

Penwith 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

Penwith College

South West Region

Inspected November 1997

Penwith College is a tertiary college in Penzance, West Cornwall. The college produced a clear and concise self-assessment report in preparation for inspection. Staff and corporation members were fully involved in the self-assessment process. The report was approved by the corporation, the academic board and the college's quality review group before submission to the FEFC. The logical structure and clear presentation of the report helped inspectors to make well-founded judgements about the college. Strengths in the report are supported by evidence and actions are identified to address each weakness. While inspectors did not agree with all self-assessment grades, inspection evidence confirmed the accuracy of many of the findings included in the report.

In recent years the college has diversified from its strong GCE A level base. It offers a range of academic and vocational courses which meets the needs of the community. There is much effective teaching. Examination results are generally good, particularly at GCE A level. Full-time students are well supported by

personal tutors and subject teachers. Financial management is sound and management information systems are reliable. Changes in the management structure have strengthened the management of the college. Corporation business is well organised. The college should: improve retention rates on some courses; increase the number of students receiving learning support; improve aspects of communication; ensure that targets and performance indicators are more widely used by governors and managers; address inconsistencies in the application of quality assurance procedures; improve wheelchair access to key areas; and increase the number of computers available to students working on their own.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Support for students	2
Business	2	General resources	3
Health and community care	2	Quality assurance	3
Social science	2	Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Penwith College was established as a tertiary college in 1990, having previously been a sixth form college for 10 years. The main site, formerly a girls' grammar school, is half a mile from the centre of Penzance. The other site in Penzance, a former art school, is in the town centre and is primarily used for part-time recreational art courses. The college also has centres in St Ives and Hayle which mainly offer training in information technology for local residents. The Penwith district is a rural area extending from Lands End in the west to an easterly border between Hayle and Camborne. The population of approximately 59,500 is mainly located in Penzance, Newlyn, St Ives, Hayle and St Just. Many residents have lived in the district for most of their lives, but there is some inward migration.

2 The Penwith district has comparatively high levels of unemployment, with significant seasonal variations. During 1997, unemployment varied from 10 per cent in January to 7 per cent in July. About 30 per cent of unemployed people have been out of work for at least a year. This figure is gradually decreasing. Ninety-one per cent of local businesses employ less than 10 staff and 66 per cent employ five or less. Most businesses are involved in either retailing, health and residential care, food production and processing or leisure and tourism. Many people living in the district are employed in low-paid, part-time jobs and seasonal or casual labour.

3 The college is the sole provider in the Penwith district of post-16 education funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). In 1996-97, 3,745 students were enrolled of whom 934 were full time. Most full-time students are aged 16 to 18 years, although in recent years the proportion of adults on full-time courses has increased. The majority of the college's 16 to 18 year old students come from five partner schools in the Penwith district, but

some are from schools outside Penwith, for example in Helston and The Lizard. Of approximately 700 pupils who leave the Penwith schools each year, about 80 per cent enter further education and 50 per cent attend Penwith College. There is competition from Cornwall College and Truro College, 15 and 25 miles away respectively, and from several schools with sixth forms in nearby districts. During the last three years, full-time enrolments have remained stable, but there has been a significant increase in enrolments of part-time students on courses leading to external qualifications.

4 The college employs 208 staff. The college management structure was reorganised in summer 1997. It now comprises an executive of three and a senior management team of 10, which includes the members of the executive. The curriculum is managed through seven sections.

5 The college mission is 'to serve the community of Penwith and assist in assuring its educational, cultural and economic development by providing cost-effective and high-quality post-16 education and training which meets the needs of its existing and potential clients'.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in the week beginning 3 November 1997. Inspectors had previously examined the college's self-assessment report. The college submitted reliable data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 37 days. They observed 63 lessons, and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 75 per cent had more strengths than weaknesses. This is well above the figure of 61 per cent, published in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*, for all colleges inspected during the 1996-97 inspection cycle. Twenty-five per cent of lessons were judged to have strengths, but also some weaknesses; none were less than satisfactory or poor. The average level of attendance for the lessons inspected was 76 per cent. Attendance on the first day of the inspection was affected by the absence of students from the St Just area for the annual 'St Just feast' celebrations. 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	16	8	0	0	26
GCSE	2	3	2	0	0	7
GNVQ and NVQ	4	6	3	0	0	13
Other vocational	1	7	3	0	0	11
Other	3	3	0	0	0	6
Total	12	35	16	0	0	63

Curriculum Areas

Science, Mathematics and Computing

Grade 2

8 Inspectors observed 19 lessons in science, mathematics and computing. Inspection findings generally confirmed the college's own assessment although a few strengths were understated by the college, and a few weaknesses were not fully recognised.

Key strengths

- effective teaching using a range of appropriate methods
- good general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) results
- students' work well marked and promptly returned
- well-managed courses
- the provision of computer literacy courses for GCE A level students

Weaknesses

- some poor pass rates on general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses
- poor retention on the 1995 to 1997 advanced course leading to the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in information technology
- little participation of students in a few classes

9 There is much effective teaching. Of the 19 lessons observed, 15 had more strengths than weaknesses. Relationships between staff and students are good. Teachers hold their students' attention, develop their understanding and stimulate discussion with appropriate questioning. In a minority of classes, students do not contribute to discussion. Teachers set appropriate assignments and tests, mark them

making helpful comments and return the work promptly as claimed in the self-assessment report. They provide clear handouts and take account of the different levels of ability among students. Practical work is generally well organised.

10 Most students enjoy their courses and are successful. They work well, in groups and on individual exercises. Coursework files are generally well organised. Students demonstrate good practical skills. Class work and assignments indicate that appropriate standards of numeracy are achieved and there is often effective use of tables and graphs. Over the past three years pass rates have generally improved. In 1997, GCE A level pass rates for mathematics, chemistry, biology and geology were over 89 per cent and were above the national rate for all entries in general further education colleges. Pass rates in computing were below the national rate. Pass rates for 16 to 18 year olds in GCSE mathematics in 1995, 1996 and 1997 were 54, 41 and 45 per cent, respectively. Although these figures exceed the national rate for 16 to 18 year olds at general further education colleges, inspectors did not accept the claim in the self-assessment report that these results are good. Pass rates for 16 to 18 year olds in GCSE human physiology and health were poor in 1996 and 1997 at 15 and 33 per cent, respectively. Pass rates on the GNVQ information technology course and its precursor, the national diploma in information technology, were high at 100, 82 and 88 per cent for the last three years. Retention on these courses has, however, been poor at 67, 65 and 47 per cent, respectively.

11 Inspection evidence supported the self-assessment report judgement that science and mathematics courses are well managed. Schemes of work are closely related to examination syllabuses. Course handbooks are issued to students. Questionnaires are used to assess students' views on courses. GCSE courses in mathematics, human biology, human

Curriculum Areas

physiology and health and information systems are offered, but the college has not been successful in its attempt to recruit intermediate level GNVQ students. To develop their information technology skills the college requires GCE A level students to take a basic computer literacy course. Links with local employers are not well developed in science, although information technology students have the opportunity of work experience.

12 Teachers are well qualified, with appropriate academic and teaching qualifications. They have a good knowledge of their subjects, but limited industrial experience. There are adequate numbers of technicians, who work effectively with teaching staff to provide support in practical classes. Some classrooms and laboratories are too small for the classes scheduled in them. Computer rooms are spacious, tidy and equipped with modern computers, but science laboratories lack sufficient computers. Some of the equipment in these laboratories is old, but fit for its purpose. Students are provided with textbooks for each of their subjects. The library has sufficient science and mathematics books and an appropriate range of journals.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level subjects	Retention (%)	69	67	73
	Pass rate (%)	74	86	86
GCSE subjects: students aged 16 to 18	Retention (%)	85	82	67
	Pass rate (%)	46	40	46
GCSE subjects: students aged 19 and over	Retention (%)	71	65	77
	Pass rate (%)	56	52	67
GNVQ advanced information technology (national diploma information technology in 1993 to 1995 and 1994 to 1996)	Retention (%)	67	65	47
	Pass rate (%)	100	82	88

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

13 Fifteen lessons were observed, including business, professional, secretarial and public services courses. The self-assessment by the college of business provision is evaluative, but it makes insufficient reference to achievement data and performance indicators. The inspection generally confirmed judgements on strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. In a few cases, there was insufficient evidence to support the judgements and some weaknesses were not fully recognised by the college.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- thorough development of practical skills on secretarial courses
- well-planned off-site activities for public services students
- work experience complementing coursework and developing business awareness
- well-equipped open learning centres effectively promoting independent learning
- well-presented students' written work of an appropriate standard
- students' achievements above national rates on many courses

Weaknesses

- insufficient account sometimes taken of different levels of ability
- insufficient development of key skills on GNVQ and national diploma courses
- some poor rates of attendance and retention
- poor results on the course for private secretaries
- over reliance on note-taking and failure to involve students in some lessons

14 There is much good teaching. Most lessons are lively and productive. In business studies, theory is effectively related to business practice. Thorough explanations are given, students' interest is maintained and learning is checked. Secretarial students are given helpful introductions to practical skills lessons and provided with good study materials. In the open learning centres, adult students returning to study receive an effective balance of tuition and guidance that helps them to gain confidence and organise their own learning. In some lessons note-taking was overemphasised. Some class activities did not take account of the different levels of students' abilities. As a result some students were not challenged, while others failed to complete the task in the time available. There were a few instances where a minority of disruptive students made it difficult for others to learn. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report accurately identified some teaching strengths and also the need to improve the development of key skills on GNVQ and national diploma courses. It did not refer to some of the weaknesses in classroom teaching.

15 Most full-time students undertake a period of work experience which effectively complements coursework and develops business awareness. Students on public services courses benefit from well-planned outdoor activities which develop practical skills, individual responsibility and teamwork. Teachers on these courses pay close attention to health and safety. They seek to raise awareness of issues that involve equal opportunities and set themselves targets for increasing the number of female students in their classes.

16 The self-assessment report recognises the generally good achievements of students but also the poor rates of attendance and retention on some courses. Most students work effectively in class and produce well-presented written work. Pass rates are above national rates for further education colleges on many courses, including GNVQ advanced business and GCE

Curriculum Areas

A level business studies. A high proportion of students progress to further or higher education, or employment. Results in most administrative and secretarial subjects have been consistently good, with the exception of the private secretaries course where the pass rate has been low for the past three years. Pass rates are good on public services courses with 80 per cent passing in 1996 and 100 per cent in 1997.

17 The college offers a suitable range of full-time and part-time courses to meet needs in the local community. The open learning centres at Penzance, St Ives and Hayle provide the opportunity for students to work by themselves, with appropriate materials and software, to gain a variety of management, secretarial and information technology qualifications. Teachers on most courses have detailed schemes of work and keep careful records of students' progress. Assignments are generally well designed and of a suitable standard. Most marking is thorough and fair. This was recognised in the self-assessment report.

18 Well-qualified staff provide effective formal and informal help which is appreciated by students. The overall standard of specialist facilities, equipment, learning resources and books is good, although some handouts do not reflect business standards. Inspectors agreed

with the self-assessment report which acknowledges the high standard of equipment available for public services students but recognises the lack of sufficient library books on public services topics.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	72	74	67
	Pass rate (%)	73	65	85
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	83	88	84
	Pass rate (%)	68	74	76
GCE A level business studies	Retention (%)	77	89	67
	Pass rate (%)	75	80	97
GCSE subjects: keyboarding 1995 to 1997, business studies 1996 only	Retention (%)	86	81	61
	Pas rate (%)	71	61	45

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Health and Community Care

Grade 2

19 Fourteen lessons were observed including GNVQ health and social care, BTEC national diploma in childhood studies, national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 in care and childcare, access to nursing and counselling courses. The inspectors confirmed most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but concluded that some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- encouragement for students to work effectively on their own
- the integration of mature students on to full-time courses
- the recruitment of students returning to education
- well-managed courses and effective induction programmes
- good organisation of work placements on the national diploma in childhood studies
- high pass rates on most courses

Weaknesses

- missed opportunities to relate teaching to vocational applications
- poor retention on the GNVQ advanced course
- insufficient pre-entry guidance on the access to nursing course

20 The quality of most teaching is good; this is reflected in the enthusiastic response of the students. Some of the lessons observed were outstanding. For example, first-year GNVQ advanced level students worked effectively in small groups to plan a presentation to raise awareness of drug and solvent abuse. The

self-assessment report notes the well-planned lessons and good schemes of work. An appropriate variety of teaching methods is used and teachers emphasise the importance of students learning to work effectively on their own. However, in many lessons opportunities were missed to explain the vocational applications of topics, for example by failing to relate teaching to work placements. In a few lessons, teachers failed to stimulate discussion.

21 The range of provision is generally appropriate, although there is no GNVQ foundation course and there is a limited range of part-time courses. A few GNVQ intermediate students would have been better suited to a foundation course, although they do receive additional help. Inspection evidence supported the college's view that courses are well managed. Induction programmes effectively prepare full-time students for their programmes of study and introduce them to the skills they will need, for example time management and information technology. Mature students are well supported on full-time courses. They mix well with the younger students and their experience is used by teachers for the benefit of the group. Many students who would not otherwise participate in further education are recruited on to part-time courses. Most students get sound pre-entry advice, but students considering taking the access to nursing course need to be made more aware of the full demands of the course before they enrol. Work placements are efficiently organised and include the college nursery, where a rota system enables students on the national diploma in childhood studies to practise their professional skills while studying. However, the range of work placements is inadequate and the amount of time that GNVQ advanced level students spend in their work placement is low.

22 Pass rates on most courses are high. Many GNVQ students gain distinctions or merits. The results of the first group of students on the national diploma in childhood studies were

Curriculum Areas

outstanding with a 100 per cent pass rate and 87 per cent retention rate. Pass rates on the GNVQ advanced course in 1996 and 1997 were very good at 95 and 94 per cent, respectively, but as noted in the self-assessment report, retention has been poor at 54 and 63 per cent. Retention is also variable on the GNVQ intermediate course. On the access to nursing programme, retention at 76 per cent, is good.

23 The specialist bookstock provides students with relevant texts. Staff are appropriately qualified although the professional experience of full-time staff is dated. Some part-time staff have current or recent experience.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ advanced and national diploma childhood studies)	Retention (%)	78	54	73
	Pass rate (%)	96	95	97
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	67	88	70
	Pass rate (%)	88	95	79
Access to nursing	Retention (%)	+	+	76
	Pass rate (%)	+	+	77

Source: college data
+course not running

Curriculum Areas

Social Science

Grade 2

24 The inspection covered social science subjects in the humanities programme area. Fifteen classes were observed at GCE A level, GCSE and on the access to higher education social science programme. Subjects included ancient history, history, geography, law, general studies, religious studies, politics, psychology and sociology. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's own assessment of social sciences although weaknesses in teaching and learning were not clearly identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- comprehensive and detailed schemes of work for most subjects
- effective assessment and marking of students' work
- good GCE A level results
- positive approaches to moral and cultural issues

Weaknesses

- lack of opportunity for students in some lessons to play a full part in discussion
- a few poorly structured lessons, some with unclear objectives
- some poor GCSE pass rates
- poor retention rates on some GCE A level courses

25 Teaching is generally good. Most lessons observed were conducted at a lively pace which sustained students' interest and encouraged their participation. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to take part in group work or individual research. Discussions and debates are generally well managed and

students respond well. In one law lesson, groups of students discussed the distinction between morality and legality and reported back effectively in a plenary session. Teachers take a positive approach to moral, cultural and social issues. For example, an adult evening class worked on an exercise designed to expose the students' own propensity to sexual and racial stereotyping. The topic was pursued with good humour and sensitivity. In some weaker classes students were afforded few opportunities to participate. A minority of lessons were poorly structured and aims and objectives were not shared with students. The college self-assessment report identifies some good teaching, but does not refer to any weaknesses in teaching.

26 Examination results in ancient history, history, geography, general studies and psychology at GCE A level have been consistently above the national rate for 16 to 18 year olds in further education colleges. History pass rates for the last three years were 86, 93 and 94 per cent, respectively. Psychology pass rates were 85, 84 and 80 per cent. The self-assessment report recognises poor retention on some GCE A level courses. Retention was below 60 per cent in religious studies, law, sociology and politics for students completing in 1997. GCSE subjects are taken by relatively few students, most of whom study part time in the evening. Pass rates vary. For example, in the last three years pass rates in sociology have ranged from 28 per cent to 60 per cent and in law from 14 per cent to 89 per cent. The pass rate on the course for access to social science was excellent in 1995 at 100 per cent but dropped to 83 per cent in 1996 and 64 per cent in 1997. Some students' written work is of a very high standard. Students enjoy discussion and debate and often express opinions with clarity and conviction.

27 Courses are well managed. Teachers have comprehensive and detailed schemes of work. Students are provided with useful course

Curriculum Areas

handbooks, textbooks and learning materials. Teachers set appropriate homework and class work, and mark effectively: most correct language, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Their comments are thorough and constructive. In some subjects teachers monitor the quality of their students' notes. A variety of enrichment opportunities are available to students. Visits, which are directly related to courses are arranged, for example, a geography field trip to South Wales, and an expedition to archaeological sites.

28 Teaching rooms are adequate for the subjects taught, but with the exception of the geography base room they lack computers. Good use is made of information technology resources in the library, for example a religious studies class used CD-ROM databases and the Internet to prepare presentations on a range of topics. Video is widely used on courses and video machines are available in every subject area.

Examples of students' achievements in social science, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year GCE A level subjects	Retention (%)	77	61	63
	Pass rate (%)	83	82	75
One-year GCE A/AS level subjects	Retention (%)	59	58	85
	Pass rate (%)	59	75	67

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

29 The self-assessment report provides a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision of support for students. Inspection evidence supports the findings in the self-assessment report which includes appropriate action to rectify weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the strong links with partner schools
- effective induction programmes
- good tutorial support by personal tutors and subject teachers for full-time students
- the monitoring of students' attendance and academic progress
- effective links with the careers service
- the provision of work experience for all students
- a wide range of additional activities available to all students

Weaknesses

- low take-up of learning support
- lack of a suitable resource base for learning support
- insufficient time with personal tutors for some students

30 The inspection team agreed with the college's assessment that guidance for prospective students is effective. There are good links with partner schools. School pupils in year 10 are introduced to the opportunities available to them at the college. A well-structured programme of events follows and includes the opportunity to sample aspects of college provision. Open days enable students and parents to view the college and discuss options with college staff. Publicity materials are generally found to be helpful by students.

Admissions procedures are supported by thorough documentation. Arrangements to accredit students' prior learning or achievement have been established but only a few students have taken up this opportunity.

31 Students comment positively on their introduction to the college. The process includes interviews in August, meetings with personal tutors at the start of term and induction sessions with course or subject teachers. There is a well-structured process to enable students to change courses, although changes are not always fully recorded. The students' handbook provides a useful guide to the range of services and facilities available. The college charter, which outlines the complaints procedures, is not always included in induction programmes. At induction, students make a selection from a wide range of additional activities, including sporting activities and courses leading to further qualifications.

32 A high level of care and support is provided by personal tutors and subject teachers. Students generally regard staff as helpful and supportive. Changes to the new tutorial system were introduced in September 1997 to address some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Group tutorials have been replaced by a system based on personal tutors. Seventeen staff were selected for this role. Each has responsibility for the pastoral care and academic progress of approximately 50 students. Many tutors are experienced and have received training for their new role. A tutors' handbook provides a useful guide to their responsibilities. There are effective procedures to ensure that personal tutors are kept well informed of their students' progress and attendance. The manager for adult and continuing education is personal tutor to about 250 part-time students. This is a heavy workload for one individual. Some full-time students have spent insufficient time with their tutors, due to difficulties in making appointments.

Cross-college Provision

33 Students' attendance is effectively monitored, and follow-up procedures are clear and well established. Students' progress and attainments are well recorded and carefully monitored by their tutors. At the start of term new students are assessed to determine whether they need learning support but, as the college notes in its self-assessment report, few students take up the support which they are judged to need. The college has tried a number of different ways of drawing students into the support system. There is no dedicated space where learning support tutors and their students can meet regularly and which gives direct access to appropriate support materials. Appropriate strategies to address this resource issue are outlined in the college's operational plan.

34 Careers education and guidance are effectively supported by a range of resources in the library and by regular, well-planned contact with the careers service. Careers interviews are easily arranged, but only a few group sessions are organised. There is sound guidance for students who are considering higher education. All students are offered the opportunity of work experience, either as part of their course, or under a college programme. Employers support college activities such as 'industry day', when students work in teams to produce business plans and employers act as consultants.

35 The student information centre provides a friendly and welcoming service to students. Counselling is available by appointment, but the arrangements to deal with emergency situations are not clear to staff. Advice on financial and welfare matters is also available.

General Resources

Grade 3

36 Inspectors concluded that the college's self-assessment report on general resources overstated some strengths and gave insufficient weight to some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- attractive and well-maintained main site
- successful extensions and adaptations to accommodation
- modern, well-equipped open learning centres
- recent improvements to library bookstock
- effective support provided by library and learning resources centre staff

Weaknesses

- a shortage of computers available to students working on their own
- no wheelchair access to key areas of the college
- insufficient study spaces in the library and restricted evening opening
- insufficient provision of sports and recreational facilities
- some inappropriate accommodation for personal tutors

37 All full-time students are based in Penzance on the main site which is attractive and well maintained. The college has successfully extended and modified its accommodation over many years. A new entrance and reception area provides an attractive entry to the main college buildings. College grounds are well kept and a 10-year maintenance programme operates effectively. Displays of students' art work in public areas create a pleasing atmosphere. Classroom accommodation is suitable for its purpose. Rooms are generally satisfactorily equipped to a common standard. In some rooms, for example the geography room, displays of students' work and posters create a stimulating environment. A few rooms were bare or had untidy displays. Some rooms were rather small for the numbers scheduled in them. Most common areas are clean and tidy, with the exception of the refectory and the adjoining student common

Cross-college Provision

room which become littered as each day progresses. The open learning centres at Hayle, St Ives and the main site in Penzance, have good accommodation and modern equipment. They are well used, in particular the St Ives Centre, which operates near to full capacity during current opening hours. At the Morrab Road Centre in Penzance, which is mainly used for part-time recreational art classes, the interior is in need of decoration.

38 In recent years access has been improved for wheelchair users. However, the library, art and design, and media studies areas remain inaccessible. This weakness has been partly addressed by providing ground floor access to the library catalogue through networked computers. At the time of the inspection the service had not been used. The accommodation strategy provides for relocation of the library to the ground floor.

39 Inspectors agreed with the evaluation in the self-assessment report of the library and learning resources centre. The judgements were well supported by quantitative data. Recent increases in the library budget have begun to address inadequacies. Although the library stock remains low, 60 per cent of purchases have been made since 1993. Recently there has been a significant increase in borrowing. The library has insufficient study spaces and some are poorly lit. The college provides an additional room for private study, but it is situated some distance from the library and is little used. Currently the library is only open for one evening a week. User surveys show that staff and students appreciate the support and guidance provided by library staff.

40 The self-assessment report notes the shortage of computers that are available to students when working on their own. This provision is at present located in the library. The demand for these machines exceeds the supply and places part-time students at a particular disadvantage. There are a further 120 computers in classrooms. Access to these

computers is limited to use of any spare machines, at the teacher's discretion, when there is a lesson in progress. The college has an information technology policy and a policy group which provides a good basis for linking hardware and software developments to curriculum requirements.

41 The college's heavy dependence on off-site facilities for sport and recreation restricts the opportunity for students to participate in a full range of activities. The refectory offers a reasonable choice of food, but the servery layout is not suited to fast service and queues build up at peak periods. Staff accommodation is generally satisfactory. Some personal tutors' offices are not suitable for meetings with individual students either because they are shared or too small. The staff common room is underused. Staff not only find it unattractive but also inadequate as a work room because there are insufficient work spaces and computer facilities are outdated.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

42 Inspectors recognised the college's commitment to continuous improvement and the effective self-assessment process. They confirmed many of the strengths resulting from recent improvements to procedures. However, they did not find the quality assurance procedures demonstrated the degree of rigour that was claimed by the college.

Key strengths

- consultative and thorough self-assessment process
- many candid and accurate self-assessment judgements
- recent improvements to quality assurance procedures

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- some thorough course reviews resulting in improvements
- well-established procedure for setting quality standards
- clear links between appraisal and staff development

Weaknesses

- support services not included in quality assurance procedures
- some inadequate course reviews
- underdeveloped links between strategic planning and quality assurance
- insufficient use of performance indicators
- course quality standards inconsistent in format and use
- little effective use of value-added analysis

43 During the year before the inspection, quality assurance procedures were reviewed and improved. These changes have resulted in a new quality assurance policy which was in draft form at the time of the inspection. The inspection supported the college's judgement that quality assurance systems are becoming increasingly rigorous. However, inspectors found many instances of incomplete or ineffective review procedures. Current quality assurance arrangements do not include non-teaching aspects of the college. The college plans that they will be included under the new policy.

44 The corporation has recently decided to use performance indicators to monitor the quality of the college's provision. Governors receive and discuss annual reports on students' achievements. They do not use them to set targets and monitor students' performance. The inspection confirmed the self-assessment judgement that links between quality assurance and strategic planning are underdeveloped. There is little evidence of direct links between

planning and the outcomes of quality assurance procedures.

45 There are two levels of course review. At the first level, course teams are required to hold and minute regular review meetings that consider responses to student questionnaires. Some course teams make good use of the information generated by analysis of these questionnaires. The second level involves a two-year cycle of in-depth reviews carried out by a cross-college quality assurance team. The course team is expected to respond to the second level review with an action plan. Some course reviews at both levels have been thorough and productive. Course improvements have resulted from action taken on issues identified in questionnaires and action plans. However, some first level reviews are superficial, and of little use in generating improvements. In a few cases, the required documentation is incomplete. As the in-depth reviews currently occur only every two years much time may elapse before issues are identified and addressed. There are plans for an annual self-assessment by course teams, which will be validated by the cross-college quality assurance team.

46 Information on students' achievement is provided centrally to assist course teams to monitor their students. Course managers and the academic board pay attention to pass rates and retention issues. However, in their course reviews, teaching teams do not systematically use performance indicators to monitor the quality of provision. Value-added calculations have been made for GCE A level students by using their GCSE scores as a basis on which to predict future achievement. At the time of the inspection the effectiveness of these calculations had not been assessed.

47 Quality assurance procedures include a set of standards that apply to the whole college, from which teaching teams are expected to derive standards for their courses. These course standards vary considerably in how specific and

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useful they are in monitoring course quality. Some course reviews refer to them, others make little or no reference to them. There are few service standards for support staff. Inspectors found that students have little awareness of the charter and the complaints procedure.

48 Prior to September 1997, staff appraisal took place on a two-year cycle, and a staff development review was held annually. The difference between these two procedures is not clear to all staff. The college has now moved to an annual cycle. Appraisal includes the observation of lessons. It is used to generate individual staff development plans. Inspection findings supported the college's view that appraisal is well established and valued by staff. Most staff feel that training needs identified during appraisal are met. Objectives in the strategic plan determine the degree of priority that staff development plans receive. There is no annual staff development plan.

49 The college produced its first self-assessment report prior to inspection. A clear, consistent and effective process for self-assessment was rapidly developed. It involved the collection of strengths, weaknesses and evidence from both teaching and support teams. The information was collected using standard forms which addressed the main headings in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Curriculum information was edited by the quality manager and reorganised into FEFC programme areas. Grading was carried out by the college quality review group. Teaching teams had the opportunity to comment on the edited curriculum sections and the proposed grades. The corporation agreed the process for the self-assessment of governance. The report was approved by the corporation, the academic board and the college's quality review group before submission to the FEFC. Staff across the college were fully involved in the self-assessment process, but there was no involvement of anyone from outside the college.

50 The self-assessment report is comprehensive and evaluative. It is prefaced by useful introductory and contextual information. There is a consistent standard and level of detail in both curriculum and cross-college areas. Strengths are supported by clear statements of evidence. There are few judgements based on the evidence of teaching observations carried out in the college, but data on students' achievements provided a complete and reliable foundation for judgements on curriculum areas. Individual weaknesses are supported by action points, which are drawn together into an overall action plan for the college. Although self-assessment has not yet been embedded as an integral part of the quality system, the college's first report provides a sound basis for the development of quality assurance.

Governance

Grade 2

51 Inspection findings confirmed some of the judgements made in the college's self-assessment report, but inspectors concluded that some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were omitted or understated.

Key strengths

- good range of business expertise
- well-organised corporation business
- effective delegation to an appropriate range of committees
- good standard of documentation for meetings
- effective attention to financial matters
- an appropriate involvement in strategic planning

Weaknesses

- insufficient links with curriculum areas
- insufficient monitoring of the college by reference to performance indicators

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- a need for further training of governors
- no planning for the replacement of retiring governors

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

53 Governors have a good range of professional and business expertise. Many have substantial industrial and commercial experience and close links with communities and industries in the Penwith district. They are very committed to the college. Average attendance at board meetings was 89 per cent in the past year. There are 14 governors, of whom two are women. There have been few vacancies since incorporation; some governors have served for many years. There is no student governor to help governors to take account of the views of students. There is a code of conduct and a register of members' interests. Systems are in place to confirm members' eligibility to serve on the board.

54 Corporation business is well organised. Meetings of the full board take place regularly. Detailed business has been appropriately delegated to seven committees. The committees have clear terms of reference, membership and rules on quoracy. There is a well-planned calendar of meetings which enables the committees to provide regular reports to the full board. The corporation carefully considers the recommendations of committees without duplicating their work. The vice-principal acts as clerk to the corporation and supports its work effectively. There is a separate job description for this part of his work. At the time of the inspection, the clerk had line management responsibility for the director of

finance. This situation raises a potential conflict of interest, particularly with regard to clerking the finance and audit committees.

55 Members receive clear agendas accompanied by useful briefing papers. Committees receive appropriate reports, financial information and regular statistical updates, on for example, enrolments. Minutes of meetings are clear and concise, but are not circulated until papers are sent out for the next meeting. Decisions are recorded clearly in the minutes, but discussions are not always recorded in sufficient detail. A summary of corporation minutes is included in the staff newsletter.

56 Governors pay close and effective attention to financial matters. Financial reporting to the corporation is timely, accurate and clear. The audit and finance committees are effective. The finance committee receives financial reports four times a year. These reports are adequate, but they would be strengthened by the addition of cash-flow information. The committee scrutinises the reports and makes appropriate recommendations to the corporation.

57 Seven governors are due to retire in 1998. There has been no assessment of the skills and experience required of new members and the search committee has not met. Inspectors are in agreement with the self-assessment report which notes that, although some training events have been held, there is a need for further training to ensure that governors are kept up to date on the work of the college and wider issues in further education. Governors have few links with subject areas in the college. They would benefit from more systematic arrangements to improve their understanding of curriculum matters.

58 Governors are involved in the strategic planning process through the strategic planning committee and meetings of the full board. Senior managers draft the strategic plan. Governors consider the plan at regular intervals

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and approve the final draft. They consider reports on students' achievements, but their involvement in assessing this aspect of the college's performance is not fully developed. The self-assessment report recognises the need for governors to identify the performance indicators which they will regularly review and for which they will set targets. Monitoring by the corporation of its own performance is at an early stage of development.

Management

Grade 2

59 The college's self-assessment report clearly set out the strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's judgements about management.

Key strengths

- an improved management structure
- effective strategic and operational planning
- sound financial management
- reliable management information systems
- good links with external agencies
- recent developments in marketing

Weaknesses

- a lack of clarity over some responsibilities within the new management structure
- little use of targets, performance indicators and quantitative data for management purposes
- reservations of some teaching staff on the overall effectiveness of communications

60 At the time of inspection a new organisational structure had recently been established. Significant changes were made to improve the management of both academic

sections and support services. The system for tutorials and the college timetable were also changed. The number of management levels was reduced and more responsibility delegated. The new structure is becoming established and is generally perceived by staff to be an improvement. However, some staff are still unclear about their responsibilities.

61 The executive comprises the principal, vice-principal and director of finance. They each have responsibility for several areas of activity. The principal oversees strategic planning and the curriculum; the vice-principal manages personnel, estates and support services, and acts as clerk to the corporation. The director of finance manages the quality assurance, marketing and management information functions. Weekly meetings of the executive are well minuted. The executive, together with seven senior managers, comprises the senior management team. The seven managers are responsible for curriculum, planning, guidance and support, learning services, adult education, quality and marketing. Inspectors consider that the college has taken positive steps to address management weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and that the new arrangements provide a sound basis for effective management and development of the college.

62 The principal seeks to promote effective communications through formal arrangements which include scheduled meetings, newsletters and training events. However, some teaching staff feel that, although the dissemination of information is satisfactory, other types of communication are not always effective. The recent self-assessment process was considered by all staff spoken to by inspectors to be an example of effective consultation.

63 The college's strategic plan is a comprehensive and useful document. Governors, teaching staff and support staff are involved in the planning process. However, some teaching staff do not understand the link

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between strategic planning and their day-to-day work. The three-year strategic plan is updated annually. Operating plans include objectives which have to be met within specified time limits, and actions which named managers are responsible for carrying out.

64 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Financial systems are reliable and adequate for the needs of the college. The internal audit service satisfies required standards. Effective control is exercised over income and expenditure. There is a clear system for allocating funds to budget holders for consumable items and teaching materials. Senior managers and budget holders receive regular financial reports. Financial and student data returns to the FEFC are reliable and accurate, although they have sometimes been late. Data on students' achievements submitted to inspectors were also found to be reliable. The management information system provides an appropriate range of reliable standard reports. However, targets, performance indicators and quantitative data are not widely used for management purposes.

65 The self-assessment report justifiably claims good links with external bodies such as Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Cornwall County Council. In the past year a marketing strategy has been developed and promotional material has been redesigned and improved. Some market research has been carried out. There is an equal opportunities committee which meets regularly and is committed to raising staff and student awareness of equal opportunities issues. The self-assessment report comments that its effectiveness has not been subject to review.

Conclusions

66 Although self-assessment is a new addition to the quality assurance system, the inspection team found that the self-assessment report

provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. The logical structure and clear presentation of the report helped inspectors to make well-founded judgements about the college. The report included some frank judgements about weaknesses and inspectors considered that the actions accompanying each weakness were appropriate. In a few cases, there was insufficient evidence to support judgements, some weaknesses were not fully recognised and a few strengths were understated. References to lesson observations, performance indicators and other quantitative information were sometimes not included in the curriculum sections of the report. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the grades in the self-assessment report, although they considered some grades for cross-college provision to be overgenerous. This was generally because inspectors attached more weight than the college to identified weaknesses, not because significant weaknesses had been omitted.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	24
19-24 years	9
25+ years	66
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	30
Intermediate	14
Advanced	28
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	28
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	173	734	24
Agriculture	3	2	0
Engineering	11	61	2
Business	142	315	12
Hotel and catering	38	37	2
Health and community care	100	810	25
Art and design	121	464	16
Humanities	333	355	18
Basic education	13	33	1
Total	934	2,811	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	69	8	0	77
Supporting direct learning contact	6	0	0	6
Other support	35	0	0	35
Total	110	8	0	118

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£2,937,000	£3,116,000	£3,198,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£16.14	£15.84	£16.56
Payroll as a proportion of income	75%	73%	*
Achievement of funding target	99%	104%	*
Diversity of income	20%	15%	*
Operating surplus	-£104,000	-£47,000	*

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)

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)

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	270	254	250
	Average point score per entry	4.6	5.2	5.1
	Position in tables	top third	top 10%	top third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	78	63	78
	Percentage achieving qualification	90%	81%	83%
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	39	69
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	69%	62%
	Position in tables	*	top third	middle 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

FEFC Inspection Report 17/98

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
March 1998**