

Daventry Tertiary College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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

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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.

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Daventry Tertiary College

East Midlands Region

Inspected March 1998

Daventry Tertiary College is on the south west edge of Northamptonshire. The self-assessment report was prepared as part of the annual quality assurance and action-planning process. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the judgements in the report. Cross-referencing between judgements and supporting evidence was not always clear. In reporting on curriculum areas, there was insufficient emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning.

The college offers courses in eight of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Five of the areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has developed a range of courses to meet local needs and some are delivered in the surrounding towns and villages. Teaching is generally good. Students' achievements vary relative to national averages across and within curriculum areas. Support for students is outstanding. There is a close partnership with the two local schools. Individual members of the corporation have strong and carefully-planned links with different areas of the college. The management of the college has been reorganised recently to produce a team-based approach to accountability and decision-making. There are strong external links with a variety of agencies. An effective and comprehensive quality assurance system is

in place. The accommodation is spacious and well maintained. The college should: implement the planned improvements to the management information system; make a greater use of quantitative data in its quality assurance system; improve attendance at corporation meetings; and improve the quality of the facilities in the learning resource centre.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing	3	Support for students	1
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Business and management	2	Quality assurance	2
Health and social care	2	Governance	2
Performing arts	2	Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Daventry Tertiary College was established in 1989 following a major reorganisation of the post-16 education provision in the town of Daventry. Prior to the reorganisation there were three schools for pupils aged 11 to 18 in the town. The college was established on the site of one of these schools and incorporated the work of the further education centre and the adult education service. The two remaining schools were redesignated for pupils aged 11 to 16. Within a 15-mile radius of the college there are five comprehensive schools with sixth forms, two grammar schools and three further education colleges. Post-16 participation in full-time education has remained reasonably constant at just over 70 per cent during the last three years.

2 The college is located on a 23-acre site near to the town centre. In 1997, ownership of the leisure centre on the site was transferred to the college. Daventry is on the south-west edge of Northamptonshire. The surrounding areas are largely rural with a low density of population. There are three major employers with sites in Daventry and approximately 200 small and medium-sized employers in the locality. Light engineering, manufacturing and service industries are prominent, particularly wholesale distribution. The Daventry international rail freight terminal was opened recently. The unemployment rate is the lowest in the county at 2.9 per cent.

3 In the 1996-97 academic year the college had 8,706 student enrolments of which 658 were full time. Ten per cent of students were aged 16 to 18 and 75 per cent were over 25. The college employs approximately 200 staff. The annual turnover for 1996-97 was just under £4 million and 82 per cent of the income was from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college offers some 300 separate courses. These include: basic numeracy and literacy; general certificate of secondary

education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced/advanced supplementary level (GCE A/AS level) subjects; full-time general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced levels; national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes at levels 1 to 4; professional body qualifications; and general interest and leisure courses. The college offers courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and specialist programmes for minority ethnic and overseas students. It operates a training agency for the Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (TEC). Just over 50 per cent of all provision is made off-site using employers' premises and locations in the surrounding villages. There are collaborative partnerships with local employers and private training providers.

4 The college's mission states: 'It is our mission to develop and extend the opportunities for education, training and employment in the community which we serve by providing a high-quality learning and training experience that meets the specific needs and interests of individuals, assists their development and the achievement of their personal goals'.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 2 March 1998. The inspection team studied the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college's data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 were validated against class registers and results issued by examining bodies. Approximately two months before the inspection, the college was notified of those aspects of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors working for a total of 29 days, and an auditor working for five. They observed 57 lessons, examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents, and held meetings with governors, managers, staff and students.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 65 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 5 per cent less than satisfactory. This is a substantial improvement on the 53 per cent of lessons which were rated good or outstanding during the previous inspection which took place in 1994. According to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*, 61 per cent of all lessons in the sector inspected for the year 1996-97 were good or outstanding and 8 per cent were less than satisfactory or poor. During

the inspection, the overall attendance level was 77 per cent and varied from 71 per cent in health and social care to 94 per cent in performing arts. The attendance level in the sector as a whole was 77 per cent during 1996-97. The average class size, of 9.9 students, was lower than the national average of 10.8 recorded in the chief inspector's annual report. It was highest in health and social care (12.4 students) and lowest in engineering (5.1 students for college-based courses). The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	8	5	0	0	13
GCSE	0	1	1	1	0	3
GNVQ	1	8	5	1	0	15
NVQ	3	2	1	0	0	6
Other vocational	3	11	5	1	0	20
Total	7	30	17	3	0	57

Curriculum Areas

Computing

Grade 3

7 Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that the self-assessment paid insufficient attention to teaching practices.

Key strengths

- good retention and pass rates on most full-time courses
- well-organised and well-presented students' portfolios
- the development of key skills through vocational assignments
- high-quality computers and software

Weaknesses

- some lessons to the whole class not well managed
- low retention rate on the first cohort of the GNVQ advanced information technology (IT)
- weaknesses in course management
- poor access to computer resources on a drop-in basis

8 Computing courses include GNVQ intermediate and advanced IT programmes. As a matter of policy the college does not offer GCSE or GCE A level courses in computing or IT. Part-time courses, mainly covering the basic aspects of computing, are available during the day and evening. Some of the courses operate with relatively small numbers of students.

9 The students are provided with good-quality booklets and handouts written by computing teachers. Teachers help students on an individual basis when required. Some lessons that involve teaching the group as a whole are often not well managed; students are

under-occupied and some do not pay attention. The college makes no reference to the quality of teaching in its self-assessment. Key skills are developed appropriately through assignments. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there are weaknesses in aspects of course management and this was confirmed through inspection. Schemes of work have been developed by individual teachers but are not shared or agreed across the course team. When setting assignments, teachers do not ensure that students' workloads are reasonably even. Teachers meet informally on a regular basis, but minuted course team meetings are infrequent. The arrangements for the internal verification of the GNVQ programmes are inadequate.

10 Students are well motivated in most lessons. They work individually on computers and make good progress with the tasks that are set. Students' work is generally of an appropriate standard. Students on the GNVQ programmes produce well-organised portfolios of work and the standard of presentation is high. The computing resources available to students are of high quality, a fact noted in the self-assessment report. These resources are located in a range of well-planned specialist rooms. During timetabled periods, students have access to up-to-date computer hardware and industrial-standard software. The arrangements for the non-timetabled use of computers are less satisfactory. Nine computers are available on a non-timetabled basis in the learning resources centre. Students are informed that they may use spare computers in the specialist rooms when lessons are in progress. However, few did so during the inspection and the specialist rooms are locked when not in use. Computing teachers are suitably qualified. A high proportion of the teaching is carried out by teachers working on a part-time or fractional contract basis. Students have difficulty contacting these teachers outside of timetabled lessons. The number of technical staff to maintain the computing facilities is inadequate.

Curriculum Areas

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the retention and pass rates on the full-time intermediate and advanced diploma courses are good. However, the retention rate for the first cohort of the GNVQ advanced IT is low; of the 22 students initially enrolled, only 10 remained at the time of the inspection. Pass rates on some part-time courses are low.

Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced (full time)	Retention (%)	88	79	72
	Pass rate (%)	93	91	100
GNVQ intermediate (full time)	Retention (%)	71	85	88
	Pass rate (%)	100	82	71
Other (part time)	Retention (%)	91	94	96
	Pass rate (%)	53	32	95

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

12 Inspectors observed 12 lessons including two delivered by a local training collaborator. Inspectors found many strengths and weaknesses which were different from those identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- generally good retention rates
- effective work experience programme
- good electronics workshop
- good pass rates on mechanical handling courses

Weaknesses

- the narrow range of programmes and failure to attract part-time students
- the decline in pass rates
- incomplete course reviews and action plans

13 There is a narrow range of engineering programmes. The full-time programmes offered are the first diploma in engineering, the GNVQ advanced engineering, and GCE A levels in electronics and design and technology. Students may study additional courses such as the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) electronic servicing or a relevant GCE A level. Mechanical handling and transport training is run in collaboration with a local training provider. No courses are run to help local employees update their engineering skills, for example in computer-aided drawing. There are currently no part-time students although a small number have been recruited in the recent past. Class sizes are small. These weaknesses were not identified by the college.

14 All teachers have schemes of work but the majority do not make use of lesson plans. In practical lessons, students work purposefully;

help is given when required by the teacher. In most cases, teachers use carefully-directed questions to check on and enhance students' understanding of the topic being studied. In a few cases, however, students are left to work on their own too long, without any check that they are making progress. The assessment of students' work is satisfactory. Projects in GCE A level electronics are well presented; most are wordprocessed. Inspectors agreed with the college that the inclusion of good-quality work experience in engineering programmes is a strength. All students on the engineering first diploma undertake two weeks work experience with local engineering companies. Their achievements are recorded and contribute towards the overall assessment of the course. Students on the GNVQ advanced engineering take part in the GNVQ engineering and manufacturing support scheme operated through the TEC. Students solve engineering problems provided by local companies.

15 The electronics workshop has been refurbished within the last two years and provides good-quality accommodation. It has attractive decor, new benches and a carpet. The workshop containing manufacturing machines and machine tools is satisfactory. The college acknowledges that the welding and fitting area is drab and uninviting. The engineering equipment, although adequate for the current range of courses, is dated in certain areas. The full-time teachers possess appropriate qualifications. They have substantial industrial experience but there has been little recent updating of this experience. Most have a training and development lead body assessor award but no member of the engineering teaching staff is qualified to verify assessments. The mechanical handling and transport training centre is well equipped and enables trainees to gain experience of a real working stores environment.

16 Retention rates are generally good. For example, in 1997 the retention rate on the

Curriculum Areas

full-time vocational programmes was 92 per cent; on the GCE A level programmes it was 100 per cent. Examination pass rates have declined over the last three years. The full-time vocational programmes pass rate was 93 per cent in 1995 and 50 per cent in 1997. The pass rates on mechanical handling and transport courses are consistently high.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	75	60	100
	Pass rate (%)	80	67	71
Engineering courses (full time)	Retention (%)	100	86	92
	Pass rate (%)	93	67	50
Mechanical handling and transport training (short courses)	Retention (%)	+	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	+	100	97

*Source: college data
+course not offered*

Curriculum Areas

Business and Management

Grade 2

17 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. Separate self-assessment reports were originally written for two areas which have since been combined. By the time of the inspection, a number of the weaknesses identified in the original self-assessments had been addressed. Inspectors concluded that some weaknesses remain.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- the wide range of programmes
- the additional qualifications taken by full-time students
- the use of IT in coursework
- well-devised, business-related assignments and exercises
- good specialist accommodation and resources

Weaknesses

- the uneven standard of course administration and record-keeping
- some low retention rates
- poor pass rates on GNVQ courses
- the poor integration and assessment of key skills on GNVQ courses

18 There is an appropriate range of courses. Return-to-work courses, mainly for women, are planned carefully to fit in with personal circumstances and opportunities for work experience. An innovative course in teleworking, which combines elements of college and home-based study, is offered at the main site and at centres in local villages. Professional development courses are provided for part-time students. An increasing number of courses are delivered on employers' premises, for example NVQ qualifications for the Northamptonshire

police. In addition to their main qualification, full-time students acquire additional qualifications which enhance their chances of gaining employment or entry to higher education. The college recognised that there are weaknesses in course administration. Improvements have been made but variations in the quality of record-keeping and course administration still remain. Some course files are not kept up to date. Student records and progress sheets are not always completed correctly. Continued student absences are not always investigated.

19 The majority of teaching is good. Lessons are well prepared. There is attention to the requirements of individual students. In most lessons, there is a suitable range of activities which involve all the students. Teachers often relate topics back to previous lessons and other parts of the course. The college identified some of these teaching strengths in its self-assessment. Inspectors confirmed that changes have been made to overcome weaknesses identified through self-assessment. Business-related assignments and exercises are appropriate to the level of course. Most are marked carefully but the teachers' comments are sometimes too brief and not helpful. The college acknowledges that the assessment of key skills on GNVQ courses requires further development. The extent to which key skills are developed and assessed through assignments is not always clear. By contrast, on NVQ programmes, key skills development is an integral and planned part of the course. Most students are attentive and contribute well to discussions in lessons. They generally organise their work well; their portfolios are well presented. IT is used appropriately in the presentation of coursework. Part-time and full-time students are able to relate the business context of their work experience to their studies.

20 The accommodation used for business and management studies provides a pleasant and productive learning environment. Rooms are

Curriculum Areas

spacious, well equipped and suitably furnished with business-related displays. Learning resources and audiovisual equipment are provided in teaching rooms. The business bureau is suitably equipped for the development of administration skills, with computers, reception desk and office equipment. Students have access to computers in a variety of locations. Many of the computers have a high specification and modern software. When necessary, evening classes and groups in village centres have the use of laptop computers and printers.

personal and work commitments continue to affect retention rates on some part-time courses.

21 Over the last three years, there have been pass rates above national averages in GCE A level business studies, accounting technician foundation, and single subject business computing skills courses. Pass rates were below national averages in the intermediate and the GNVQ advanced business in 1997. Retention rates were below average on a number of courses in 1997. The college recognises these weaknesses in students' achievements and a number of measures have been introduced to improve the situation. The early indicators are that improvements in the quality of work in portfolios and external test results should result in improved pass rates. Changes in courses and revised procedures have resulted in some improvement in the retention rates, but

Examples of students' achievements in business and management, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National diploma/GNVQ advanced business	Retention (%)	53	72	33
	Pass rate (%)	85	67	40**
GCE A level business studies	Retention (%)	96	86	92
	Pass rate (%)	90	94	82
GNVQ intermediate business	Retention (%)	94	60	90
	Pass rate (%)	56	67	44

Source: college data

**fewer than 10 students

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses identified through self-assessment had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- relevant and appropriate assignments
- well-planned work experience
- effective internal verification
- the development of care programmes in the community
- well-equipped and furnished classrooms

Weaknesses

- inadequate analysis of data on students' achievements
- some poor classroom management
- inappropriate timing of assignments

23 NVQs in childcare and education are provided on the main site and in surrounding towns. These courses are operated with partners in Northampton, Banbury and Kettering. In one partnership, nine students from a local school study either the advanced or the GNVQ intermediate health and social care and undertake an NVQ with a training organisation based in Kettering. This diversified provision is a strength which was not recorded in the self-assessment report. The work experience arranged for all full-time students is effective and was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

24 Lessons take place in well-equipped and comfortable classrooms which have attractive

wall displays of students' work. Clear objectives and intended outcomes are detailed in the lesson plans but these are rarely explained to students. Handouts and transparencies are well produced. Relevant videos, teaching materials and practical exercises are used by teachers to add variety to their teaching. During an effective 'theme day' on dependency for mature students on the national diploma in childhood studies a series of realistic exercises and role-play situations allowed students to simulate the feelings of dependency on parents, teachers and other adults experienced by children as they grow up. There were some weaknesses in classroom management which were not identified in the self-assessment report. The small number of students in a few lessons limits the range of activities that can be undertaken. Instructions to students about what they are expected to do are not always clear. Inspectors agreed with the college that the assignments are relevant and appropriate. However, the fact that many of these assignments have similar deadlines, resulting in uneven student workloads, was not recognised. Internal verification is effective.

25 Pass rates on the GCE A levels in psychology and sociology are above the national averages for general further education colleges, although value-added data calculated by the college indicate that the results are not always as good as would be predicted on the basis of performance in GCSEs. There were pass rates of 78 and 90 per cent on the GNVQ advanced health and social care in the last two years, and retention rates were 85 and 73 per cent, respectively. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate health and social care range from 53 per cent to 100 per cent and retention rates ranged from 64 per cent to 90 per cent. GCSE psychology and sociology have pass rates below national averages. The full-time certificate in childcare and education had below-average results in 1996-97 with a pass rate of 57 per cent and a retention of 60 per cent.

Curriculum Areas

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level psychology and sociology	Retention (%)	87	76	72
	Pass rate (%)	75	79	77
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	+	85	73
	Pass rate (%)	+	78	90
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	73	90	64
	Pass rate (%)	94	53	100
GCSE psychology and sociology	Retention (%)	88	56	68
	Pass rate (%)	56	56	30
Other full-time courses including certificate in childhood studies, BTEC national diploma in childhood studies	Retention (%)	+	55	69
	Pass rate (%)	+	67	74

*Source: college data
+course not offered*

Curriculum Areas

Performing Arts

Grade 2

26 Ten lessons were observed covering GCSE, GCE A level and national diploma courses in music, dance and drama. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-structured lessons that link theory and practical work
- effective development of students' performance and production skills
- well-designed assignment and project briefs
- good specialist accommodation for music and drama
- pass rates significantly above national average in music and theatre studies

Weaknesses

- the low student numbers in a few lessons which restrict the opportunities for group work
- the poor use of visual and other teaching aids in a few lessons
- the lack of a sprung floor, mirrors and barres in the dance studio

27 There is a small but developing range of courses in the performing arts. The well-established GCE A level courses in music and theatre studies have recently been supplemented by a new national diploma course in performing arts and the GCE A level in dance. Full-time students take additional qualifications in subjects such as music, dance and drama. Student numbers are low on all the courses. The small team of teachers meets regularly and manages the courses efficiently. Students receive carefully-structured guidance before

starting their course. The progress of individual students is monitored closely and recorded formally.

28 Some lesson plans do not have clear objectives although an oral brief is generally given at the start of the lesson. Students with differing levels of prior knowledge and experience are managed well by teachers. Appropriate attention is given to technical and specialist language such as the terms used in music theory. Students experience different methods of learning but the range of activities they can undertake is restricted by the low numbers in some lessons. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the college that teachers make good links between practical work and theory. In a few lessons, poor use is made of visual aids. Students are expected to take their own notes but there are few checks on their accuracy. Study trips are arranged regularly to broaden the students' experience of the arts. Students have a clear understanding of assessment requirements. Clear assignment briefs are provided, particularly in music.

29 Students respond positively to practical work. Dance students are encouraged to comment critically on one another's work. The drama and dance studios are spacious. The drama studio has a well-equipped lighting rig and will seat an audience of up to 75 people. The dance studio lacks a sprung floor, a lighting rig, mirrors and barres. These limitations were not identified in the college's self-assessment. Music facilities are good. There are three music practice rooms and a seminar room with a good collection of instruments, compact discs, and music scores. A public performance space is being developed in the newly-acquired hall. Facilities for set design, stagecraft and music technology have yet to be developed. There are no box office facilities. Teaching staff are suitably qualified and have kept up to date with the changes in the curriculum. The small amount of technician support means that

Curriculum Areas

productions rely largely on the technical skills of teachers.

30 From 1995 to 1997, the few students on GCE A level music achieved pass rates at A to C grades 30 per cent above national averages and for A to E grades 10 per cent above the national average. In 1997, the students on GCE A level theatre studies achieved pass rates at A to C well above national averages. In 1996 and 1997, the retention rates were above national averages for the sector in GCE A level music but below the sector average in GCE A level theatre studies. In 1996 and 1997, pass rates for students taking additional qualifications were above national averages. Apart from their examination achievements, students receive recognition for the quality of their work in other ways. For example, music students have won many prizes for individual instrumental performances at the Northamptonshire annual music festival. Inspectors agreed with the college that drama, music and dance students develop a good range of performance skills through touring productions. The college wind band gives performances within and outside the college. Projects provide opportunities for students to practise directorial and choreographic skills.

Examples of students' achievements in performing arts, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level music (A to C)	Retention (%)	71	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	80	83	75
GCE A level music	Retention (%)	71	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level theatre studies (A to C)	Retention (%)	88	68	69
	Pass rate (%)	36	38	56
GCE A level theatre studies	Retention (%)	88	68	69
	Pass rate (%)	79	77	78

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

31 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment and found others. Most of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- efficient and effective pre-entry guidance, enrolment and induction
- comprehensive arrangements for learning support
- thorough careers and progression guidance
- the effective system for monitoring and reviewing the progress of students
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities

Weaknesses

- 'drop-in' learning support not readily available
- unclear targets in some students' action plans

32 The college has made considerable progress since the last inspection, particularly in the management of learner support, the delivery of additional learning support, and careers education and guidance. There is now a learner support centre which is located in a prominent position near the main entrance to the college. It provides the focal point for students to obtain information, advice and guidance. The centre also houses a new careers library.

33 Inspectors agreed that arrangements for pre-entry guidance and enrolment are efficient and effective. There is a comprehensive calendar of information-giving and recruitment events and extensive liaison with partner schools. Inspectors also agreed that the induction programmes are effective in settling

students into their programmes quickly. A 'freshers fayre' introduces college clubs and societies and the extensive programme of extra-curricular activities. The majority of first-year students take part in the programme and are able to choose from a wide range of options. Some options lead to qualifications, others seek to broaden interests and experience. The programme is a strength which was not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

34 Inspectors confirmed that the system to monitor students' progress operates successfully, as claimed in the college's self-assessment. Subject teachers provide academic support for students and refer them to others for specialist support if required. Each of the college's five curriculum areas has a specialist member of staff who co-ordinates and organises support activities and provides guidance for individual students. Students are assigned to a course or subject tutor who monitors their academic progress through a learning agreement and an associated plan of action. In a few plans of action, the targets were not expressed clearly. A review of students' progress in individual subjects or modules is undertaken termly. The students and their tutor agree on areas needing attention and propose actions. Copies of the recorded outcomes are sent to parents. Comprehensive records are kept in the students' progress files which are stored centrally.

35 Inspectors confirmed that the comprehensive arrangements for learning support meet the needs of individual students studying at different academic levels. Students are tested to identify whether they require extra support to improve their literacy and/or numeracy skills. Support managers liaise with teachers, the learner support centre, and the key skills unit to arrange for any necessary support. Effective one-to-one support is provided by the key skills unit or by subject teachers. The college recognises that subject teachers will require further development of their skills before they can contribute fully to this process. Where

Cross-college Provision

a number of students are identified as requiring similar support, staff from the key skills unit and subject teachers provide the support in small groups. Students who seek support on a drop-in basis cannot always be helped immediately. All students on intermediate level courses have timetabled lessons in English and communications, and numeracy and mathematics. They are offered the opportunity to enter for the appropriate qualifications, including GCSE English and/or mathematics. All full-time students have supervised timetabled periods for the development of IT skills. Advanced level students are tested to identify their level of IT skills.

36 As a further dimension to their personal development, students can participate in a further education award scheme which allows them to gain accreditation for activities such as hobbies, sports and voluntary work. Many students do not see the relevance or usefulness of the programme.

37 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that students benefit from thorough careers and progression guidance. There is effective liaison with the Northamptonshire Careers and Advisory Service. An adviser provides careers education for groups and individuals. All students research job opportunities as part of their course. Visits from external speakers are organised as appropriate. Workshops are provided to help students improve their application and interview techniques. A 'Job Shop' advertises opportunities. Parents are encouraged to participate in the higher education and employment convention.

38 Students with problems which require professional counselling are referred to agencies based in Daventry. There is no qualified counsellor on site. Closer links with the local agencies, including the possibility of on-site counselling, are being explored.

39 There is an active students' union. It is well supported by a youth worker with the

Northampton County Council Youth Service who acts as a student liaison officer. The union has productive links with external agencies and community organisations and organises a range of well-attended social events. Profits are used to support some of the college clubs and societies. The crèche provides good-quality childcare.

General Resources

Grade 2

40 Inspectors agreed with the majority of the judgements about resources in the self-assessment report. Actions have been taken to address some of the weaknesses since the report was written.

Key strengths

- an attractive and well-maintained site
- the quality and quantity of computing resources
- spacious and well-decorated classrooms
- most areas accessible to wheelchair users
- good sport and recreational facilities

Weaknesses

- the current level of facilities in the learning resource centre
- insufficient access to the computing resources

41 The college site is spacious, clean, well maintained and pleasantly landscaped. It includes car parking areas and a recreation complex including outdoor sports pitches. Inspectors agreed with the college that the quality of the accommodation and the general environment is good. The buildings are attractive and welcoming, particularly the main reception and atrium areas. Classrooms and other teaching areas are spacious, carpeted and

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generally well decorated. Surveys of students' opinions, quoted as evidence in the self-assessment report, indicate strong satisfaction with the learning environment. The refectory provides a suitable service for staff and students but requires refurbishment. A separate small dining area is available for parents and children. The recreation complex contains a large, general purpose sports hall, a fitness room, a lounge area and a licensed bar. There are some areas where the internal fabric of the buildings is in need of redecoration. The college recognises that the toilets and the former home economics room are priority areas for improvement. Some staff work rooms are cramped. The college is aware that the ventilation and heating of many rooms in one block are ineffective.

42 The accommodation strategy is linked clearly to the strategic and curriculum plans. There are proposals for more effective and efficient utilisation of the site. An appropriate proportion of the college budget is set aside for the annual maintenance programme. There is also a 10-year maintenance investment plan. The majority of the college site is accessible for wheelchair users. Appropriate ramps and lifts provide access to first-floor areas. There are conveniently-located toilets for students with disabilities. The ramp to the recreation complex requires some surface repairs and access to it is occasionally blocked by inconsiderate parking.

43 The college has invested a considerable amount of money in computing equipment in recent years. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the overall quality of computing resources is good. There are 173 computers available for students' use, many with up-to-date specifications and industrial-standard software. A few machines are outdated and in need of replacement. The main computer rooms are heavily timetabled. The college identified some problems of availability of computers on a drop-in basis. Access to some computers is restricted at times when staff supervision is not possible. A small

number of dedicated computers are available in curriculum areas. The college has invested some of its capital reserves and funds from external sources to install a computer network. All staff rooms have a connection to the network but not all have computers. Laptop computers and printers are available in centres outside the college and certain evening classes.

44 The learning resource centre houses a range of books, journals, CD-ROMs and videos, as well as the college's reprographic services. There are two photocopiers for students' use and nine computers linked to a printer. The centre has a small, well-used viewing room for videos. Through self-assessment, the college identified a demand for longer opening hours of the centre and as a result the centre is now open on four evenings each week. Inspectors confirmed that students are generally satisfied with the centre but identified some weaknesses which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. The centre is in need of general refurbishment. The bookstock is barely adequate for the number of students and there are insufficient study spaces. Issues and catalogues are not computerised. In addition to the main learning resource centre, curriculum areas also have their own bases which house specialist resources. Information is not held centrally to indicate what is available in the various parts of the college. At the time of the inspection, the centre had insufficient staff but still managed to maintain its normal opening hours.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

45 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although some strengths were overstated. Significant progress has been made in addressing some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

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Key strengths

- all aspects of college operations covered by the quality assurance system
- continuous review and development of the quality assurance system
- the use of quality targets and standards
- the value-added calculations and associated course team targets
- regular course reviews leading to comprehensive plans of action
- effective staff development which supports strategic objectives
- the comprehensive college charter

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of quantitative data to monitor improvements
- variability in feedback to students on questionnaire outcomes
- lack of regular monitoring of some charter targets
- lack of employer contributions to reviews

46 At the time of the last inspection, in 1994, new quality assurance arrangements were being introduced. Quality assurance has improved over the intervening four years. As noted in the self-assessment the quality assurance system now applies to all aspects of the college's operations. All staff and students take part in regular formal reviews. The corporation reviews the college's educational performance annually. A quality assurance team oversees the operation of the system. Team members are drawn from staff teams across the college and include a governor with experience of quality assurance systems in industry. Time is allocated to quality assurance reviews and staff training. Standards and targets are set. The college recognises that there is a continuous review and development of the quality assurance system. Recent developments include pilots for a revised course quality assurance log and classroom observations.

47 Business support teams have set service standards for work with customers both internal and external to the college. For example, the secretarial and office support team has standards for reception and reprographics which are monitored using questionnaires to staff. Issues identified through surveys are, in most cases, addressed quickly and successfully. Staff are kept informed of the outcomes of surveys and any resulting reviews through the staff newsletter. The reviews do not include the regular re-examination of service standards to see if they remain appropriate.

48 All course teams maintain quality assurance logs which are checked for compliance with standards as noted in the self-assessment. Most record the targets set, the outcomes of reviews, and plans of action. A few are not well structured and lack evaluative statements. In some, the teachers' judgements differ from students' perceptions and there is no reconciliation of the differences. There are few comments on the quality of the evaluations contained in the logs.

49 Inspectors agreed with the college that the course review process is a strength. Course teams review their performance three times each year. Course reviews are based on an analysis of students' responses to questionnaires, staff perceptions, and the students' achievements. Most students are given feedback on the outcomes of the questionnaire reviews but this is not consistent across the college. Plans of action resulting from reviews clearly identify the issues to be addressed but make little use of quantitative data to monitor improvements. Student achievement trends are analysed for the previous three years. Retention targets set by the college are monitored. Course teams calculate realistic targets for students' achievements based on the entry qualifications of the students. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there is little involvement of employers in the review process. Inspectors

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agreed with the college that the collaborative provision is monitored effectively by regular visits to observe lessons, discuss achievement data, review verifier reports, and analyse the responses to student questionnaires.

50 The college produced the self-assessment report for the inspection using the headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The self-assessment was prepared as part of the annual quality assurance review, monitoring and action-planning process. Most staff were involved in the initial development of the report. The report was debated at the college annual strategic conference in July 1997 and then moderated by the senior management team. The governance self-assessment was developed by a mixture of informal brainstorming sessions and formal consideration at meetings of the corporation. The corporation approved the full self-assessment at their October meeting. Subcommittees of the corporation will monitor and review the implementation of the action plans.

51 The college charter has recently been reviewed and modified. It comprehensively covers the college's commitments to students, the community and industry as recognised in the self-assessment. Students are given copies at the start of their study programmes. Not all of the quantitative targets in the charter are regularly and formally monitored. Compliments and complaints are recorded and analysed. Complaints are dealt with promptly.

52 The self-assessment report suggests that the staff appraisal system is well structured and inspection supports this claim. Staff appraisal is linked to an effective system for staff development. Appraisal documents provide staff with the opportunity to prepare for their interview by recording work undertaken during the year. An individual development plan for each member of staff is drawn up. Development activities are evaluated, recorded centrally, and monitored against operating statements.

Governance

Grade 2

53 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some of the weaknesses identified had been rectified by the time of the inspection. A small number of strengths and weaknesses were not identified in the report.

Key strengths

- effective arrangements for identifying and inducting new governors
- efficient management of the business of the corporation and its committees
- effective and appropriate delegation to corporation committees
- the corporation members' links with the work of the college

Weaknesses

- low attendance at corporation meetings
- insufficiently detailed reporting of information on enrolments and achievements to the board
- the lack of benchmarking

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

55 Corporation meetings are quorate although there are instances of low attendance. There have been several changes in corporation membership in the last two years. The corporation has used suitable means of identifying potential governors, including advertising. Inspectors agreed that the

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comprehensive induction procedure helps new governors to understand their role.

56 The business of the corporation and its committees is well managed as recognised in the self-assessment. Clear agendas and comprehensive supporting papers are distributed in good time for meetings. The cycle of meetings is established in advance. Committee meetings are scheduled appropriately in advance of corporation meetings. The corporation has established a finance and resources committee, an employment policy committee, a remuneration committee, and an audit committee to assist it in considering the detail of its business. In practice there is effective and appropriate delegation of corporation business, although there are minor deficiencies in some of the terms of reference for these committees.

57 There are no standing orders to guide the conduct of corporation business. A register of interests is completed annually by governors and senior postholders. It includes a declaration of interests by partners and a confirmation of continuing eligibility to be a governor. The corporation has adopted a code of conduct for its members although this has yet to incorporate the seven principles of public life as expounded by the Nolan committee.

58 Inspectors agreed with the college that the corporation pays appropriate attention to the college's mission, curriculum and other non-financial issues. The strategic plan was developed in consultation with representatives of the community and benefited from a planning day which involved corporation members and senior managers. Members of the corporation have strong and carefully-planned individual links with the college. These links include visits to curriculum and cross-college areas and involvement in the college's quality group. The academic board has been reorganised to ensure that it deals with appropriate issues. The principal gives an oral report to the corporation

on matters discussed by the academic board. The self-assessment report claimed that the reporting of students' achievements and performance to the board is effective. Inspectors did not agree with this claim. Some information on students' achievements and enrolments is reported to the board but it does not provide clear or detailed information of progress towards targets or over time. Information on achievements does not give national comparators against which to measure the college's success. The board receives information on the FEFC's six performance indicators but the college recognises as a weakness the lack of other benchmarks against which to set the college's performance.

Management

Grade 2

59 The self-assessment report on management is detailed but inspectors concluded that it is insufficiently evaluative. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report but there are some omissions and some strengths are overstated. The evidence quoted does not always clearly relate to the strengths or weaknesses identified.

Key strengths

- a clear and detailed strategic plan
- effective and regular monitoring of operational plans
- good external liaison with a range of agencies
- detailed and timely financial management information
- effective and efficient deployment of staff

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Weaknesses

- differences in the quality of departmental operational plans
- weakness in the provision of management information
- some delays in the decision-making process
- the lack of a coherent marketing strategy

60 The college's self-assessment report records the strong commitment of staff to the college's mission. The clear and detailed strategic plan has corporate objectives cross-referenced to a three-year operating plan which is updated annually. An annual strategic planning conference is held to review formally the strategic plan and overall direction of the college. The conference is attended by corporation members and college senior and middle management staff. The review draws on labour market intelligence, curriculum and management information, and quality review data. Operating plans are drawn up for academic and business support areas. These vary in quality and, in many cases, do not have quantitative targets against which to measure progress. There is an effective system for reviewing these plans on a regular basis. Planning cycles are not closely aligned with the quality assurance cycle.

61 The management system has been restructured recently. There is a team-based approach to accountability and decision-making. The management structure is complex and there is some overlap in job responsibilities. The multiple line management of a service or an individual leads to delays in the decision-making process. The college acknowledges that some staff do not fully understand the structural position and job roles of others. A positive outcome of the restructuring has been the improvement in the management of the business studies programme area. The senior

management team comprises the principal and the five assistant principals for: human resources; operations and data systems; finance and administration systems; quality and learning systems; and business development. The senior management team meets twice a week; once to discuss strategic matters and once to discuss operational matters. The outcomes of these meetings are well documented and include clear action points.

62 There is effective communication from managers to staff, but communication from staff to managers is less effective. There is a staff newsletter and time is set aside each week for staff meetings. Whole-college events are organised on 10 days each year. These events are valued by staff and are used constructively to address staff development, planning and other college issues. The college recognises the need to improve communications with some part-time staff.

63 The deployment of staff is efficient and effective. This strength was not identified in the college's self-assessment. A variety of employment contracts is used. Academic staff timetables are monitored termly to ensure staff are fully utilised. The use of part-time teachers is costed and monitored closely. The college has not yet developed course level unit costing to inform decisions regarding course viability and the allocation of resources.

64 The college has productive relationships with a variety of agencies. This was claimed in the self-assessment report and confirmed during the inspection. The college liaises with the TEC and the Northamptonshire County Council on a variety of issues at strategic and operational levels. There are links with the Daventry district, Kettering borough, and South Northamptonshire councils. There are regular meetings with the head teachers of the 10 local secondary schools and with the local education authority (LEA) to address strategic issues. There is a strong collaborative partnership with

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the two Daventry schools to provide a coherent education and training service. The college was part of a successful bid for 'widening participation' funds in collaboration with three other local further education colleges, Nene College, the TEC, the careers service, and the LEA.

65 The college does not have a coherent marketing strategy. There is no detailed analysis of local education and training needs based on market research. This weakness has not been recognised by the college. The marketing function is undertaken within information and recruitment services, although this is not clearly reflected in the operational plan. There is a calendar of marketing events to support the recruitment of students. The employer database is updated annually and an employer visit pro forma allows staff to record information so that follow-up visits can be organised. The college successfully hosted a series of lunchtime seminars to promote NVQs and modern apprenticeships to local employers. Follow-up visits were undertaken.

66 The management information system is adequate. The college acknowledges that the provision of data from the system to all teaching and learning teams needs to be improved. This was confirmed by a number of inspectors who had difficulty in obtaining reliable data on students' achievements. The college is in the early stages of implementing its IT strategy which includes the development of the management information system. A computer network infrastructure has been installed. The next phase of the implementation will provide staff with access to appropriate information about students.

67 The equal opportunities committee has sought to broaden its remit and membership. It is supported by two corporation members. At the time of the inspection there was no student representative on the committee.

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's

financial management is good. The finance department is headed by an assistant principal who is a senior postholder and who is qualified by experience. Budget holders receive appropriately detailed and timely reports at monthly intervals, which align with the monthly management accounts. The management accounts, supported by a separate detailed commentary, are produced to coincide with corporation meetings. The senior management team considers the management accounts as a formal agenda item once a month at their weekly meetings.

69 Full-time enrolments have fallen over the last three years whilst part-time enrolments have increased substantially. A significant proportion of this increase is a result of growth in outward collaborative provision. The percentage of funding agreement tariff units earned against the targets set were 98 per cent for 1994-95, 99 per cent for 1995-96 and 116 per cent for 1996-97. The college expects to meet its funding agreement target for 1997-98. The college's average level of funding for 1997-98 is £16.69 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £16.72 per unit.

Conclusions

70 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, the report overstated the significance of some strengths and failed to identify some weaknesses. Cross-referencing to evidence was not always clear. In reporting on curriculum areas, there was insufficient emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning. Overall, the college's judgements on the quality of its provision closely matched those of the inspectors. Inspectors concluded that the college had underestimated its strengths in two aspects of its provision. In one of these, considerable improvements had been made since the self-assessment was written.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	10
19-24 years	10
25+ years	75
Not known	4
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	36
Intermediate	32
Advanced	8
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	23
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	115	1,870	23
Engineering	111	1,712	21
Business	104	599	8
Hotel and catering	53	50	1
Health and community care	126	2,358	29
Art and design	56	581	7
Humanities	82	693	9
Basic education	11	185	2
Total	658	8,048	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (February 1998)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	63	0	7	70
Supporting direct learning contact	10	2	0	12
Other support	35	1	3	39
Total	108	3	10	121

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,494,000	£3,612,000	£3,855,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.07	£18.86	£18.89
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	73%	70%
Achievement of funding target	98%	99%	116%
Diversity of income	20%	20%	18%
Operating surplus	-£71,000	-£276,000	-£214,000

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

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

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

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	174	144	119
	Average point score per entry	4.5	4.8	4.2
	Position in tables	top third	top third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	85	72	69
	Percentage achieving qualification	69%	69%	72%
	Position in tables	bottom third	bottom third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	74	64
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	43%	48%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	bottom third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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