

East Surrey College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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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.

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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

East Surrey College

South East Region

Inspected May 1998

East Surrey College is a general further education college with its main centre at Redhill.

The college offers courses in all the FEFC programme areas and a large adult education programme. The college produced a detailed self-assessment report involving staff and governors. In most respects, inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but judged that insufficient weighting had been given to some significant weaknesses and that some strengths were overstated. Action plans arising from both the college's curriculum area self-assessment reports and the college's overall report contained few measurable targets for improvement. The college recognises these weaknesses and, since the self-assessment report was written, it has made progress in addressing some of them. The inspection covered provision in seven curriculum areas and the five aspects of cross-college provision.

The college has close and productive links with its partner schools and with the local community. The standard of teaching and learning is generally good and there are some

very good examination pass rates in some areas. In engineering, the quality of some teaching and of some of the work produced by students is outstanding. The level of personal support for students is high. Governors have a distinctive approach to their duties and a good understanding of the differences between governance and management. A management reorganisation has led to a clarification of roles and responsibilities and a shared sense of direction for the college. Since the last inspection, the college has improved the IT facilities for students. The college should address: the variability in implementing the new quality assurance procedures; poor retention rates in many areas; the average and below average examination pass rates on some courses; the need for better teaching in some areas; inadequacies in establishing clear objectives and targets for improvement; confusion and variability in implementing the group tutorial programme; the need for governors to monitor the college's educational performance; and the poor use of accommodation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	1	General resources	2
Business	3	Quality assurance	3
Beauty and hairdressing	3	Governance	2
Art and design	2	Management	2
English and modern languages	3		
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 East Surrey College operates on four sites in Redhill and Reigate, and serves a large area of Surrey. It also attracts students from parts of Croydon and Crawley. Its two main sites are in Redhill, and the school of art and design is approximately two miles away in Reigate. The college also provides a substantial adult education programme, in partnership with Surrey County Council Community Services. There is a wide range of vocational and academic courses extending from pre-entry to postgraduate level. It includes provision for national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes, general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses, higher national diploma and certificate courses, and professional courses.

2 Levels of employment in the area are high. Only 1.5 per cent of the workforce is unemployed, and some local organisations experience difficulty in recruiting staff. The local economy is influenced by its close proximity to London and by the industrial and commercial activities around Gatwick airport. There are few large enterprises in the area, though numerous multinational organisations have established their European head offices locally. The staying-on rate for post-16 education is over 80 per cent and there is considerable competition between schools and colleges to attract 16 to 19 year olds. The college has forged strong links with four partner schools to help pupils progress to further education. It has other effective partnerships with local companies, the local training and enterprise council (TEC), the county council and voluntary organisations which provide specialised education and training. The college has entered recently into an innovative arrangement, known as 'community-based programming', with representatives from a broad range of community and agency interests.

Representatives of the community and the college work together to identify, and lay plans to resolve, issues of concern to the community at large and to help establish a local 'learning community' in which people see learning as a lifelong activity.

3 The college has steadily increased its enrolments in recent years. In 1996-97 the college had 6,729 students, of whom 1,912 were full time. A further 3,578 part-time adult students were enrolled at various Surrey County Council adult centres. Each of the four curriculum faculties contains either three or four programme areas, and there is a cross-college learning support and development team. The college's mission is to 'empower people to change their lives through the provision of high-quality education and training'. Its vision statement is: 'East Surrey College ... adding value to the community by improving the life chances of people and the effectiveness of organisations'.

Context

The Inspection

4 The college was inspected during the week beginning 11 May 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college was unable to submit data on students' achievements for 1995 because of a computer systems failure. Continuing problems with these systems have led the college to submit only partial data for the two years 1996 and 1997. These incomplete data were checked by an inspector against class registers and the examination pass lists issued by awarding and examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be assessed approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors working for a total of 50.5 days and an auditor working for four days. Inspectors observed 112 lessons including a sample of tutorials, and examined students' work and college documents.

5 Of the lessons inspected, 63 per cent were good or outstanding, which is just above the national average of 61 per cent for all colleges

inspected in 1996-97 quoted in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. Eight per cent of lessons were less than satisfactory. The average number of students attending the classes inspected was nine, and the average level of attendance in the lessons observed was 75 per cent. Both figures are just below the sector averages for 1996-97, according to the same report. The highest level of attendance, at 93 per cent, was in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the lowest, at 68 per cent, was in English and modern languages. 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	2	2	3	0	0	7
GCSE	1	2	1	0	0	4
GNVQ	3	7	7	2	0	19
NVQ	6	13	7	2	0	28
Other vocational	7	9	7	3	0	26
Other*	3	15	8	2	0	28
Total	22	48	33	9	0	112

*includes group tutorials

Curriculum Areas

Science and Mathematics

Grade 3

6 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering a sample of all the courses offered in this curriculum area. They agreed with the main conclusions of the self-assessment report. However, the report contained few judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and failed to acknowledge the significance of some low examination pass rates. The objectives in the action plan were not linked to any measurable targets for improvement.

Key strengths

- a wide range of courses
- flexible patterns of course delivery
- good standards of teaching
- high pass rates on the access and degree foundation courses
- good key skills development on GNVQ courses
- innovative curriculum developments in GCSE mathematics and in numeracy
- good tutorials and learning support for students

Weaknesses

- poor achievements on GCE A level and GNVQ courses at intermediate level
- poor attendance and student retention rates on several courses
- poor accommodation for teaching science
- inadequately developed facilities for mathematics and numeracy
- lack of modern, dedicated information technology (IT) equipment for mathematics and science

7 There is a broad range of science and mathematics courses although the numbers

enrolled for many of the courses are low. Students are brought together to form viable groups and flexible organisation allows both full-time and part-time students to follow individual programmes. This strategy works well because of good tutorials and the high levels of support for individual students.

8 There are appropriate schemes of work and inspectors confirmed the conclusion of the self-assessment report that students are involved in well planned and appropriate learning activities. There are good teaching and assessment materials. Lessons are lively and teachers use questioning techniques carefully to ensure that all students have a chance to respond fully and to check that they are learning. Students' contributions are sought and used effectively, and they develop good scientific discipline. Most teachers use technical language appropriately. Occasionally their vocabulary is unnecessarily complex and this makes the subject matter difficult for students to understand. Practical work is carried out safely. Students' marked work is returned to them promptly and there are helpful written comments on how they might improve. On the GNVQ programmes, key skills are being developed effectively and there is good monitoring of students' progress. On GCE A level courses only one key skill, IT, is being developed. Students on GNVQ intermediate courses, working for a range of additional qualifications, are set specific projects and taken on visits, all of which are intended to stimulate interest in the vocational application of their studies. Work experience, however, is poorly developed on both intermediate and advanced level courses.

9 Teachers are well qualified and work well in their teams. There are regular faculty and programme area meetings which are minuted. Both formal and informal communications are good. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the science laboratories are outdated and inflexible. There is insufficient storage space.

Curriculum Areas

Most of the basic equipment and the library resources are satisfactory, but there are no modern computers specifically to support science or mathematics teaching. There is no dedicated accommodation for mathematics.

10 Students on the access course and the degree foundation course have high levels of achievement and retention rates, and progression rates are good. Pass rates on GNVQ advanced and GCSE mathematics courses are at the national average for general further education colleges, but pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate science course in 1996, and in most GCE A level subjects in 1997, were considerably below the national average. Insufficient attention was given to this weakness in the self-assessment report. No students were recruited to the GNVQ intermediate course in science in September 1996. Early indications are that the larger number recruited in September 1997 will achieve better results than were achieved in 1996. Student attendance and retention rates on a number of courses are poor. The self-assessment report cites the result of some value-added analyses based on a very

small student sample, which indicates that GCE A level pass rates may be in line with predictions based on students' GCSE results. Concerns about poor pass rates in GCSE mathematics have led to some innovative curriculum developments, designed to enable students to study different levels of numeracy and/or a GCSE in mathematics, in line with their differing abilities. If these initiatives are to succeed, the college needs an adequately resourced base for study and a clear policy about how mathematics and numeracy fit into its wider policy on key skills. Plans are in hand to try to increase student numbers and to develop a clear direction for these curriculum areas.

Examples of students' achievements in science and mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Access to higher education and foundation degree	Retention (%)	71	69	79
	Pass rate (%)	92	100	87
GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	*	58
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	42
GCSE mathematics	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	38	28
GNVQ advanced science	Retention (%)	**	**	46
	Pass rate (%)	**	**	50
GNVQ intermediate science	Retention (%)	**	81	**
	Pass rate (%)	**	31	**

Source: college data

*comparable data not available

**course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 1

11 Inspectors observed 22 lessons covering courses in the areas of aeronautical engineering, general engineering and motor vehicle engineering. Inspectors' findings were in line with most of those in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- excellent practical facilities for students' use
- very good pass rates on motor vehicle courses
- good retention rates
- some outstanding project work in motor vehicle studies
- the high standard of students' files, assignments and portfolios

Weaknesses

- lack of student involvement in some lessons
- failure of some teachers to check students' understanding
- instances in which the requirements for safety footwear were not observed

12 The programme area provides courses in engineering, aeronautical and motor vehicle studies, and full-cost courses to meet specific industrial needs. Taster courses for school pupils are available on Saturdays, and there are school links for students with learning difficulties or behavioural problems. There is work experience for all full-time students, except those on product design courses. The college is a national centre for open and distance learning programmes for the aeronautical industry. As the self-assessment report indicates, the provision is expanding to meet the needs of the

growing numbers of students. Courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly, but their meetings are usually informal and inadequately minuted. Programme area meetings are regular and well minuted though action points are not always recorded. The self-assessment report identified the need to reduce the number of teaching hours in order to make more time available for planning and internal verification. This policy is already being implemented.

13 The standard of teaching is high. Teachers use a suitable variety of teaching methods. Most lessons progress at an appropriate pace; objectives are clear; activities are well planned. Inspectors confirmed the findings of the self-assessment report that these aspects of teaching are a strength. As the self-assessment report identifies, teachers' enthusiasm and their recognition of individual students' needs, contribute to excellent working relationships. Safety requirements were generally well observed, though in a few practical lessons students were not wearing the required safety footwear. In some lessons, teachers do not check sufficiently carefully that students understand the topics they are studying. Sometimes, teachers fail to involve all students in answering questions, allowing the same few to give answers. There were proportionately more weaknesses relating to teaching and learning in the general and aeronautical engineering section than in the motor vehicle section.

14 An outstanding project was recently undertaken by students on the national diploma course in motor vehicle studies, for which the college achieved the Beacon Award for work-related projects. This involved students in reducing an old vehicle to its shell. They renovated all of the parts and rebuilt the car for racing. This year, sponsorship from an oil company has enabled the car to be raced at venues throughout the country. Students act enthusiastically as members of the pit team

Curriculum Areas

when the car is racing. The project is being repeated.

15 Specialist resources are good. To add reality to their experiences, students following motor vehicle NVQ courses are allowed, for assessment purposes, to work on vehicles belonging to staff and other students. There are good centralised IT facilities, which meet the needs of engineering courses. The library has a good stock of relevant books. Some classrooms are old and need significant repair or refurbishment but, in general, the learning environment is good. The self-assessment report acknowledges the lack of storage space in the motor vehicle area. Teachers are appropriately qualified. Nearly all have the relevant training and development lead body assessor qualifications. There is a need, however, for some teachers to update their technical experience. As indicated in the self-assessment report, the already significant links with industry are being formalised by establishing an advisory committee which includes representatives from industry.

16 All pass rates in motor vehicle courses are above the national average, and some pass rates are outstanding; for example, in 1997, pass rates of 71 per cent in the national diploma

course and 89 per cent in the NVQ level 2 course were achieved. In 1997, there were significant improvements in pass rates on the general and aeronautical engineering courses. Retention rates on all courses are good. On some advanced level courses they are above 90 per cent. Students produce some very good written work. The work is well marked and there are constructive comments from teachers to help students improve. Students' files and portfolios are comprehensive and provide excellent records of their work. Students also produce good practical assignment work and respond well to workshop tasks.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	*	86	76
	Pass rate (%)	*	66	66
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	100	81	77
	Pass rate (%)	97	68	78
NVQ level 3	Retention (%)	*	94	91
	Pass rate (%)	*	78	81
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	67	91	81
	Pass rate (%)	50	45	86

Source: college data

*comparable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

17 Inspectors observed 23 lessons covering most of the business and management courses offered. Whilst in general agreement with the college's self-assessment report, inspectors considered that some statements could not be substantiated. They also identified some weaknesses not identified in the report. The programme area action plans contained no measurable targets for improvement.

Key strengths

- some good teaching, involving suitably varied methods and materials
- good use of students' work experience during lessons
- good examination pass rates on some courses
- well-organised NVQ portfolios
- the opportunity for work placements for all full-time students

Weaknesses

- some lessons which were inadequately prepared or conducted at too slow a pace
- significant numbers of students failing to achieve the full qualifications on some courses
- poor retention rates, punctuality and attendance on some courses
- the lack of rigorous analysis of data on students' achievements and retention
- key skills assessment and verification systems which are not fully operational
- the lack of qualified assessors and verifiers on some courses

18 There is a good range of courses and some of these courses are organised flexibly to suit

students' personal commitments. The provision inspected is located in two programme areas within one faculty. The head of faculty was appointed only in September 1997 and, at the time of the inspection, there was a vacancy for a programme area manager. The faculty has a significant number of part-time teachers and some courses are too heavily reliant on them. Management systems in the faculty are still developing. They are intended to bring consistency and rigour to operations, but they are not yet fully understood or applied. This weakness was not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Planning and decision-making suffer because the analysis of data on students' achievements and retention rates is not rigorous enough. Although poor levels of attendance and retention are particular issues for the programme areas, there is no evidence of the systematic analysis of course registers.

19 The quality of teaching was satisfactory in the majority of lessons observed. Most lessons were well planned and some lesson plans provided clear objectives. Activities and tasks were appropriately sequenced, and the necessary resources identified. Teachers made good use of the considerable business experience of both full-time and part-time students, by drawing fully on their knowledge during lessons. Inspectors agreed with the college's own assessment that a strength of the provision is the work experience organised for all full-time business students. In the poorer lessons, topics were covered too slowly and teaching methods were not sufficiently varied. Some longer lessons were not sufficiently well prepared.

20 Teachers are appropriately qualified for the subjects they teach, but few have the relevant assessor and verifier qualifications and progress towards achieving them is slow. Teaching rooms are generally spacious. Most have suitable furniture, and they are generally well equipped with teaching aids. The IT equipment is being updated and increased. The college

Curriculum Areas

library provides adequate texts and facilities to support the business area.

insufficient attention to poor pass rates and low retention rates in its self-assessment report.

21 Students' work is generally marked thoroughly, though teachers' written comments on it sometimes lack detail. The system for assessing key skills and collating relevant supporting evidence is new and not fully operational. There is effective tutorial support and this helps students to compile well-structured NVQ portfolios. The pass rates on some professional courses are good; for example, on the certificate in personnel practice, the certificate in management studies and on secretarial courses including courses leading to single subject awards. The proportion of students achieving full GNVQ and NVQ awards is poor, though most students achieve several of the units. On the Association of Accounting Technician courses, for example, levels of achievement in college assessments are good, though only a small number of students generally achieve the full award. The retention rate on some advanced vocational courses is low. Inspectors considered that the college paid

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	*	60	35
	Pass rate (%)	*	50	65
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	*	67	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	18	27
NVQ level 2 accountancy	Retention (%)	*	81	82
	Pass rate (%)	*	35	31
NVQ level 3 accountancy	Retention (%)	*	83	97
	Pass rate (%)	*	66	35
Certificate in personnel practice	Retention (%)	*	86	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	75	100
Certificate in management studies	Retention (%)	*	83	93
	Pass rate (%)	*	90	89

Source: college data

*comparable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Beauty and Hairdressing

Grade 3

22 Seventeen lessons were observed, covering NVQ courses at level 2 and level 3 in beauty and hairdressing. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the college's self-assessment report but considered that the college had given too much significance to their generally average examination pass rates, and when identifying weaknesses had taken insufficient account of cramped conditions in the beauty salons. The action plan does not include any quantified targets for improvement.

Key strengths

- well-equipped hairdressing salons which provide students with a good, realistic working environment
- good schemes of work and well-planned lessons
- teachers' responsiveness to individual students' needs
- additional learner support staff with good experience
- the effective development of key skills in tutorials for NVQ level 2 full-time courses
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- well-documented internal verification procedures

Weaknesses

- cramped working conditions in the beauty salons
- some ineffective teaching
- poor use of teaching and learning resources in some classes
- assessments scheduled too late in the year

- ineffective integration of key skills with other elements of the NVQ level 3 hairdressing course
- some poor pass rates and retention rates

23 The hair, beauty and holistic therapies courses are part of the services to people faculty. Provision includes apprenticeship and youth training courses. Courses are designed and delivered flexibly to cater for a broad range of attendance patterns. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that this flexibility of provision is a strength. Staff work well as a team. There are standardised and informative course files, clear schemes of work and lesson plans. Internal verification procedures are well documented and are followed. Monitoring of students' progress and achievements has improved.

24 Lessons are well planned, using standardised schemes of work. Teachers are responsive to individual students' needs and give help and guidance appropriately. There is usually a good, purposeful working atmosphere in practical and theory lessons. Key skills are developed through tutorials, and appropriate use is made of evidence from students' work placements and the tasks undertaken during lessons. Many schemes of work contain details of the resources to be used for teaching. However, these resources are not always employed and where they are not, there is often an adverse effect on the quality of teaching and learning. Students on beauty courses work in cramped conditions which are potentially unsafe. Better and safer use of the restricted space could be achieved. On the NVQ level 2 full-time courses key skills are effectively developed as an integral part of the work. On the NVQ level 3 hairdressing course, however, this integration has not been achieved.

25 There are bright, spacious and well-resourced hairdressing salons, providing a

Curriculum Areas

realistic working environment in which students can operate. Teaching materials and other resources for hairdressing are good. Resources include 115 videos and both black and white 'model' heads for practising hairdressing skills. Many of the carefully collated teaching materials in the salons are laminated for durability. The library has a good range of relevant texts and journals. For those with restricted mobility, there is good access to the ground-floor salons and the upper floors. Teachers are well qualified and are supported effectively by additional learner support staff with relevant experience, and a work experience co-ordinator and assessor.

written before systems for monitoring new students' achievements were introduced, identified monitoring and recording of students' progress as poor. Inspectors considered that the monitoring system is now generally effective.

26 Internal verification procedures are well documented and adhered to by internal verifiers. However, some students were concerned about assessments which were being introduced late in their programmes of study, giving them a much reduced time in which to complete the tasks. This was not mentioned as a weakness in the self-assessment report. High staff turnover on some courses has affected students' progress. Pass rates are generally at or below the national average. Retention rates are erratic. Assessments undertaken so far this year indicate some improvement in students' achievements. The self-assessment report,

Examples of students' achievements in beauty and hairdressing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 3 hairdressing	Retention (%)	*	64	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	40	70
NVQ level 3 beauty therapy	Retention (%)	*	64	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	20	81
NVQ level 2 hairdressing	Retention (%)	*	91	70
	Pass rate (%)	*	61	70
NVQ level 2 beauty therapy	Retention (%)	*	63	55
	Pass rate (%)	*	23	59

Source: college data

*comparable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

27 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering art and design and photography. The self-assessment report is detailed and the inspection confirmed many of its findings. However, inspectors identified weaknesses which had been missed by the college. The objectives in the action plan for this curriculum area are generalised and do not contain any clear targets for improvement.

Key strengths

- some good teaching which is suitably demanding of students
- good curriculum management
- the high standard of students' work
- the high proportion of students progressing to higher education courses
- very good pass rates

Weaknesses

- unclear assessment criteria for marking students' work
- the adverse effect of multiple staffing changes on intermediate students' progress
- low student retention rates on two courses
- the poor accommodation and poor decor in many work areas

28 The programme area is well managed. Teachers work well as a team and have regular meetings. The longer-established courses are well organised and enable students to develop their individual interests and abilities. The range of courses is expanding. It now includes the new Surrey Open College Federation vocational intermediate course and the higher national diploma course. There is an additional, separate grouping for mature students on the

general art and design course. Whilst students' work is reviewed and assessed regularly, the formal recording of students' progress is minimal. The criteria for the grades awarded are not always clear, and there is little written feedback to confirm what students have achieved or to help them improve their work. The self-assessment report fails to address these issues.

29 Most lessons on higher and advanced level courses are well planned. Teachers set appropriately challenging tasks for students, sometimes requiring them to evaluate their own and each other's work so that all may learn from the analysis. In theory lessons, complex concepts are made clear, and good use is made of audiovisual teaching aids. These features, together, help to ensure that students' work on the advanced level and higher education courses is of high quality. It demonstrates well-developed basic drawing skills, good research and sound exploration of materials and techniques. In the contextual studies programme, students often present written work and research in an innovative way. On lower level courses, however, teachers do not make sufficiently high demands of the class and sometimes accept poor-quality work from students. Some students' work is too casual, and good classroom disciplines and appropriate working practices have yet to be achieved.

30 Except for the diploma in photography course, the programmes are located in the former Reigate School of Art. The buildings are old and in poor repair. However, they provide generous space for students to work in. The range of facilities is adequate, though much of the equipment is old. There is up-to-date specialist IT equipment for image manipulation in graphic design and good facilities for photography courses. The facilities for three-dimensional studies, including those for wood, metal, plaster and ceramic work, are good. These courses take place in a large Victorian house on a second Reigate site and students

Curriculum Areas

there thrive in the generous work spaces. On the main Reigate site, however, much of the furniture is second-hand, the contextual studies seminar room is poorly decorated, and the library, which is cramped, does not provide a pleasant working environment for students. There are no other quiet study spaces for art and design students on these sites.

31 Students on advanced programmes may choose to sit an additional GCE A level in art and design. In 1997, all of the 34 students who sat this examination passed, and 62 per cent of those who passed achieved a grade A. The college is justifiably proud of the achievement. In 1997, there was also a 100 per cent pass rate on the national diploma in graphic design course. The pass rates on most other courses are, however, in line with the national average and the college exaggerates the achievements of its students by identifying these mixed pass rates as a strength in its self-assessment report. Student retention rates on the graphic design diploma course and the diploma in general art and design course have been poor. There have been many changes to the staffing of the new Surrey Open College Federation intermediate vocational course and this has adversely affected students' progress. There are no work placements for design students, though the college is addressing this by establishing industrial links. The majority of the students

completing advanced level courses progress to higher education studies. In 1997, 90 per cent of the students on the foundation course gained places to study for a degree, the majority at the place of their first choice, often against strong competition.

Examples of students' achievements in art and design, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Full-time foundation course	Retention (%)	*	88	93
	Pass rate (%)	*	89	84
GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	74	84
	Pass rate (%)	*	68	86
Advanced vocational (graphic design)	Retention (%)	*	80	73
	Pass rate (%)	*	75	100

Source: college data

*comparable data not available

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Languages

Grade 3

32 The inspection covered: GCE A level and GCSE courses in English and in modern languages; English as a foreign language; and vocational courses in modern languages. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. The findings of inspectors were mainly in agreement with those contained in the self-assessment report. However, the self-assessment report does not identify weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning and it takes an unjustifiably optimistic view of students' achievements. There are no measurable improvement targets in the action plan.

Key strengths

- some imaginative and well-planned teaching
- the high standards which are set for students in some lessons
- good pass rates in GCSE and GCE A level English and Spanish
- students working effectively as individuals, in groups and in whole-class discussions
- success in selling language expertise to local business and schools

Weaknesses

- a minority of lessons which lack a clear structure and purpose
- some poor-quality materials for teaching and learning
- poor examination results in English as a foreign language and in vocational language courses
- poor punctuality and low levels of attendance in some lessons
- ineffective management of some sessional staff

33 Management roles in the programme area are clear. There are regular meetings, and, where these are well minuted, there are records of the actions agreed and the timescales within which these actions are to be carried out. A substantial number of sessional teachers work in the programme area and, in one section in particular, they are not well managed. Sessional teachers cannot rely on contact with permanent staff, and the quality of their work is not assessed. This is not acknowledged as an issue in the self-assessment report. The programme area has seized opportunities to expand its work in modern languages and in English as a foreign language. There are link courses with local schools and a number of contracts to provide language tuition for business.

34 Students are generally confident. They work in a concentrated way on individual tasks, operate effectively in small groups and contribute with ease to whole-class discussions. They are set suitably challenging tasks. In a GCE A level English literature lesson, for example, students explored poetic styles, voices and meanings by reconstructing poems from parts of original poems given to them at random in sealed envelopes. They worked in groups to share and use their technical knowledge and then presented and discussed their version of the poems. Some lessons are well planned and imaginative, and the teachers' lively approach to the work stimulates students and maintains their enthusiasm. Modern languages teachers make extensive use of the language being studied in their lessons. The relationship between teachers and students is relaxed and friendly. Teachers have high expectations of their students and encourage them to achieve. Assignments are marked thoroughly and contain comments on how students might improve their work. In a minority of cases lessons had no clear structure or purpose, and students found it difficult to respond positively. Such weaknesses in classroom practice are not identified in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

35 Resources are more than adequate to meet the requirements of the courses offered. A particular strength is the Pitcairn workshop which contains a wide range of good-quality learning resources. Learning support materials for literacy and numeracy teaching are held there, as well as materials for GCSE and GCE A level English. The large space can be used flexibly to accommodate whole classes, small groups or individuals, working on a variety of topics.

36 There are gaps in the data on students' achievements provided by the college. This means that it is not possible to comment on trends. It is evident, however, that there are some poor results in GCE A level French, in GCSE English literature, and especially in English as a foreign language and on vocational language programmes. There was poor punctuality for, or low levels of attendance at, some lessons. The average rate of attendance at the lessons observed was 68 per cent. Some class registers show low retention rates; in one case, the rate was 31 per cent. The self-

assessment report does comment on the poor retention rates on some courses.

Examples of students' achievements in English and modern languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level English literature	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	72	86
GCE A level modern languages	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	50	*
GCSE English	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	65	77
GCSE modern languages	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	51	65
English as a foreign language	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	38	11
Vocational programmes in modern languages	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	30	*

Source: college data

*comparable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

37 Inspectors observed 13 lessons across the range of discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- a good range of discrete programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- innovative work with adults from residential group care homes
- good progression from supported learning programmes on to mainstream courses
- good specialised IT facilities and access to central college resources

Weaknesses

- initial assessment of students which is insufficiently specific to identify individual learning needs
- accreditation requirements sometimes leading to inappropriate methods of learning
- the lack of individual learning goals and learning plans for students
- too great a delay in students entering vocational courses
- inadequate briefing for learning support assistants

38 There is a wide range of programmes and activities designed specifically for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and virtually all courses are accredited. The college has negotiated successfully with other agencies to provide specialised provision for adults from

local residential and day-care centres, particularly for those with visual impairments. The programme area is managed effectively and sensitively. There are regular team meetings and a regular staff bulletin issued to disseminate information among the large team of teachers and learning support assistants. Parents and representatives of relevant agencies are involved in regular reviews of students' progress.

39 Lessons are planned effectively and students work purposefully and well. Teachers take every opportunity to help students learn from their own experiences. For example, a late comer to the lesson was asked to consider what she might say to other members of the class before the lesson continued, and the whole group was subsequently engaged successfully in discussing what it would be appropriate to say in such circumstances. In some lessons, staff exercise too much control over students' behaviour. As a result, some naturally occurring opportunities for students to learn are lost. The initial assessment of students' needs is not sufficiently detailed and this prevents the setting of clear learning goals. The learning support assistants receive insufficiently clear information about students' needs. There is not enough joint planning between teachers and assistants to ensure that appropriate activities are used to help students achieve their goals. These are issues which are not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

40 Most teachers have appropriate specialist qualifications as well as general teaching qualifications. Most of the learning support assistants are appropriately qualified. The programme area benefits from the contribution of staff teaching on other programmes in the college, who bring their vocational and subject expertise to bear. There is good administrative support for the work of the programme area. Because staff do not understand sufficiently the funding that is available to colleges for this area of work, opportunities for obtaining some additional financial support are lost. Teaching rooms are generally pleasant though some

Curriculum Areas

teaching takes place in ageing huts. There is good specialised software on the computers in the base room. Students can also access all other centralised IT facilities.

41 Students generally make good progress, both within the specialised programmes and in progressing to other vocational courses at the college. They also gain a sense of achievement from their involvement in Young Enterprise companies, which offer a range of services to the college and to the public. The college recognises in its self-assessment report that students' self-esteem and their achievements would be enhanced if students were able to progress more quickly to vocational courses to work for NVQs.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

42 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, the college's overall judgement that retention rates were a strength, contradicted many curriculum area assessment reports in which they were listed as a weakness. Inspectors considered poor retention rates a widespread weakness. Some progress has been made with action points since the production of the self-assessment report in November 1997.

Key strengths

- good enrolment procedures
- high levels of personal support for full-time students
- an effective and well-organised student services team
- good support for students with disabilities
- good welfare, careers, and advice and counselling services
- productive 'link courses' with schools

Weaknesses

- the inconsistent quality of group tutorials
- monitoring and evaluating systems which are not fully developed in all areas
- insufficient tutorial support for part-time students
- confusion among staff about new systems

43 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that its procedures for publicity, recruitment and enrolment for full-time students are a strength. There are close links with local schools. Activities include open evenings and

taster days. The college has a strong 'link course' arrangement with seven schools, including special schools, under which pupils attend the college for part of the week. There is a strong student services team which manages the various services well.

44 Interviews to discuss course choices are offered to prospective students who are uncertain about the studies they wish to pursue. Course-specific interviews take place in the academic faculties. The college cites as a strength that the advice given by the faculties is objective. However, inspectors found that the college has no means of checking whether, in practice, this is so. Procedures for enrolment are clear. The system for assessing and accrediting students' prior experience is well organised. It is particularly effective in hairdressing. There is a centrally arranged college induction programme and course-specific induction activities which help students to settle in quickly and assist those who are still undecided about their courses. However, inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that arrangements for induction to courses need strengthening, not least to help to address poor retention rates. Induction arrangements for part-time evening students and for students who join full-time courses later in the term are much less well developed.

45 There are group tutorials for two hours a week and regular individual interviews to review students' progress. Their quality and effectiveness are variable, as is the recording of outcomes and the setting of objectives for students. Observation of tutorials by college staff has led to the identification of a range of deficiencies, and a revised tutorial policy and statement of 'tutorial entitlement' for students have been issued. Some staff, however, are still unfamiliar with the policy and the statement of entitlement. The college plans to assess students' key skills and to monitor further achievements through tutorials. The emerging scheme is new and some teachers remain

Cross-college Provision

confused about it. The college has identified student absenteeism as a weakness in its self-assessment report. Course teams are strengthening their systems for monitoring students' attendance, but the systems continue to vary in their effectiveness. Tutorial and personal support arrangements for part-time students are unsatisfactory. The college acknowledges this and is working on a tutorial policy for part-time students. The majority of students have received the college charter, but few of those spoken to by inspectors could recollect its contents.

46 The college assessed the levels of literacy and numeracy skills of all full-time students for the first time in September 1997. More than 370 students have been identified as needing help with these skills. Just over 100 are receiving specialised support. The majority of the others receive help from their teachers. Although the arrangements are new, they are generally effective. Support for students with disabilities is good. The college has subscribed to the principles of the Tomlinson Report and it is assessing the extent to which its operations already meet the report's recommendations.

47 The college provides sound careers education in partnership with Surrey Careers Services. A careers consultant attends the college three days each week and the college careers adviser is available for 26 hours a week, which is generally sufficient. Specialist staff are available to help those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are appropriate arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the student support service. Students preparing for higher education and employment receive sound advice and guidance. The college is a member of the Surrey Compact, which involves several universities. It helps students to progress more easily to higher education. Effective welfare arrangements include a responsive counselling service, health advice, financial advice and a chaplaincy service. There is no college nursery, but assistance for childcare is provided in cases

of hardship. The Prince's Trust provides financial assistance for some students.

48 The college has an energetic students' union. The executive committee represents students at meetings at many levels in the college. The committee also provides an effective vehicle for dealing with minor complaints from students, and arranges social activities. Members have contributed to the most recent college strategic plan. Students have variable knowledge of the equal opportunities policy, and the policy is not always followed in classroom practice.

General Resources

Grade 2

49 Inspectors agreed with many of the findings in the college's self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the college had overstated the strengths of its accommodation and understated the inefficient way in which rooms are used.

Key strengths

- improvements to accommodation, including good new buildings
- well-organised maintenance of buildings
- improved computing equipment
- well-organised and well-equipped learning centres
- good library services
- good refectory services at the Redhill site

Weaknesses

- some older accommodation which is of poor quality
- inefficient use of accommodation
- poor access for wheelchair users in many areas of the college
- few facilities for outdoor sport and recreation

Cross-college Provision

50 The college occupies two sites in Redhill and two in nearby Reigate. The main Gatton Point North site in Redhill consists of accommodation built over the last four decades, a Victorian house, and a large number of temporary huts of varying ages which comprise 26 per cent of the college's teaching space. Some of this accommodation is poor. The adjacent Gatton Point South site comprises two modern, linked blocks, built in 1989, and a house built at the turn of the century. The buildings at Reigate, which constitute the college's school of art and design, are of varying ages and designs.

51 The college's accommodation strategy recognises the strengths and weaknesses stemming from the variety of sites and buildings. The intention is to move activities from Reigate to Redhill and to build a community arts centre and sports facility at Redhill. The Gatton Point North site provides a pleasant working environment. The grounds are attractive though the huts near the main entrance give a poor initial impression of the college. The accommodation at Gatton Point South is good. Although some of the accommodation at Reigate is old, students enjoy the generous space it provides for art and design work. With the exception of the new block, however, these buildings are in poor condition and there is little external amenity space.

52 The college uses its teaching accommodation inefficiently. This is not identified as a weakness in the college's self-assessment although recent utilisation surveys of two of its areas clearly highlight the issue. The college plans to centralise room timetabling to try to make better use of teaching accommodation. Public spaces and teaching areas in the permanent buildings at Redhill are generally clean and well maintained. Older buildings and huts are particularly difficult to maintain, and the college deals with them appropriately. There is a well-conceived and

well-managed maintenance programme. Health and safety requirements are met. Signposting around the college, which has been reviewed recently, is of a good standard. The college identifies one-third of its accommodation as being inaccessible to wheelchair users and another third as accessible only with difficulty or by a longer route. However, it is improving access to buildings through a programme of building ramps and stair-lifts. The access for wheelchair users at the Reigate site is particularly poor.

53 The college's self-assessment report cites considerable improvement in the quality and range of computing facilities since the last inspection, a judgement with which inspectors agreed. There are 313 computers, most of them modern, which represents a ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of 1:8. Ninety-two computers are located in the three IT workshops and the main learning centre at Redhill, and students report no problems in gaining access to these machines. Students speak highly of the learning centres. The main centre at Redhill provides good library services and the accommodation is light and spacious. The workshop that houses learning materials designed for students to study on their own provides complementary facilities to the learning centre and has a good work space. There are over 32,000 texts in the college's learning centres and teachers work closely with learning centre staff to rationalise stock and keep it up to date. There are over 600 videos, 40 CD-ROMs and a wide range of materials specially designed to enable students to study on their own. The library's consumable budget of around £70,000 represents expenditure of approximately £28 per full-time equivalent student, which is relatively high in comparison with other colleges. The specialist art and design library at Reigate is very small but it has a good range of texts. The computerised library catalogue does not yet extend to the Reigate library.

Cross-college Provision

54 The college has few recreation and sporting facilities. Sports facilities are limited to a mini-gym and two five-a-side football pitches. There is a students' common room at Gatton Point North but no equivalent room at the other sites. There is a growing number of social areas designed for students' use, and in good weather the grounds outside are also used for social purposes. There are no nursery facilities. All these weaknesses are identified in the self-assessment report. The refectories at Redhill are in good accommodation and provide a range of good-quality food. In contrast, the refectory at Reigate is in poor accommodation, it is too small, and students report that it offers poor service and food.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

55 The college has made considerable efforts to develop its self-assessment process in order to focus on improving quality in all aspects of its work. Inspectors agreed generally with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report, though they considered that some strengths had been overstated.

Key strengths

- full involvement of staff in the self-assessment process
- improved quality assurance procedures
- a comprehensive process for checking the conclusions reached through self-assessment
- the standardisation and monitoring of procedures for classroom observation
- good opportunities for staff to discuss matters relating to the quality of provision

Weaknesses

- few measurable targets for quality improvement
- lack of coherence and consistency in the quality assurance process
- little formal action to improve teaching and learning following classroom observations
- lack of analysis of relevant data for course review and evaluation
- fragmented management of staff development

56 The college seeks to develop and assure the quality of its operations through a self-assessment process in which all staff are involved. The process now underpins the college's quality assurance strategy. Staff in course and service teams undertake a careful scrutiny of their area of work, identify strengths and weaknesses, report the findings and supporting evidence, and produce action plans to address weaknesses. Course reports are discussed and form the basis of the faculties' self-assessment reports. The faculties each have meetings of their board of studies, attended by senior managers, at which reports are scrutinised to ensure that assessments are robust and based on secure evidence. Self-assessment reports produced by the service areas are scrutinised by a similar board. The full college self-assessment report was agreed by the corporation before submitting it to the FEFC. In the report, the college acknowledges that its action plans contain few specific targets for improvement. For example, little use is made of performance indicators for retention rates or examination pass rates. The college recognises that it does not yet make effective use of self-assessment in its strategic planning. Efforts are already being made to adjust procedures and timescales to address this.

57 The college has revised its quality assurance policy and supporting procedures.

Cross-college Provision

However, the system lacks clarity and coherence. Although faculty operations are assessed by the boards of studies, these boards do not report directly to another committee, to the academic board or to the corporation. The academic board does not have quality assurance matters in its remit. Members of the senior team or their representatives attend faculty board meetings. However, the quality of recording of these meetings varies, and there is no formal means at directorate level of comparing outcomes or of monitoring actions directed at improving the quality of provision. A recently formed committee of the corporation will now oversee the quality of teaching and learning. Contrary to the college's assertions in its self-assessment report, policies and procedures for quality assurance do not provide a clear indication of the lines of reporting self-assessment findings, and fail to ensure adequate monitoring of improvements in the quality of provision. The college has made significant efforts to inform staff of the new quality assurance process and to provide staff with opportunities for discussion of the policy and its implementation. As yet, however, individuals' roles in the process are not fully understood.

58 The college has a well co-ordinated internal verification system which enables good practice to be shared. Reports from external verifiers and examination boards are analysed systematically and action to improve matters is executed swiftly. Students' views are sought and course teams generally respond quickly to issues that are raised. The academic board has been restructured recently and, in order to improve communication of its deliberations and to increase the involvement of staff, it has established a series of staff briefings. Staff welcome the opportunity to participate openly in debates on academic matters.

59 There are standardised procedures for the observation of lessons and tutorials. The college takes care to achieve consistency in the grades awarded as a result of these observations.

However, in some cases, the feedback to teachers who have been observed is slow and the strengths and weaknesses identified have not been shared, or addressed adequately. Staff development is not systematically linked to the actions identified in action plans. As noted in the self-assessment report, staff development activities have not been co-ordinated effectively enough to ensure that good practice is disseminated, or that development activities make best use of the resources available. The college recognises in its self-assessment report that the revised staff performance and review system is not fully operational. At the time of the inspection, all senior managers and 75 per cent of middle managers had been reviewed, but no teachers. The college has recently made a commitment to achieve Investor in People status.

60 The college charter is published in the student handbook and is reviewed annually. Students are aware of their rights and responsibilities. The college complaints procedure is clear and the few complaints received are dealt with promptly. The procedure is monitored appropriately.

Governance

Grade 2

61 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the main strengths and the one weakness identified in the self-assessment report. They found some additional weaknesses which were not acknowledged in the report.

Key strengths

- a clear view of the strategic direction of the college
- a distinctive approach to, and philosophy of, governance
- the clear distinction made between governance and management

Cross-college Provision

- firm financial monitoring
- effective clerking

Weaknesses

- lack of analysis and monitoring of the college's non-financial performance
- limited implementation of best practice on open governance
- the compromised independence of the audit committee

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

63 In its self-assessment report, the college claims as a strength the corporation's distinctive approach to governance, with operations based on those more commonly found among boards of directors of public companies. Inspectors and auditors agreed with this judgement. The corporation has 12 members, comprising seven independent members, three co-opted members, two of whom are also college directors, a TEC member and the principal. A formal skills audit has not been carried out, but the need to maintain a balanced membership is taken into account in the appointment and reappointment of governors. The ability of potential members to contribute to strategic thinking has been a key consideration in appointments. Governors claim that by maintaining a low membership and minimising the number of committees, the whole corporation can play a greater part in decision-making. Inspectors and auditors acknowledge that, within this framework, the distinction between governance and management is clearly understood and observed, and that the college's firm governance is a strength.

64 Governors are clear about their financial responsibilities and have devoted a considerable amount of time to them since incorporation, using the corporation as the finance committee. Their key aim since incorporation has been to put the college on a sound financial footing and this has been achieved. The corporation has a clear view of the future strategic direction of the college, and spends an annual residential conference discussing and formulating strategic aims and their implementation. However, although they have approved the three-year 1997 to 2000 strategic plan, governors have not defined specific targets for the college or the means for monitoring progress and measuring achievements against them. Generalised targets, such as the intention to increase non-FEFC income, do not provide effective guidance to management. The corporation recognises in its self-assessment report that it has paid insufficient attention to its key duty of overseeing the educational character and performance of the college. It has accordingly established a learning quality committee, which will receive reports on and monitor matters related to academic performance and quality assurance. The corporation has not systematically reviewed information on students' achievements, but it is intended that this new committee should do so.

65 The corporation meets frequently and the 10 meetings each year attract variable levels of attendance, averaging 76 per cent. The audit committee has seven members, with other governors generally in attendance and contributing to discussions, though not allowed to participate in formal decision-making. This structure compromises the independence of the committee. The independence of members of the audit committee is at further risk when the corporation as a whole acts as the finance committee. Although there is no set of standing orders covering the conduct of meetings, effective clerking ensures that the corporation and its committees are well supported

Cross-college Provision

administratively. Agenda papers are distributed in good time for meetings and are clear and comprehensible to all governors. Minutes provide an informative record of the business of the corporation and its committees; they are produced in good time and are available for staff in the learning resource centre. The clerk to the corporation is also the director of the business support function at the college, with overall responsibility for financial matters. There is no indication that these dual roles have created a conflict of interest.

66 The corporation has only recently approved the establishment of a register of interests and this is in the process of being collated. The corporation approved a code of conduct for members in 1995. It has not been updated to reflect recommendations arising from the Nolan committee report and does not accord with current best practice. The corporation has not yet adopted other examples of best practice in implementing formal policies on issues of openness such as who, other than governors and the clerk, is allowed to attend corporation meetings and how corporation decisions are to be communicated effectively to staff and students.

Management

Grade 2

67 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the strengths and all of the weaknesses identified by the college. Some strengths were overstated, and some of the college's claims undermined by the weaknesses it identified. Progress with action points was made between the submission of the self-assessment report in November 1997 and the update produced in April 1998.

Key strengths

- clear strategic planning processes
- effective financial management
- the definition of roles within the revised management structure
- good communications

Weaknesses

- management information systems which are not yet fully effective
- little use of specific targets to guide developments
- little monitoring of policies

68 Strategic planning is well considered and realistic. There are good opportunities for staff to contribute to the planning process. Having achieved its financial targets, the college has developed a vision for the future development of its educational provision and its place in the community. There are some good analyses of market information and environmental factors which will increasingly inform decisions about the nature and location of provision. Good use is made of information gained through links with schools, the TEC, and an innovative partnership with community groups. The revised process for linking planning, budget-setting and self-assessment has yet to be tested over a full year but it appears logical.

69 Communications in the college are generally good, although staff comment that they have too little informal contact with senior managers. Since the last inspection, there has been a major restructuring of the organisation. Responsibilities and accountabilities have been clarified. The self-assessment report identifies the many opportunities for staff to receive information and contribute ideas, and inspection findings confirm this. There are newsletters, briefing meetings, and team meetings which are timed so that information can pass rapidly from senior managers to other staff groups. An innovative management development

Cross-college Provision

programme has involved a detailed analysis of how the executive group works together. This programme is being extended to the corporation and the senior management team. The senior management team has 13 members, and a large number of full-time staff have some management responsibilities. This has mixed benefits; more staff are involved in decision-making, but managers with new roles and significant teaching commitments have not found it easy to implement changes rapidly.

70 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Since incorporation, the college has moved from a deficit of £275,000 to a surplus of £84,000 in 1996-97. This reflects the college's commitment to achieving financial viability. The college is in a strong cash position, and is fully able to meet its current liabilities. Payroll costs have been reduced from 77 per cent of income to 65 per cent of income, which compares well with other colleges in the sector.

71 There is effective financial control. Members of the financial team are well qualified and experienced. Neither internal nor external auditors have raised any significant concerns over the college's internal control systems. Monthly management accounts, which are not produced directly from the accounting system, are reviewed by the college directorate. Until recently, the accounts were also reviewed monthly by the corporation. In the light of the college's strengthened financial position, the corporation now reviews the accounts quarterly. Monthly management accounts do not include specific targets against which the performance of the college can be monitored. Financial regulations are widely distributed in the college and are being reviewed to reflect new staff responsibilities. The college's average level of funding for 1997-98 is £15.95 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £16.72 per unit.

72 The computer systems failure in 1997 was a major setback. External auditors praised the documentation maintained by finance staff, which helped overcome serious problems as a result of the failure. Management information systems are compatible, but are not fully integrated and are not yet fully effective. Students' recruitment, retention and some achievements data are incomplete, and recent returns of data to the FEFC are overdue. Course costings are rudimentary. Nevertheless, staff have identified recent improvements in the management information they receive and are optimistic about future developments. The self-assessment report overstates the extent to which useful reports are made available to managers, and acknowledges as a weakness that reports to managers do not necessarily meet their needs. Inspectors identified some poor retention rates which the college had not acknowledged, and which could have significant financial implications in 1998.

73 The executive team and the corporation have not been ready to set many quantifiable targets to guide developments. There are recruitment targets which are converted in faculty business plans to targets for funding units. In other respects, aims and objectives are expressed in more general terms and progress is, therefore, difficult to monitor. Intentions to grow or to develop are not accompanied by measures or timescales. The college might consider whether it is this feature of its planning which slows down progress, since it accepts in its self-assessment that managers do not make sufficient use of targets and performance indicators. Some developmental work is managed by specially formed project teams, who also perform feasibility studies. These projects would benefit from clearer specifications and timescales for achieving goals. For example, arrangements for implementing the key skills policy have not been interpreted consistently by teachers. This and other initiatives would benefit from well-focused staff development.

Cross-college Provision

74 The college has in place many policy statements, but few are consistently monitored. Staff consider the policies for equal opportunities, quality, and health and safety as having greatest influence on their work. The self-assessment report claims that the commitment to equal opportunities is embedded in curriculum planning. This is only the case in a few areas, and inspectors identified a lack of awareness about aspects of equal opportunities practice among some staff.

76 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.

Conclusions

75 The annual self-assessment report submitted for the inspection was the second that the college had produced. The format for recording self-assessment findings in the curriculum was based on the FEFC's 10 programme areas, and consisted of reports on the 17 subdivisions of these areas. Inspectors found the subdivisional reports helpful in planning and carrying out the inspection. The subdivisional reports did not contain assessments of curriculum content, organisation and management, which were instead submitted separately in a section dealing with cross-college matters. The college's other cross-college self-assessment findings were contained in three miscellaneous sections and six cross-college sections. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the self-assessment report, but considered that several strengths identified by the college were overestimated and that some key weaknesses were not given the weighting they deserved. They also identified some weaknesses which were missed by the college. Few of the action plans contained measurable targets for improvement. Although inspectors were in general agreement with the findings in most curriculum areas and for most cross-college provision, there was less agreement about the significance given to some of them. Therefore, about one-third of the grades awarded by the college were judged by inspectors to be generous.

College Statistics

Student numbers* by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	27
19-24 years	15
25+ years	39
Not known	17
Total	100

Source: college data

*excludes 3,578 part-time adult students at Surrey County Council Services adult education centres

Student numbers* by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	37
Intermediate	29
Advanced	26
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	5
Total	100

Source: college data

*excludes 3,578 part-time adult students at Surrey County Council Services adult education centres

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	107	814	14
Agriculture	4	30	1
Construction	108	138	4
Engineering	302	1,017	20
Business	122	491	9
Hotel and catering	253	281	8
Health and community care	365	1,015	20
Art and design	465	95	8
Humanities	100	926	15
Basic education	86	10	1
Total	1,912	4,817	100

Source: college data

*excludes 3,578 part-time adult students at Surrey County Council Services adult education centres

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	126	0	70	196
Supporting direct learning contact	16	4	0	20
Other support	88	3	0	91
Total	230	7	70	307

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£9,268,000	£9,021,000	£8,958,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£17.45	£17.86	£16.57*
Payroll as a proportion of income	77%	67%	65%
Achievement of funding target	108%	104%	100%
Diversity of income	25%	22%	20%
Operating surplus	-£554,000	£27,000	£84,000

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)

*not yet finalised

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	56	107	59
	Average point score per entry	2.6	3.2	4.1
	Position in tables	bottom third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	317	207	186
	Percentage achieving qualification	60%	70%	69%
	Position in tables	bottom third	middle third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	91	28
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	63%	79%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	top 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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