schemes of work
- good pass rates in GCE A level and GCSE Spanish courses

Weaknesses

- some poor retention rates
- low proportion of higher grades in GCE A level French and German

25 The college runs GCE A level, GCSE and business language courses in French, German, Spanish and Italian. The self-assessment report noted as strengths the wide range of modern languages courses available and the fact that teachers are well-qualified, native speakers. Inspectors agreed with these judgements.

26 Most lessons were good or outstanding. In the best lessons, the pace was lively and teachers' expectations were high. The target language is used as the principal medium of communication. All lessons are thoroughly planned, and involve a variety of teaching and learning styles. Group work is used extensively and well. Students' attendance is very good; 88% in the lessons observed. Students are generally attentive, participate readily in lessons, and are prepared to use the target language. Detailed schemes of work are prepared for all courses. Written work is corrected, marked and returned by teachers with clear, helpful written comments. However, key skills in IT are not being sufficiently

developed, for example students rarely wordprocess their assignments. Educational visits to the countries of western Europe form a regular and useful part of the modern languages programme. The enjoyment students derive from these visits is evident in the displays of students' work in the classrooms.

27 The management of the modern foreign languages curriculum area is good. There are regular meetings of language teachers. Although there is some discussion of key issues, such as retention and achievement, this lacks rigour and there is a lack of action-planning and target-setting at course team level, a weakness not referred to in the self-assessment report. Students are, generally, given sound advice when they enrol on to language courses. They are required to have at least grade B in the GCSE modern language before they can take their GCE A level. Teachers believe this policy has contributed to an improvement in retention. Some students on the one-year GCSE courses find the pace too fast and leave the course. To respond to demand from the local Italian community, the college is running a one-year GCE A level course in Italian.

28 The self-assessment report noted that pass rates in GCE A level German have greatly improved over the last two years. However, it does not mention that GCE A level Spanish pass rates have been above the sector benchmark for the past two years and that there was a dramatic improvement in GCE A level French in 1998, when the pass rate was 94%. Pass rates in GCSE Spanish are good and are consistently above the sector benchmark. A low proportion of students obtain pass rates at grades A to C in GCE A level French and German, a fact not recognised in the self-assessment report. Retention rates on most language courses are below sector averages. The trend however, is upward, with a particular improvement in 1998 in GCE A level French and German.

29 GCE A level students are helped to improve their speaking skills through regular

Curriculum Areas

conversations with a foreign language assistant. This is undertaken on a one-to-one basis during the second year of the course. This strength was identified in the college's self-assessment report. Specialist resources are good; many tapes, videos, dictionaries and other reference books are readily accessible. Learning materials are varied and of high quality, and there is regular use of audio and video tapes and

overhead transparencies as learning aids. The self-assessment report identified the important new resources which have been developed recently. These include eight multimedia stations that are being provided for the recently-established language centre, which also contains supporting textbooks and other learning materials. At present there is insufficient monitoring of usage of the centre by students.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in modern foreign languages, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Spanish Chamber of Commerce	2	Expected completions	*	20	14
		Retention (%)	*	30	50
		Achievement (%)	*	100	75
GCSE Spanish	2	Expected completions	29	26	31
		Retention (%)	52	31	52
		Achievement (%)	100	75	75
GCE A level French	3	Expected completions	35	39	27
		Retention (%)	57	49	67
		Achievement (%)	70	63	94
GCE A level German	3	Expected completions	8	7	9
		Retention (%)	50	71	67
		Achievement (%)	0	100	83
GCE A level Spanish	3	Expected completions	6	8	9
		Retention (%)	50	63	89
		Achievement (%)	67	100	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

30 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements about support for students in the self-assessment report, but found that some of the features noted as strengths referred to normal practice, or to recent developments whose full impact is yet to be felt.

Key strengths

- informative documentation for prospective students
- productive links with many schools
- tutorial activities developing accredited key skills
- good pastoral care
- effective students' association

Weaknesses

- insufficient liaison between learning support staff and subject teachers
- poor take-up of learning support

31 The college provides a good range of services to support students. Enrolment is organised efficiently. Prospective students receive detailed, well-designed leaflets about the college and its courses. The prospectus and leaflets about individual courses set out clearly the entry requirements, the range of activities undertaken on the course and possible progression routes within the college and to higher education and employment. All students receive a handbook which explains clearly their rights and responsibilities, and contains much useful information about college services and procedures. As identified in the self-assessment report, the college has productive links with a large number of partner schools. College staff attend careers events at schools, and provide specialist speakers to talk about vocational subjects. Before joining the college, some students attend workshop sessions as a means of sampling the college. In response to poor

attendance and retention on a number of courses, the college has recently introduced a more systematic approach to enrolment interviews, and now provides training for interviewers. There is stringent monitoring of students' attendance. Most of the college's students are aged 16 to 19, and the college keeps parents well informed about students' progress.

32 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that tutorial provision is good. There is a well-designed tutorial curriculum covering the development of key skills and preparation for higher education and employment. Activities undertaken in group tutorials are planned centrally. Tutors receive a bulletin which advises them on what needs to be covered and suggests tutorial activities. During tutorials, all full-time advanced level students undertake key skills development and their achievements are accredited through a nationally-recognised qualification. Similarly, students on GNVQ and one-year courses have their tutorial achievements accredited through additional GNVQ units linked to preparation for employment or higher education. In addition to group tutorials, students are also entitled to a minimum of three individual tutorials each year. In the course of these tutorials each student reviews their progress with their tutor, develops study skills and prepares action plans for improvement. Using data on students' previous performance, tutors set realistic but challenging academic performance targets for students. Students speak highly of the support they receive from their tutors. The quality of tutorials observed by inspectors was good.

33 Careers guidance is provided for students by a careers company working with college staff. The careers centre provides a friendly, well-resourced environment. All students are invited to attend individual guidance interviews. Careers staff give relevant presentations to tutor groups on issues such as university entrance and applying for employment.

Cross-college Provision

34 At the start of their courses, all full-time GNVQ and GCSE students undertake Basic Skills Agency tests to identify any additional learning needs. Students are also asked, during the enrolment process, to identify their own learning needs. There are teachers who specialise in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages, the provision of support for dyslexic students and the provision of numeracy support. Timetabled sessions are planned for each student taking up the support. Many students do not attend the support sessions offered to them. There are no drop-in workshops for students who need help with communications or numeracy. There is insufficient internal liaison between tutors and learning support teachers to monitor effectively the progress being made by students. The previous inspection report identified that the college had limited provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The self-assessment report acknowledged that this is still the case. However, the 'essential skills' course has been introduced over the last three years. This can lead to a foundation GNVQ in health and social care, and caters for a range of students. Support for students with a physical disability is organised as necessary, but the college has recruited few students with disabilities.

35 Students speak highly of the counselling provision in the college. Two qualified part-time counsellors provide a confidential counselling service to students and staff. They have extensive links with outside agencies and make referrals as necessary. The college has few students over the age of 19 and access funds are limited. However, small amounts of money are available to assist students in financial need with the cost of activities such as course trips. There is an active students' association in the college. Its work is encouraged and co-ordinated by a part-time youth worker who helps the students to organise activities such as charity events, a debating society and a range of sports. Each tutor group has a representative

on the students' association. The association publicises its work, advertises its services in a weekly bulletin, and produces a termly magazine. Each year, courses are suspended for one week during which the college organises a range of personal development activities. Students who wish to do so can participate in regular sporting activities. The college enters teams in local football, basketball, netball and hockey leagues.

General Resources

Grade 2

36 The college's self-assessment report identified many of the strengths and some, but not all, of the weaknesses in general resources found by inspectors.

Key strengths

- safe, welcoming environment
- good general teaching accommodation
- outstanding IT provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient private study spaces
- poor access for people with physical disabilities

37 The college occupies a single site which was formerly a boys school, built on the site of a medieval colliery. The buildings are attractive and provide a safe, welcoming learning environment. Their general condition is good. A number of improvements to the buildings have been carried out since the last inspection. These include the conversion of the hall into a large IT suite, the provision of a photography studio, the completion of new toilets and the refurbishment of the refectory and common room. General teaching rooms are well decorated. Most classrooms are dedicated to the teaching of particular subjects. They are generally well equipped but a number are too

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small for the size of groups using them, particularly on business courses. The corporation has recently approved the allocation of £250,000 towards improvements in learning and recreational facilities. These were identified as needing improvement in the self-assessment report, but are not addressed in the college's draft accommodation strategy which has yet to be approved by the corporation.

38 The total amount of space available for students to work on their own while at college is inadequate. Classrooms and specialist rooms are often used for private study. The number of study spaces within the library, now known as the information resources centre, has increased, but overall there are fewer dedicated private study spaces available for students than at the time of the last inspection. This weakness was acknowledged by the college in its self-assessment report. The information resources centre is too small, and it is one of the areas that the corporation has identified for expansion. The centre is effectively managed. The bookstock and other learning resources are satisfactory in those curriculum areas inspected. In addition to materials held within the centre, a number of curriculum areas hold substantial stocks within their own sections.

39 The college has made a substantial investment in IT and the provision is good. There are 330 computers available for students' use, an overall ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of 1:3.4. Students have good access to computers outside timetabled lessons. The IT suite is an excellent facility. There is limited access to the internet within the information resources centre. The college has plans to improve internet access. A prototype intranet is being tested. Levels of technical support are satisfactory. The college recognised the strength of its IT provision in its self-assessment report.

40 The self-assessment report acknowledged the lack of areas where students can meet and socialise. The refectory and common room are

the only such areas and at peak times they become very crowded. Refectory services finish just after lunch, and the refectory is closed for cleaning an hour before classes finish. The sports facilities available on site consist of a new fitness studio, a sports hall, and an indoor swimming pool. The sports hall is currently being refurbished.

41 The main college building is on two floors and has no lifts. As a result much of the accommodation, including the science laboratories and the information resources centre, is inaccessible for people who use wheelchairs or who have restricted mobility. The draft accommodation strategy refers to this issue but contains no specific proposals to address it and this weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The quality of staff work rooms varies but most are satisfactory. Some staff do not have access to computers in their work rooms.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

42 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in quality assurance identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some strengths identified by the college relate to recently established systems, the effectiveness of which have yet to be proven.

Key strengths

- a strong commitment to continuous quality improvement
- good annual course reviews
- effective evaluation of the views of students, parents and staff
- reliable management information on retention and achievement rates

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Weaknesses

- lack of established standards for cross-college services
- little use of target-setting and monitoring at course level
- slow implementation of staff appraisal policy

43 The deputy principal is responsible for the college's quality assurance systems. The heads of faculty group, chaired by the deputy principal, monitor the implementation of elements of the quality assurance system. As noted in the self-assessment report, consultation between the heads of faculty group and other managers and staff has led to the establishment of a quality assurance framework and an annual cycle of quality assurance activities. However, there is a lack of supporting documentation. In particular, there is no clear statement of the college's quality assurance policy, and no explanation of the operation of the overall quality assurance system. The college makes effective use of reliable management information including a comprehensive analysis of student achievement and retention rates, compared with the sector benchmarks published by the FEFC, and a detailed analysis of students' destinations.

44 Since the last inspection, the college has improved and developed its quality assurance systems. Some systems have only recently been implemented, and their effectiveness in producing measurable improvements in achievement and retention rates, in line with the college's strategic objective, has yet to be realised. Monitoring of performance against targets is also at an early stage of development. Recent initiatives to improve retention and achievement rates include: achievement targets for students; an attendance monitoring system; a revised tutorial system; and a formal assessment policy.

45 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the college makes effective use of

questionnaires to elicit views from students, staff, parents, schools and local companies. The analysis of responses to questionnaires has led to improvements. For example, in response to students' views, toilets were improved. The college's charter is currently being revised. A lesson observation scheme was introduced in the summer term of 1998. At the time of inspection, around 50% of teachers had been observed. The outcomes of lesson observations do not contribute to the quality assurance systems.

46 The annual review and evaluation of courses is carried out systematically, a strength noted by the college. Generally, the reviews are thorough. Most lead to well-documented self-assessment reports which include the action proposed to remedy weaknesses. However, a few action plans specify general targets or objectives rather than specific actions. The course self-assessment reports include an analysis of retention and achievement rates. In the case of GCE A level courses, there is an analysis of students' achievements compared with their qualifications on entry to the course. There are established procedures for the approval of new courses, and proposals are scrutinised by heads of faculty and the senior management team. Standards for cross-college services have yet to be fully established.

47 The college acknowledges that the introduction of staff appraisal has been slow and at the time of inspection, few staff had undergone appraisal. There is a staff development policy which is clearly linked to the college's strategic objectives. Staff attend college-based training activities and also external events. There are effective application and evaluation procedures for staff development. The staff development budget for 1998-99 is approximately 0.5% of the college's staffing costs.

48 A self-assessment steering group was established in 1997. The group has responsibility for the management and

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monitoring of the self-assessment process. It is chaired by the deputy principal, and members include the chair of the corporation and managers and teachers representing various aspects of the college's work. The college produced its first self-assessment report for the inspection. Most managers and staff were involved in the preparation of the report. The corporation considered the cross-college sections and the summative sections on teaching and learning, curriculum content and students' achievements, but not the curriculum area self-assessment reports.

Governance

Grade 3

49 Inspectors and auditors confirmed many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, some of the strengths were overstated and some additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- close, effective working between governors and senior managers
- governors' evaluation of their own performance
- appropriate committee structure and meetings cycle
- regular and thorough oversight of the college's financial health

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of students' achievements against national benchmarks
- many corporation vacancies
- poor clerking arrangements in 1997-98
- little systematic training or identification of training needs

50 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially complies with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The membership of the corporation comprises the principal, 12 business members, a training and enterprise council (TEC) representative, three co-opted members and two staff governors. The gender and ethnicity composition of the corporation does not reflect the student population. This was recognised in the self-assessment report and is something which the college has attempted to address, along with the need to bring in new members systematically and widen representation from the local community. There has been little success in recruiting new governors and there are now eight vacancies on the corporation. This has placed substantial additional demands on existing governors.

51 As stated in the self-assessment report, governors see the college as one which focuses primarily on the education of 16 to 19 year olds. However, they are also aware of the need to diversify into new areas of activity. There is a logical process for the preparation and approval of strategic plans. College performance indicators and targets for retention and achievement are included in the strategic plan. The corporation receives reports on the college's achievements against these targets and compares some achievements to those of other local institutions. However, the reports do not show trends over time or compare retention and achievement with national benchmarks.

52 The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure. The committees operate within clearly-defined terms of reference. The corporation and committee meetings are appropriately scheduled. All governors receive a copy of the monthly management accounts and the corporation,

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through the finance and general purposes committee, ensures that appropriate consideration is given to financial issues. During 1998, clerking arrangements were inadequate and there have been errors in the appointment of governors. The corporation recognised this problem and a new, suitably experienced clerk, who is independent of the senior management team, has been appointed. The corporation has no formal policies on attendance at meetings and there are no standing orders that regulate the conduct of meetings. The register of interests does not accord with current good practice and has not been extended to cover members of the senior management team, other than the principal.

53 Governors' attendance at corporation meetings is high, averaging 82%. They take part in many college activities. However, as noted in the self-assessment report, they have little direct contact with the teaching staff. Formal links between governors and the academic faculties have recently been reviewed with the aim of increasing the corporation's awareness of curriculum matters. As stated in the self-assessment report, a plan to issue a staff handbook with information on the corporation's role has been delayed. There is a close and effective working relationship between the chair, the principal, senior managers and the chairs of committees. The chair and the principal meet informally each week.

54 The corporation fulfils its role to secure the appointment and appraisal of senior postholders. The principal is appraised regularly by the chair of the corporation with advice from a consultant, who is a former sixth form college principal. The corporation formally evaluated its own performance in 1997 through the completion of a self-assessment questionnaire. An analysis by the chairman led to a thorough report to the full corporation setting out targets and strategies to develop the governors' effectiveness. Despite approval by the corporation, few of the strategies have been

implemented and few of the targets achieved. There is an annual training event for governors at the October corporation meeting, but there has been no formal assessment of the training needs of governors. Induction procedures for new governors are tailored to their needs and interests.

Management

Grade 2

55 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the judgements about college management in the self-assessment report, although some of the features noted as strengths are no more than routine practice. Inspectors and auditors found some additional weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective, responsive managers
- good financial management
- timely, accurate returns to the FEFC
- many strong external links

Weaknesses

- insufficient market research
- lack of equal opportunities monitoring and reporting
- insufficient use of management information to check performance against targets

56 The college's managers are effective and responsive. The senior management team consists of the principal, the deputy principal, the associate principal, and the finance and business development manager. This well co-ordinated team meets every week. Minutes are clear and identify responsibilities for action. The college management team, which comprises the senior management team, the five heads of faculty and the seven members of the learning

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support group, meets termly to consider issues relating to students and the curriculum.

Inspectors agreed with the view expressed in the self-assessment report that the management structure is sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse needs of the college. The teaching staff feel that they are well managed. As the self-assessment report indicated, there are effective lines of communication and accountability throughout the college. A weekly newsletter, which covers strategic and operational matters, is circulated to and highly valued by, staff and governors.

57 Staff are consulted during the strategic planning process and, as noted in the self-assessment report, this promotes their understanding of the college's mission. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that managers have recently devoted insufficient time to strategic issues and that market research, especially for adults' and employers' courses, needs to be further developed. Some curriculum initiatives have been launched without sufficient planning or market research. As a result, the response has been poor and some have been discontinued.

58 The management information system has been extensively updated. Returns to the FEFC are accurate and generally submitted on time. There is reliable information on students. The management information system provides accurate weekly reports on attendance. Other data can be provided when requested. There are college-wide targets relating to the FEFC's six performance indicators and to GCE A level retention and pass rates for each year up to 2001. However, insufficient use is made by the college of its management information to identify long-term trends in retention and achievement and to match performance to current targets.

59 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college is in a sound financial position. Key financial ratios

have shown an improving trend over recent years following a successful college-wide restructuring, and are now at or above national averages for sixth form colleges. A detailed analysis of these trends, including comparisons with local colleges and national averages, has been provided in reports to the senior management team and to governors. The finance and business development manager is suitably experienced and qualified and has significantly enhanced the quality of monthly accounts. These accounts are produced promptly and distributed to all governors. Budget holders also receive suitably detailed monthly reports relating to their areas of responsibility. All of these strengths were identified in the college's self-assessment report. The budgeting process is consultative. Funding unit targets have been exceeded each year.

60 The college has developed many fruitful links with the local authority which are identified in the self-assessment report. It is involved in a local strategic partnership on lifelong learning. A local councillor is currently vice-chair of the corporation. There are good links with schools, including an 'essential skills development programme' agreed with the LEA. College and schools staff co-operate in curriculum planning to ensure that students with particular interests, such as modern languages, can study from a wide choice in their chosen field when they progress to the college. The college has worked with the TEC on bids to the wider collaboration fund and has been allocated funds under the strategic partnership for widening participation. The principal is an elected member of the Sixth Form College Employers' Forum council. Managers and staff are well informed about developments in the further education sector. Equal opportunities are promoted but there is some lack of awareness of the policy, and its implementation amongst staff. Monitoring and reporting procedures need updating to reflect the ethnic diversity within the college community.

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Conclusions

61 The college produced a comprehensive and evaluative self-assessment report. The report served as a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. Some additional weaknesses were noted by inspectors. The college gave insufficient emphasis to student retention. One curriculum grade and two cross-college grades awarded by the inspection team were lower than the grades in the self-assessment report.

62 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 (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	85
19-24 years	3
25+ years	12
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	10
Intermediate	21
Advanced	69
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	300	72	28
Agriculture	6	6	1
Engineering	7	0	1
Business	220	52	21
Hotel and catering	83	0	6
Health and community care	39	0	3
Art and design	164	16	14
Humanities	311	32	26
Total	1,130	178	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 10% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	51	13	0	64
Supporting direct learning contact	6	2	0	8
Other support	13	2	0	15
Total	70	17	0	87

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,394,000	£3,484,000	£3,360,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.18	£18.43	£17.91
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	70%	68%
Achievement of funding target	108%	103%	102%
Diversity of income	3%	5%	5%
Operating surplus	-£130,000	£28,000	£25,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	235	658	370	0	49	60
	Retention (%)	65	38	61	n/a	47	57
	Achievement (%)	85	74	65	n/a	91	85
2	Expected completions	972	1,137	1,457	3	18	54
	Retention (%)	74	74	79	67	72	57
	Achievement (%)	93	74	58	100	92	78
3	Expected completions	–	1,459	1,564	–	40	48
	Retention (%)	–	69	66	–	50	46
	Achievement (%)	80	79	80	100	70	85
4 or 5	Expected completions	n/a	n/a	15	n/a	16	26
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	40	n/a	100	50
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	100	n/a	100	100
Short courses	Expected completions	1	11	12	8	0	6
	Retention (%)	100	9	67	88	n/a	50
	Achievement (%)	100	0	100	86	n/a	67
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	18	74	544	0	14	15
	Retention (%)	94	65	75	n/a	79	87
	Achievement (%)	94	96	98	n/a	91	100

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

n/a not applicable

FEFC Inspection Report 59/99

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>
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