Farnborough College of Technology

THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL

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

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

Contents

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

*   as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
*   as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
*   as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

Farnborough College of Technology

South East Region

Inspected February 1999

Farnborough College of Technology is a large general further education college offering a wide range of courses from pre-foundation to postgraduate level. Although the comprehensive self-assessment report was the first that the college had produced, it drew on a rigorous process of annual reviews and action-planning developed over several years. The production of the report involved governors as well as staff at all levels in the college. Inspection findings confirmed most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. Since it was produced, the college has made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses identified in the report.

The college offers courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. Students' achievements in some areas are very good but more variable in others. Leadership is effective, and there is an open approach to management. Communication throughout the college is good. Governors play an active role in strategic planning and in the monitoring of financial targets. Their partnership with senior managers is sound. Strong links between strategic planning and quality assurance have led to demonstrable improvements in many areas since the last

inspection. Staff appraisal is well established. Staff development is a key priority and is funded accordingly. The college's main campus in Farnborough provides a well-resourced, spacious and attractive learning environment. The library is an outstanding resource. There is good provision and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has made significant progress in its general support for students since the last inspection. Pre-entry guidance and induction for full-time students are very good, and there is greater consistency in the quality of tutorial provision. The college should continue to improve: the standard of teaching in some areas; student achievement and retention rates on some courses; guidance and tutorial support for part-time students; the evaluation of learning support; the management information system; and the measures used by governors to monitor the college's non-financial performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Computing and information technology	2
Engineering	2
Business studies	2
Health and childcare	2
Humanities and social sciences	3
Basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	2
General resources	2
Quality assurance	2
Governance	2
Management	1

The College and its Mission

1   Farnborough College of Technology is a large general further education college offering full-time and part-time courses from pre-foundation to postgraduate level. The college is the major provider of adult and continuing education in north-east Hampshire. Courses are available in all the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas. Since the previous inspection in 1994-95, the range of vocational courses has been extended. A programme of franchised courses has been developed, and now accounts for 6% of the college's FEFC-funded work. The college has contracts to deliver training for modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and foundation training, involving some 250 students.

2   Of the current students, 85% live in north-east Hampshire, north-west Surrey and south-east Berkshire. Since the last inspection, student numbers have increased by around 20%. The number of part-time students aged over 19 has risen to 78% of the total student population, an increase of 5% since 1994.

3   The college occupies two principal sites in Farnborough and Aldershot, with a third, smaller site in Aldershot. The accommodation strategy includes the development of a new single site in the centre of Aldershot as an integral part of the town's regeneration plans. The college's commitment to serving the local community is shown through the strong links with local businesses and community groups. Work with disadvantaged groups has been extended and includes courses for disaffected pupils from local schools and a contract with social services to deliver programmes for people with disabilities.

4   Much of the employment in the area comes from information systems companies, the financial sector and service industries. The local economy is robust and the level of unemployment is 1.6%. Currently job vacancies exceed suitable applicants, particularly in the information and communication technology sector. The local population is highly qualified; approximately 50% of the region's employed residents hold a national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 or equivalent.

5   Over the past two years, the college has developed a number of partnerships providing learning and training. These include a 'common accord' agreement with the local sixth form college, signalling the determination of both colleges to work together in the best interests of the region.

6   The college mission is 'to provide high-quality education and training'. The underlying strategic aim of the college is to put the needs and interests of the students first by promoting a range of opportunities that:
*   'are flexible in their delivery and relevant in their content
*   provide students with progression
*   enable students to reach their full potential'.

This strategic aim is supported by the commitment to:
*   'encourage participation by all groups in the community
*   value and invest in staff
*   maintain the financial health and stability of the college through effective management of resources'.

The Inspection

7   The college was inspected during the week beginning 8 February 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1996 and 1997. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1998. These data

were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies, and were found to be generally reliable. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 51 days. The inspection team observed lessons, visited students on placement, examined students' work, and scrutinised college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students.

8   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 84 lessons observed, 58% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% were less than satisfactory. This compares with averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	2	2	1	0	6
GNVQ	3	11	9	1	0	24
NVQ	0	3	3	0	0	6
Other vocational	3	6	7	0	0	16
Other	3	17	10	2	0	32
Total (No.)	10	39	31	4	0	84
Total (%)	12	46	37	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

9   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. The highest attendance level, 86%, was in computing and information technology (IT) lessons, and the lowest, 73%, in basic education.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Farnborough College of Technology	10.9	82
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

10   The self-assessment report identified the strengths and weakness of the curriculum area. Inspectors agreed with its findings, although they considered the report underestimated the significance of some poor retention. Substantial progress had been made to address weaknesses by the time of the inspection. Fourteen lessons were observed.

Key strengths

- extended range of courses with appropriate progression routes
- good teaching
- high pass rates on some courses
- effective assessment arrangements
- good IT hardware and software resources
- extensive stock of books and periodicals in the library

Weaknesses

- poor retention on some courses
- poorly-developed schemes of work
- limited industrial contact or work experience for full-time students

11   The school of computing and information systems offers an extended range of courses from intermediate to degree level, providing progression routes for both full-time and part-time students. Courses include general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in IT at both intermediate and advanced levels; professional development awards at intermediate and advanced levels; higher national certificates and diplomas in computing, software engineering and business IT; and an honours degree in computing validated by the University of Surrey.

The school also runs a range of short courses for industry. The inspection focused on the FEFC-funded GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses and higher national certificates.

12   The quality of teaching is good. All but one of the lessons observed were well planned and the aims were shared with students at the start of the session. Most lessons were conducted at a lively pace and teachers had high expectations of students. They made frequent checks on students' learning. Students responded positively to all the learning tasks that were provided. In a few lessons, teachers made poor use of questioning, or the teaching approach used was not appropriate to the range of ability in the class. Most schemes of work are merely lists of topics with no reference to teaching methods or the use of resources.

13   Arrangements for assessment are effective, although there is some bunching of assignments, particularly for part-time students. There is some very imaginative assignment work at all levels. Teachers provide detailed and prompt written comments to show how students might improve their work, but in a few cases, these are too brief to be useful. Key skills are effectively tracked. There are no work experience arrangements for full-time GNVQ students and they have insufficient exposure to the industry during their course. Achievement rates for students on the GNVQ advanced course have been very high over the last three years. However, in 1998, these were marred by a very low retention rate and as a result the school took action to improve its arrangements for student support. Early evidence indicates that retention of the current year's intake has improved significantly. Achievements for students on the GNVQ intermediate course are slightly above the national average. Achievement rates on the professional development award are very high but retention is low; the college reports that this is because many unemployed students in this group gain sufficient skills from the early part of the programme to move into employment earlier

than anticipated. According to college data, higher national certificate results were very high in 1996 but dipped significantly in 1997. Verified data for 1998 show a slight improvement in 1998 but the figure remains low.

14   During the last two years, the school has been through significant change. Some staff have taken early retirement and some newly-recruited teachers returned to industry. This has had a significant impact on retention and some achievement. However, a new organisational structure has been established and the school is now well managed. Effective arrangements have recently been put in place for improved tutorial and careers support for both full-time and part-time students. These include consultation evenings for parents of the GNVQ students and new systems of student tracking. These changes have already led to

improvements in retention and achievement. Staff make good use of feedback from both full-time and part-time students to review and improve courses.

15   The school has good levels of appropriate software and hardware to support its teaching. The self-assessment report identified that some software was not of an appropriate industrial standard but steps have been taken to correct this. The range of up-to-date books and journals in the library is extensive. Teaching staff are well qualified and recent recruits from industry are being supported by the college in gaining appropriate teaching qualifications. Technical support is good. Most practical rooms are well furnished and well equipped, but some are inappropriate for teaching theory. Some general teaching rooms are crowded, poorly equipped and restrict the effectiveness of the teaching methods used by teachers.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate in IT	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	16 94 67	28 86 67	30 71 57
Professional development award (Edexcel units)	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	94 70 100	100 60 95	81 56 98
GNVQ advanced in IT	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	17 82 93	38 61 89	47 27 100
Professional development award (Edexcel units)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	20 50 100	17 59 100	19 26 100
Higher national certificates in computing, software engineering and business IT	4	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	135 57 48

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*reliable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and also noted improvements in engineering provision since the last inspection.

Key strengths
- good teaching in most lessons
- the high quality of specialist engineering equipment and resources
- good students' achievements
- extensive range of courses and opportunities for progression
- well-established employer links

Weaknesses
- some poor lesson planning and schemes of work
- missed opportunities to reinforce learning
- lack of regular meetings at school level

17   The college's engineering provision, shared between two schools, offers a wide range of programmes in aerospace, automotive, electronics and mechanical engineering. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the provision provides good opportunities for students to progress from foundation level courses to higher national diplomas in automotive engineering, electronics and computer systems, as well as an honours degree in aerospace engineering. Both schools have well-established links with local industries including membership of the local aerospace consortium. Teachers are also active members of the relevant professional engineering institutions.

18   Teaching was good or outstanding in two-thirds of the lessons observed and satisfactory in most of the remainder. Teachers employ a variety of approaches to learning, and they use the wide range of engineering equipment to maintain students' interest and enhance their learning. Some engineering theory lessons take place in laboratories so that teachers can use demonstrations to illustrate the lesson topic. For example, in a lesson on airflow patterns and aerodynamic forces, the teacher made expert use of a variety of practical examples and illustrations to introduce an assignment. Students' interest was sustained throughout. In contrast, in another lesson, the teacher showed diagrams on an overhead transparency to illustrate types of seals but did not use the seals available in the room as examples. In a few lessons, teachers did not adequately check students' learning. Students demonstrate appropriate levels of skill and knowledge, sometimes at a high level. Teachers provide detailed feedback on students' assessments and record the progress students make in key skills. Students on part-time NVQ programmes are assessed in the workplace. This ensures that they are able to demonstrate in the workplace the competencies they have acquired at college. Most full-time GNVQ advanced engineering students do not undertake work experience as part of their course. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

19   Over the past three years, examination pass rates for most courses have been at or above the national averages. Retention on the NVQ level 2 courses has been good for the last three years at better than 80% and the NVQ level 3 has had a 100% retention for the last two years. The pass rates on these courses have varied over the last three years, but in 1998 they were good at above 70%. Retention has also been good on both GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes. Pass rates on the advanced programme have risen in each of the last three years. Attendance on most courses was good at 80%.

20   A wide range of specialist equipment supports teaching in all the engineering

disciplines. The schools have particularly good IT resources. In aeronautical studies, the equipment includes several wind tunnels and an operational gas turbine engine. Students have appropriate access to these facilities. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of specialist equipment is a significant strength. A well-resourced library has a good range of up-to-date books and several copies of those most frequently used. Accommodation is of a high standard and is generally well maintained. Well-qualified teachers are effectively supported by administrative and support staff. Those teachers employed on part-time contracts complement the specialist skills of the full-time staff. This has strengthened the schools' ability to develop and deliver new programmes. Those staff who need them have assessor and verifier qualifications. Heads of school have completed the appraisal of their individual staff.

21   The two heads of school meet the assistant principal with responsibility for further education each month. Meetings of the heads of school with their course team managers are not regular, are informal and not minuted. Despite this, most course teams work effectively, although they have not paid sufficient attention to the development of schemes of work in most cases. The review and evaluation of each course completed by all those teaching on a course includes the setting of new targets for enrolment, retention and achievement.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE	2	Expected completions	19	6	10
		Retention (%)	100	40	91
		Achievement (%)	58	83	90
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	28	45	14
		Retention (%)	85	85	93
		Achievement (%)	64	44	57
NVQ	2	Expected completions	150	214	121
		Retention (%)	86	84	88
		Achievement (%)	64	42	71
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	43	68	80
		Retention (%)	93	56	89
		Achievement (%)	63	65	69
NVQ	3	Expected completions	23	11	13
		Retention (%)	79	100	100
		Achievement (%)	52	100	75
BTEC higher national certificate	4	Expected completions	*	120	87
		Retention (%)	*	88	85
		Achievement (%)	*	73	73

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*reliable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

22   Inspectors observed 23 lessons. Overall, inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that it overstated the quality of students' achievements on a few courses.

Key strengths

- teaching that is often good and sometimes outstanding
- well-managed provision
- the wide range of full-time, part-time, vocational and professional courses
- high-quality GNVQ programmes
- well-developed support for full-time students
- the good range of IT resources

Weaknesses

- some instances of insufficiently differentiated teaching approaches
- low completion rates on some part-time courses

23   Provision in this curriculum area is made in three schools, which between them offer a good range of courses including GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced level courses in business; secretarial courses; courses leading to professional qualifications in marketing, personnel, business and management; and NVQ courses in accounting. There are clear routes allowing progression up to degree level. Inspectors agreed with the college that the provision is well managed. Targets for enrolment, retention and achievement are set and monitored. Course teams meet regularly, implement action plans and evaluate performance against targets. Arrangements for the induction of full-time students work well. Their individual learning needs are assessed and support is provided as appropriate. Tutorial support and guidance on full-time programmes are good and have contributed to improved achievement levels. Part-time students joining later in the year do not receive the same degree of support.

24   The quality of teaching is often good and sometimes outstanding. No lessons were less than satisfactory and most were well planned. Schemes of work are detailed and well developed. Staff working on the GNVQ programme place a strong emphasis on student learning; they share good practice and provide effective mutual support. Most full-time students experience a variety of teaching and learning styles. GNVQ advanced students benefit from placements with local employers, where a named mentor takes responsibility for supporting each individual student. Teachers use question-and-answer techniques effectively to stimulate students' interest and check that learning is taking place. In some lessons, however, teachers do not fully take account of the differing levels of students' ability and they fail to reinforce learning by summarising information appropriately. In the courses leading to professional qualifications, teachers used a variety of learning aids. In one lesson, the teacher used the board to build up a series of financial accounts using contributions from students; an overhead projector slide then provided a finished version. Some part-time students had insufficient opportunities to make contributions in class. Part-time students are generally encouraged to use work-based evidence to support their studies. Work experience programmes provide good learning opportunities for full-time business and secretarial students. Inspectors agreed that this provision is a strength.

25   Retention rates on GNVQ programmes have been above the national average for the last three years. Pass rates in these programmes have improved year on year and are now above the national average. The majority of GNVQ intermediate students progress to advanced courses; three students have successfully moved

through the GNVQ programme from foundation to advanced level, and have now been offered places in higher education. One student from a secretarial course recently achieved an award as UK secretary of the year. In spite of high retention rates, many students on the professional courses complete only part of the qualification for which they are enrolled, often as a result of changes in employment or personal circumstances. On the Association of Accounting Technicians foundation course, pass rates are above the national average. Students contribute freely to class discussions and participate confidently in group work. They display a clear understanding of the evidence they need to provide for assessment purposes. Assignments are well designed, and portfolios are marked and internally verified to a high standard.

26   Teachers are well qualified for the work they are undertaking, but many lack recent industrial and commercial experience. Management support for in-service training is good. Support staff provide a valuable service across all areas. The involvement of governors with individual schools has created a valuable link, resulting in improvements in the working environment of two of the schools. There are good IT resources on both the Farnborough and Aldershot campuses. Students on courses leading to qualifications in computer literacy and information technology, wordprocessing and on other IT courses value the facilities available. Other business studies students use these resources effectively for both research and portfolio presentation. The libraries have a good supply of relevant books and other learning materials. Some classrooms on the Farnborough campus are poorly ventilated but nevertheless provide an attractive learning environment. Teaching accommodation at Aldershot is adequate but uninspiring. The college recognised this mix of strengths and weaknesses in its self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	**1997**	**1998**
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	11 70 60	12 75 67	11 82 64
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	27 89 44	16 75 63	15 93 87
Association of Accounting Technicians foundation	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	49 100 12	66 85 42	51 78 53
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	54 61 52	48 75 56	35 91 83
Higher national certificate	4	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	51 69 57	50 98 38	41 68 68
Association of Certified Cost Accountants certificate	4	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	66 97 13	41 97 12	25 94 32

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

Health and Childcare

Grade 2

27   The inspection covered childcare, health and social care, counselling and dental nursing courses. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the college self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, students' achievements and curriculum management.

Key strengths

- effective community links
- the wide range of part-time provision
- work experience well integrated with the rest of the course
- theory effectively related to practice in lessons
- strong support for students
- some very good students' achievements

Weaknesses

- poor retention on the diploma in nursery nursing course
- insufficient attention to key skills development
- underdeveloped schemes of work

28   Full-time courses in this curriculum area allow students to progress from intermediate to advanced levels. Full-time foundation level courses are not available. The part-time provision offers education and training in a wide range of vocational areas as well as professional development opportunities for nurses and dental nurses. This strength in part-time provision was not identified in the self-assessment report. Course teams, consisting of few full-time staff, work collaboratively to deliver the curriculum. Effective tutorial systems monitor and record students' progress. Courses are regularly reviewed and performance targets are set to

improve students' retention and achievements. Inspection findings confirmed the college's view that course organisation and management are strengths.

29   Teaching in all lessons observed was satisfactory or better and there were examples of outstanding practice. Well-qualified and professionally-experienced teachers take care to relate theory to current workplace practices. In the better lessons, teachers made full use of specialist facilities and professional expertise to enable students to develop and demonstrate relevant knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, a lesson planned to develop skills in selecting books for young children was held in the local library. The librarian led a lively discussion on the key factors to be considered. During the discussion, students were skilfully guided into contributing knowledge they had gained from work experience. Groups of students scrutinised a given sample of books and reported on the strengths and weaknesses of each book to the whole class. This allowed them to demonstrate their understanding of the factors influencing the choice of books for children. In less effective lessons, the level of work was too low for the students, and they remained uninvolved. In several lessons, students on advanced level courses spent too much time copying notes from overhead transparencies. Schemes of work are underdeveloped. They do not identify learning and assessment methods or opportunities to develop key skills. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

30   Inspectors agreed with the college that work experience makes an effective contribution to students' learning. All full-time provision includes well-organised work experience, fully integrated with the course and reinforced through assessment. Students are able to develop and demonstrate workplace skills and apply theory to practice in a variety of care settings. For example, an advanced level student in a work placement was able to apply learning about sociological and psychological

aspects of behaviour to understanding the behaviour of clients.

31   Student' achievements in 1998 on all courses were good, showing significant improvement on the previous year. On both childcare courses, all students who completed their course achieved their qualifications. Students' achievements on the GNVQ advanced level course and part-time intermediate courses have improved dramatically, and are now above the national averages. Student retention on the diploma of nursery nursing course is poor. Action taken to improve retention includes revised induction procedures and more effective monitoring of attendance. Students' written work is marked accurately and grading reflects nationally agreed criteria. Internal verification systems and processes are thorough. Opportunities for key skills assessment are identified in assignments, but it is difficult to identify which pieces of evidence demonstrated the achievement claimed. The self-assessment report did not analyse retention and achievement data in sufficient detail.

32   Most classrooms are appropriate for the particular learning activities they accommodate. Specialist equipment meets course needs. Teachers have developed community links which allow good use to be made of facilities available in the community; for example, using a local dental surgery to support the development of specialised skills. Students have regular timetabled access to IT and are also able to use the IT centre on a 'drop-in' basis.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	17 88 80	21 95 60	16 81 100
Associated Examining Board counselling certificate, Associated Examining Board counselling theory, oral hygiene and dental nursing	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	138 82 5	177 82 33	61 80 96
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	37 70 73	33 76 32	32 72 78
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	28 69 79	24 54 46	36 56 100
Pre-diploma in social work and Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	39 89 82

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Humanities and Social Sciences

Grade 3

33   The inspection covered psychology, sociology, access to higher education and a sample of other humanities subjects. Eleven lessons were observed. The self-assessment report dealt with a wider area of humanities provision than that inspected. Inspectors considered that it provided a comprehensive evaluation of the provision, but that it understated some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- provision responsive to local needs
- good, well-planned teaching in some cases
- high pass rate on access to higher education courses
- effective assessment of students' work
- good support for full-time students

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates and low retention on many general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses
- the restricted learning opportunities in small classes
- insufficient variety of teaching methods in many classes
- some inadequate initial guidance and support

34   The college has modified its provision in this programme area in response to identified local needs. Students who wish to work towards a qualification in access to higher education have a choice of routes. GCE A level courses have been reorganised to increase opportunities for part-time day students. These changes have helped maintain an appropriate range of GCE A level subjects in the humanities, although the small size of many classes limits the range of teaching approaches that can be used. The level of support for full-time students is effective. However, pre-entry guidance and support given to part-time GCE A level students is inadequate. Existing publicity materials do not always enable students to make an informed choice of course and some students do not seek advice before enrolling. Part-time GCE A level students are not screened to assess their learning support needs, and retention rates on current part-time evening classes in most humanities subjects are unsatisfactory.

35   Some teaching is good. The strengths were identified in the self-assessment report but a few were overstated. Teachers plan their lessons around clear objectives. Most lessons are purposeful. Teachers are experienced and have a confident grasp of their subjects. Good-quality handouts often promote effective learning. In one GCE A level philosophy lesson, the teacher outlined case histories with appropriate sensitivity in order to stimulate debate about euthanasia. In the small group discussions that followed, students used a further handout of structured questions to explore the issue in a systematic way. Many teachers rely on a restricted range of teaching methods. In the main, teachers make limited use of audiovisual aids or of IT. Many access students were able to voice ideas confidently to each other as well as to the teacher. Key skills are not incorporated into GCE A level programmes but are taught separately. The methods used to develop the communication skills of students on these programmes lacked variety.

36   The inspection confirmed the college's judgement that achievements in humanities are mixed in quality. Most students who completed the access to higher education course between 1996 and 1998 achieved the qualification, and pass rates are higher than the regional average for similar provision. GCE A level pass rates in general remain below the national average for students aged 19 years or over in further education colleges. The achievements of students on the two-year GCE A level programme have declined since 1996. However,

in 1998, examination results for the first group of part-time day students were good. Achievements in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects are mixed. In sociology, pass rates are above the national average; in psychology, they are below.

37 The self-assessment report identified retention as a weakness in some programmes. Retention rates on many GCE A level subjects have been poor. However, in a few subjects, for example, archaeology and geography, retention has been maintained at a high level. Overall retention on the access to higher education courses is good. Students' written work is generally well presented. Teachers provide mostly constructive comments on separate assessment sheets. Errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar are corrected. Many access to higher education students demonstrate a range of skills which are appropriate to the level required of students starting a degree course. They are clear how their work will be assessed and graded.

38 Teachers work well together. All have degrees in appropriate subjects; the majority have higher degrees. Almost all hold a teaching qualification and have varied teaching experience. Classrooms for humanities subjects are barely adequate for their purpose. Only a basic level of equipment is provided, and some blackboards are of very poor quality. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that at Aldershot specialist resources in humanities are limited in range and quantity. There are no computers in the classrooms used by humanities students. Library facilities are satisfactory. The bookstock is up to date and is good in history and psychology. A college librarian issues useful subject bulletins which contain brief descriptions of items added recently to the stock. Access to the internet is good, and humanities students make use of this facility.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of achievement and retention rates in humanities and social sciences, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	**1997**	**1998**
GCSE social studies subjects (psychology, law, sociology)	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	84 71 42	69 74 52
GCE A level psychology and sociology (one year)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	105 67 41	108 59 62
GCE A level psychology and sociology (two years)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	42 67 62	37 73 56	37 57 43
GCE A level other humanities	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	110 75 53	130 70 42	78 68 46
Access to higher education (full time)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	69 62 100	69 58 83	50 58 94
Access to higher education (part time)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	10 80 100	25 56 100	30 70 95

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*course not running

Basic Education and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

39   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the key strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but considered that an important weakness was understated.

Key strengths

- a wide range of courses meeting individual students' needs
- good opportunities for accreditation
- the varied teaching activities used in most lessons
- positive relationships between staff and students
- development and use of resources including IT

Weaknesses

- the lack of individual learning targets in some lessons
- poor written records of students' progress
- some teaching which fails to cater for individual students' needs

40   The college provides a wide range of courses for adults and courses that cater specifically for those with learning difficulties. Courses run at the main sites and at many other centres in the community such as schools, clubs and public houses. The college's approach to widening participation allows many students to benefit from part-time provision and, as a result, many have progressed successfully to full-time study. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this is a significant strength. Extensive work in the community has led to the provision of deaf awareness training for social services staff. The college has also developed training opportunities for hearing impaired people who have additional difficulties such as mental health problems or partial sight. Careful attention is paid to building students' confidence and self-esteem. For example, students on the Wider Opportunities for Women course, speak with delight of the progress they have made in IT. This supports the college's judgement that the curriculum in this area meets the needs of a widening range of students. There is a good match between students' interests and abilities and their learning programmes.

41   All teachers are secure in the knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They use this expertise well to promote students' learning and progress. Lessons are generally well planned and include a range of theoretical and practical activities. Full-time and part-time students mix well on the Build Your Skills course. They choose from a range of modules and normally follow individual timetables. However, in a minority of lessons, all students were required to do the same work regardless of their ability. This reflects a failure to identify specific learning outcomes for each student, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and record-keeping that is insufficiently detailed. This lack of information means that teachers in other subjects are unable to build on core skills or embed them in vocational areas. Inspectors did not agree with the college that students' individual needs are addressed in all lessons.

42   Good teaching was observed where there was evidence of planning for the range of abilities. For example, in a lesson for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), students at beginner, elementary and intermediate levels worked on tasks matched to their skills and experience. Volunteers were used effectively to support students' learning by providing good models of language for students to follow, and they were able to teach relevant strategies such

as 'look, cover and write' for practising spellings. In a particularly effective Build Your Skills lesson on retailing, students worked well together. Making gift tags, they each took responsibility for a specific task, they were able to describe the purpose of roles such as quality assurance, and they understood that the rate of production would have to increase in order to make the desired level of profit. In all lessons, relationships are very good. Younger students are treated as adults, and encouraged to express their views and feelings appropriately, whilst older students are treated as full partners in the learning process.

43   Levels of achievement are good, both in terms of accredited modules and the development of confidence. As well as working towards their personal learning goals, students have access to a wide range of qualifications, including City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) awards in numeracy, literacy, and ESOL, together with other awards, such as the National Skills Profile, basic first aid and swimming. Retention rates are outstanding and support the self-assessment statement that students attend regularly and complete their courses. Students who are achieving well make progress towards higher level courses; the college is currently increasing the opportunities for progression by extending provision at level 1. Students are happy with their college experiences and enjoy discussing their skills and displaying their very well organised portfolios and files.

44   Staff are skilled in helping part-time students to undertake their work with enthusiasm. Extensive investment has resulted in greatly improved facilities for IT and a large kitchen area for the teaching of life skills. Students on the Farnborough campus also have access to specialist accommodation and resources such as the technology centre and the catering kitchens. Classrooms and corridors have attractive displays of students' work, including photographs of practical lessons.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

45   Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report. They found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths
- influential student services committee
- professional and efficiently-organised counselling service
- responsive and proactive occupational health service
- innovative project on drugs and alcohol abuse
- effective support for students with sensory impairments and dyslexia

Weaknesses
- inadequate evaluation of learning support
- some inconsistencies in tutorial practice

46   The college has made significant progress in the support it gives its students since the last inspection. The organisational structure of student services is more coherent and communication between central services and academic areas is much improved. The student services committee has been influential in driving forward initiatives such as the 'key tutor' system, and in bringing together the different groups involved in the guidance and support of students. These developments are aimed at improving retention and students' achievements. Some are at an early stage of implementation and have few measurable outcomes as yet.

47   The college has maintained its links with local schools in highly competitive circumstances. Improving relationships with the local sixth form college are leading to more balanced presentations to pupils and their parents. Students speak positively of the usefulness of open days and 'taster' days in providing information and guidance to help them make informed decisions. The college has introduced a system of 'student shadowing', allowing prospective students to spend time observing current students on their course. This has been a particularly effective way of helping some students decide which course to take. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Most potential students take up the offer of impartial guidance interviews provided by information services. A few full-time students do not follow the normal admissions process and enrol on courses inappropriate for their level of ability.

48   Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that all full-time students receive a well-structured induction programme. Most find it a positive experience, helping them to begin to know their fellow students, to understand the content of the course and the skills required, and providing an introduction to relevant personnel and parts of the college. Many induction activities successfully combine these elements. Induction for health and social care students includes a visit to a woodlands activities centre for work on team-building. This contributed to evidence required for assessment on working with others and problem-solving.

49   All full-time and some part-time students have their basic communication and numeracy skills assessed at the start of their course. Increasing numbers of students attend the learning support centre and receive support on a one-to-one basis. Most consider the help they receive to be good quality, non-threatening and encouraging. Learning support co-ordinators keep tutors regularly informed about students' progress and attendance. There are sufficient staff and materials to meet the needs of the students currently using the centre. However, the college has not identified the total number of students needing support to help it plan its provision. It does not know how many of those

identified actually receive support. Evaluation of learning support is inadequate. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors observed a number of lessons where students with sensory impairments and dyslexia received effective support, enabling them to participate fully in the lesson.

50   The college has formulated a tutorial framework which sets out a minimum tutorial entitlement. This was implemented at the beginning of this academic year. All full-time students have a personal tutor and a timetabled tutorial period. Tutorials include monitoring progress and attendance, action-planning, setting targets and updating records of achievement. A written record is kept of tutorials. Inspectors found evidence of good practice on many courses, but, on a few, provision fell short of minimum entitlements. The college recognises inconsistencies in the provision of tutorials for part-time students. Each school has appointed a key tutor to agree schemes of work, provide support to tutors and monitor the quality of tutorial work. This is beginning to produce greater consistency. Students uniformly agreed that the knowledge, accessibility and willingness of staff to help is a major strength of the college.

51   The services available to students include a professional and efficiently-organised counselling service and, unusually in the sector, its own occupational health service. The two work closely together, and are responsive to students' needs. An innovative project on drugs and alcohol abuse, which includes extensive staff development, has allowed the college to take a more active stance on these issues. Inspectors were able to observe this approach and the close working relationships between counselling and occupational health. The strength of these services is not fully acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Careers guidance is good, and students value the advice they receive from careers advisers.

52   The student union is represented on all the major decision-making committees in the college. It is another source of help for students who may be experiencing difficulties with aspects of college life. The student union, which is managed by the college's higher education students, has recently agreed a plan to increase the involvement of further education students in its activities.

General Resources

Grade 2

53   Inspectors agreed with most aspects of the college's self-assessment on general resources. One weakness in this area had been included in the management section of the report. Some weaknesses mentioned in the self-assessment report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- high standard of accommodation at the Farnborough campus
- excellent library resources
- modern and accessible computers for students' use
- well-planned and well-executed buildings maintenance
- good nursery provision

Weaknesses

- poor accommodation at the smaller, Aldershot site
- underutilised accommodation
- some limited access to buildings for those with mobility problems

54   The main college campus is close to Farnborough town centre. The college also has two sites in Aldershot, some five miles away. The range of buildings on the main campus dates from the 1950s. In 1998, the college

added a building which houses its main reception area, a lecture theatre and the student union, and redesigned the main entrance. The nursery has been improved and now accommodates 40 children. The most notable feature of the campus is the 260 metre central mall from which the library, computer centre, refectory and much of the teaching accommodation is reached. Landscaped borders edge all walkways and there are two enclosed gardens. Inspectors agreed that general accommodation at Farnborough is a strength. The college identified low utilisation as a weakness in management. Students with restricted mobility cannot easily reach the upper floors of the four older buildings, and they have no access to the science laboratories housed in one of these buildings. Wherever possible, their lessons are relocated.

55   The larger of the two Aldershot sites, Manor Park, was originally a secondary school. The single-storeyed building has three levels on a sloping site. Access to each level for students who have mobility difficulties is possible but not easy. They have no way of reaching the library. There has been some internal refurbishment but flat roofs that leak are a continuing problem. The site has a crèche for 15 children. The second Aldershot site, East End, was a Victorian primary school. The building is in poor condition and is used mainly for young people of school age on the Fresh Start programme for disaffected pupils. The college's accommodation strategy identifies the need to replace these two sites, and plans to do this are at an advanced stage. Other buildings leased from the Ministry of Defence provide living accommodation for 160 students, most of them on higher education courses.

56   The main library on the Farnborough campus is an outstanding resource. Since the last inspection, it has been extended to provide seating for 370 students, including 200 places for quiet study. The library holds some 45,000 books, subscribes to over 300 specialist journals, has a range of 1,400 videos with good viewing facilities and houses 22 computers, some of which provide internet access. A second library at Manor Park is of good quality. This has some 6,000 books, selected to support the more limited range of courses taught there. Both libraries are well funded, and the spending on learning resources exceeds £40 per full-time equivalent student. Library staff are grouped into specialist teams to ensure all library functions are effectively managed and developed. Good links between library staff and teachers ensure that resources are regularly updated. Use of the library has increased by 32% in the last two years. Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that its libraries are a strength. The college aims to help improve teachers' effectiveness by using modern advances in technology to aid students' learning and assessment. It has recently appointed a teaching and learning technology centre manager whose role is to evaluate, develop, and increase the range of computer-based learning materials.

57   Inspectors agreed that the quality of the college's computers is a strength. With the exception of a small number of specialist terminals, the remainder of the college's 629 computers are of modern standard. Half the computers are located in the main computer centre; the others are in teaching departments. Students have good access to computers for individual study. All students have an electronic mail address and are able to access the internet. Software companies provide students with general and specialist software free or for a nominal charge while they are at the college. Most of the college's computers and software have been checked and modified to ensure they are year 2000 compliant.

58   The college's facilities team includes maintenance, grounds, security, administrative and cleaning staff. There is a detailed maintenance programme and buildings are generally well maintained and clean. The

college's sporting and recreational facilities are limited. Two multi-gyms are for staff and students' use, and the college hall is used for some recreational activities. The student union building has good facilities and is open throughout the day to all but the school-age students, who have limited access. Through membership of the student union, all students are able to participate in a wide range of sporting activities and to use the facilities of the nearby Farnborough recreational centre for a reduced fee. The refectories at Farnborough and Aldershot provide a good service throughout the day, and they are also used by students as social and meeting places.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

59   Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- effective quality assurance arrangements
- comprehensive and productive curriculum quality reviews
- strong links between quality assurance and strategic planning
- effective internal verification system
- good staff appraisal and development

Weaknesses

- limited evaluation of adult education provision
- underdeveloped quality standards in some business support areas
- overgenerous grading of lesson observations

60   The college's strong commitment to quality is reflected in its mission statement. The quality assurance framework is based on the principle that the raising of standards is the responsibility of all staff. It requires a systematic review of quality in all areas of activity. Responsibilities for monitoring the implementation of the framework are clearly identified. The academic standards committee is actively involved in assuring quality in the curriculum. The college charter sets out for students the quality standards the college will meet. The complaints procedure is well documented and the process for resolving issues is clearly explained.

61   The self-assessment report identified that the programme reviews and evaluation system leads to a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of curriculum areas. The process includes a rigorous mid-year review at programme level which informs the end-of-year report. This report includes a detailed analysis of cohort statistics and performance against targets, staff and employer views, external and internal verifier comments, and students' views derived from questionnaires and representation on course panels. Each programme manager produces a comprehensive report and action plan for the head of school. Some of these action plans do not include timescales and responsibilities. The final stage is an annual report produced by the head of school covering all its programmes. This is presented to the school board for validation at a meeting attended by the governor attached to the school. A representative from another school also attends to ensure consistency and sharing of good practice. Each school report is considered by the academic standards committee. A summary of these reports is presented to the academic board and the corporation. This system of curriculum review has led to demonstrable improvements in a number of areas.

62   There are strong links between the college's quality assurance framework, the self-assessment process and strategic and operational plans. Review and monitoring of

targets through the programme review system informs the college-wide targets for retention and achievement which are published in the operating statement. The report used for the inspection was the college's first full self-assessment report. It drew on the good practice in target-setting and programme review established over a number of years, and included contributions from most staff. To assist the self-assessment process, the college applied the business excellence model. It also used a commercial package on performance indicators for better management, which proved effective in benchmarking. The self-assessment report has a clear structure with a useful summary at the beginning of each section. Strengths are clearly identified, but weaknesses are described as 'areas for development' and, as a result, their significance is not always evident. Strengths and weaknesses are supported by clear evidence, although this sometimes lacks quantitative rigour. Actions are identified and a review of actions taken up to the date of the inspection provides evidence of improvements already achieved. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements but considered that the peer review system of lesson observations led to overstating the quality of teaching and learning.

63   The quality assurance system does not yet fully encompass the adult and continuing education programme the college provides in partnership schools. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report. However, priorities for improving the quality of this provision next year have been identified. The college company runs customised courses which are well monitored through the ISO 9001 framework. In some business support areas, notably the library, finance office and facilities management, performance is fully monitored against quality statements. Other support areas have only recently introduced service standards, as noted in the self-assessment report.

64   An effective internal verification system based on a comprehensive college-wide policy monitors the quality of assessment. Its

effectiveness is confirmed by external verifier reports and the awarding of centre accredited status by Edexcel and the Northern Council for Further Education. Proposals for new courses are considered by the academic standards committee and approved by the academic board. This combined with detailed curriculum mapping, helps to create a balanced provision.

65   The staff appraisal system is good. All full-time teaching and business support staff are appraised annually. Training needs are identified for individuals and contribute to the development of the college training plan. The staff development review and evaluation group, which is chaired by the principal, thoroughly monitors staff development activities. The college recognises the importance of staff development and allocates 2% of its staffing budget to these activities. Inspectors agreed with the college that staff development is well established and highly valued. The college's Investor in People status was renewed in 1997.

Governance

Grade 2

66   Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's self-assessment, but identified one significant weakness.

Key strengths
- committed and knowledgeable governors
- effective administration of corporation and committee business
- close involvement with schools
- good and appropriate partnership with senior managers
- thorough self-assessment by governors
- effective audit committee

Weaknesses
- incomplete procedures for monitoring non-financial performance

67   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. The corporation has 12 business members, two staff members, one student member, two community members; the principal is also a member. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that the register of interests is comprehensive. It is completed by all governors and the senior management team, and is being extended to include all heads of schools. It is available for public scrutiny.

68   Inspectors and auditors confirmed the college's assessment that governors are strongly committed to the development of the college and are knowledgeable about the range of issues affecting its progress. This overview is assisted by links with the schools, whereby individual governors attend meetings of staff, visit facilities and take part in the course review process. This interaction is greatly valued by staff. Members provide useful formal reports to the full corporation on their school contacts and any issues arising. Inspectors agreed that the sound partnership between governors and senior managers is a strength. Senior managers provide regular briefings on matters within their portfolios of responsibility, and governors offer appropriate comment, utilising their particular areas of expertise. Governors are clear that despite these close links, their primary focus remains on strategic issues and that operational matters are the responsibility of management. There are good arrangements for the appraisal of senior postholders which ensure that governors are fully aware of managers' performance. In the case of the principal, specific financial targets are agreed annually. These are directly related to objectives in the strategic plan.

69   Governors maintain their overview of the college's strategic direction through close involvement in the development and monitoring of the strategic plan. Day conferences are used to focus on strategic issues. Inspectors agreed that the governors' wide range of expertise has proved particularly valuable in assisting the college in its strengthening of external relationships with the community. The chairman is actively involved in the development of positive working relationships with neighbouring colleges. The governors' self-assessment was completed after a thorough process involving close interaction with both senior managers and external consultants. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors have concentrated in recent years on ensuring the financial health of the college. A recent update on the action plan developed from the self-assessment report acknowledges the need to formulate a set of performance indicators for evaluating the college's non-financial performance. To assist this process, a task group on quality and curriculum has been established with specific terms of reference focusing on this issue.

70   Although new governors are briefed on their duties and responsibilities through a comprehensive induction process, there is no formal training plan for governors. The need for such training, linked to the annual review process, is acknowledged by the board. Governors also agreed with the inspectors' judgement that the search procedures for identifying potential new governors, which rely on personal nominations from existing governors, is not consistent with their normal commendable approach to openness.

71   There are clear and effective procedures for the conduct of corporation and committee business, including comprehensive standing orders, an appropriate cycle of meetings and clear terms of reference for committees. Lucid papers and minutes provide a good record of corporation business and are available to the public in the college library. Key decisions of the corporation are reported to staff and students through the college newsletter. The

clerk is appraised annually by the chair of the corporation. Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college that clerking arrangements are effective and professionally managed.

72   The audit committee has assessed its own operation and performance against guidance given in the FEFC's *Audit Code of Practice.* Revised terms of reference, drawn up and approved by the corporation, accord with current best practice. An annual report for 1997-98 was prepared by the committee and formally submitted to the corporation. The report included the committee's positive opinion on the overall system of internal control at the college.

Management

Grade 1

73   Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths
- effective management structure and a strong corporate approach
- comprehensive strategic plan
- significant contribution made by the academic board
- effective communication at all levels
- strong financial control

Weaknesses
- insufficient use of management information
- fragmented market research

74   Since the last inspection, a new principal has given firm and clear direction to the college and successfully completed a major restructuring of management, effecting significant financial savings. The structure comprises a principal, deputy principal, director of corporate services, and director of management and financial services, together with two assistant principals who, as well as cross-college responsibilities, oversee the work of the 12 heads of school. The management arrangements in schools work effectively to control both the curriculum and associated specialist resources. All postholders have clear job descriptions and lines of responsibility are well understood. The appraisal system ensures that progress on specific targets for individual managers is reviewed annually. There are minuted weekly management meetings which support a strong corporate approach. Progress on agreed action points is carefully monitored. Managers have adopted an open and accessible style. Internal communication is effective. Staff are kept well informed through newsletters, briefing meetings with the principal and the various college committees.

75   The academic board plays a key role in focusing the attention of both managers and other staff on the achievement of agreed educational goals. Its minutes go direct to the board of the corporation. Its membership is broad, including support staff and students. Through its committees, it provides a forum for the thorough consideration of issues concerned with teaching and learning, academic standards, research and student services. This contributes to policy development and action where appropriate. Staff value the opportunity they have to participate in these discussions.

76   The strategic plan is well structured and its priorities relate directly to the mission statement. The college recognised in its self-assessment report the need to co-ordinate its market research more effectively to inform planning. Operating statements identify both the person responsible for their implementation and the monitoring and evaluation arrangements. The senior management team, academic board and the governors all have a role in monitoring progress towards objectives.

77   Inspectors agreed that the college has good and extensive links with a wide range of external bodies. It is actively involved in the local community and is a partner in a number of local and regional organisations. These reflect the commitment to the community in the mission. The college is a member of the regeneration partnership group for Aldershot. It has a memorandum of understanding with Rushmoor Borough Council, and is a member of the North Hampshire Colleges Forum. These and other partnerships ensure that there is appropriate and effective liaison with external bodies involved in education and training.

78   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college is in a healthy financial position. The cost savings envisaged as one result of the management restructuring in 1997 have been fully realised and the college is now in the position of making an annual operating surplus. This reflects senior managers' commitment to achieving the objective of continued financial viability set by the corporation. The college makes insufficient use of its targets to monitor progress towards its financial objectives. Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that value for money is obtained in all college operations. Staffing levels are strictly monitored by the senior management team. The finance department is adequately resourced with appropriately-qualified and experienced staff. The budgetary process is appropriate to the needs of the college, fully documented, and has clear links with the college's strategic plan. Financial regulations have recently undergone a comprehensive review to reflect changes in the management structure of the college.

79   In 1998, the college entered contractual arrangements with a company to upgrade its financial management system. Technical difficulties with the installation of the upgrade for the start of the 1998-99 academic year resulted in significant disruption to the routine financial management of the college.

Management and staff, with the full support of governors, instituted appropriate and effective alternative procedures to ensure that the risks to the financial status of the college were minimised during this time. These included ensuring that the key elements of income and expenditure were in line with expectations and the approved budget.

80   The college has established a new team to support the management information system and develop it further to meet the needs of all managers. The college recognises the need to build on progress already made in order to ensure the continuing provision of reliable, timely and relevant information.

81   The implementation of the college's equal opportunities policy is the responsibility of a senior manager. Training programmes for staff ensure a good understanding of equal opportunities issues throughout the college. The strategic plan includes operating statements concerned with equal opportunities, and annual reports are provided to the corporation and academic board.

Conclusions

82   The college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings but considered that the quality of teaching and learning had been overstated. Lessons observed and graded by the college resulted in a profile higher than that awarded by inspectors. At the time of the inspection, action to address some of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment had already taken place. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected, and all but two of the grades for cross-college provision.

83   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 (January 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	23
25+ years	59
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (January 1999)

Level of study	%
Foundation	29
Intermediate	25
Advanced	24
Higher education	17
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	5
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	109	942	14
Agriculture	0	47	1
Construction	17	283	4
Engineering	190	385	8
Business	232	1,455	23
Hotel and catering	158	99	3
Health and community care	213	918	15
Art and design	215	135	5
Humanities	151	1,413	21
Basic education	45	383	6
Total	1,330	6,060	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 2% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	187	0	40	227
Supporting direct learning contact	54	6	0	60
Other support	141	0	10	151
Total	382	6	50	438

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£15,002,000	£15,836,000	£15,717,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.39	£16.79	£17.04*
Payroll as a proportion of income	72%	69%	65%
Achievement of funding target	90%	108%	104%
Diversity of income	50%	49%	51%
Operating surplus	-£1,200,000	-£1,073,000	£33,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)
ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)
Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)
Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), audited accounts (1997), college (1998)
*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	319	565	668	620	1,264	1,812
	Retention (%)	87	91	88	81	92	77
	Achievement (%)	88	57	55	62	44	30
2	Expected completions	584	873	980	962	1,599	1,714
	Retention (%)	87	85	79	90	91	87
	Achievement (%)	61	61	52	66	47	42
3	Expected completions	–	861	856	–	1,384	1,779
	Retention (%)	–	83	74	–	89	84
	Achievement (%)	68	52	47	64	50	46
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	23	18	–	1,000	877
	Retention (%)	–	74	94	–	85	90
	Achievement (%)	59	20	53	85	41	49
Short courses	Expected completions	150	253	263	2,863	3,886	4,652
	Retention (%)	98	96	98	99	98	96
	Achievement (%)	83	15	29	67	17	45
Unknown/ unclassified	Expected completions	522	588	354	2,022	1,528	1,111
	Retention (%)	83	85	66	91	92	81
	Achievement (%)	61	20	17	85	25	19

Source: ISR
–ISR data not collected

FEFC Inspection Report 54/99