

Plymouth College of Art and Design

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**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.

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

© FEFC 1999 You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 5

Curriculum areas

Graphic design, signwork and calligraphy 8

Fashion 13

Foundation studies and general art and design 19

Cross-college provision

Support for students 25

General resources 33

Quality assurance 41

Governance 50

Management 59

Conclusions 68

College statistics

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

Plymouth College of Art and Design

South West Region

Inspected November 1998

Plymouth College of Art and Design is a specialist college near the city centre. The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first to be produced by the college. The process involved most teachers and support staff. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements regarding the quality of some aspects of its work, but in several areas they identified important weaknesses which the college had omitted. There was little evidence to support the college's judgements regarding the quality of teaching and learning. Self-assessment is not firmly linked to quality assurance.

The college offers a good range of art and design qualifications for full-time study at advanced level. Most teaching is good, although there were few outstanding lessons. Students who complete their courses usually gain their qualification, but retention rates on many courses are below national averages. Students are well supported by their tutors, especially those students who are aiming to progress to higher education. However, there are few enrichment opportunities or optional activities for students to follow outside their lessons.

Managers and teachers make good use of external verifiers' views on the quality of the college's work, but there are significant weaknesses regarding the analysis of the college's performance and the monitoring of the quality of much of its work. Teaching accommodation is satisfactory and some is of high quality. Some accommodation is underused and some is overcrowded at times. The college is a difficult working environment for people with restricted mobility. Governors are committed to the success of the college and work hard on its behalf. There are significant weaknesses in the management of governors' business and in the way they monitor the college's performance. Financial management is good. Decisive action has been taken to improve the college's efficiency and sustain its activities within its budget. Managers need to improve the means they use to monitor students' attendance and performance. The college should improve: students' attendance at core studies lessons and in workshop sessions; retention rates on many courses; its quality assurance systems; its learning support and careers provision; the means by which governors and managers monitor the college's performance; and its use of accommodation and access for people with restricted mobility. It should also address the significant weaknesses identified in governance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Graphic design, signwork and calligraphy	3	Support for students	3
Fashion	2	General resources	3
Foundation studies and general art and design	3	Quality assurance	4
		Governance	4
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Plymouth College of Art and Design can trace its history back to the late nineteenth century. The college moved into its present main site in Tavistock Place in 1973. It has three other sites. Two of them are close to the main site: Sutton, a former school building, and Regent, a small building used for motor vehicle finishing courses. A further site, at Beech Avenue, which houses a small number of interior design students, is approximately one and a half miles from Tavistock Place. The college plans to vacate this site in 1999 and move the students to the main site.

2 There is a wide range of schools in the local area, including three grammar schools, many secondary schools with sixth forms and two secondary schools designated as arts colleges. Many schools are increasing their provision in vocational art and design. The college is a member of the Tamar Valley consortium, a partnership between schools, colleges and institutions of higher education. The nearest further education colleges are Plymouth College of Further Education and Saltash College, a small annexe of St Austell College. Higher education also has a significant presence in the city. The University of Plymouth and the college of St Mark and St John are based there. The college had 1,358 students at 1 November 1998, 92% of whom study on courses in the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) art and design programme area. Approximately 44% study on advanced level courses such as specialist national diplomas in art, design, media and graphic communications and 34% of the college's students are studying higher education courses.

3 Plymouth city became a unitary authority in April 1998. It is a pathfinder authority, with action zones in education, employment and health. It has a population of 255,000. Minority ethnic groups make up approximately 1% of the population. The city has won substantial

inward investment in the last few years, to help it recover from the recession of the early 1990s, when reductions in the defence industry significantly reduced opportunities for employment. The city is a major manufacturing centre in Devon. Of the workforce, 15% are employed in the local manufacturing industries. There is a major naval base and dockyard. In 1996, one in seven of the city's workforce were employed at military bases. Tourism is an increasingly important employment sector for Plymouth, with almost 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs. Unemployment in the city has fallen faster than the national average. In October 1998, it stood at 5.9% of the workforce. However, in some inner city wards, unemployment rates remain high at between 11% and 14%. These areas also score poorly when measured against the Department of the Environment's index of local conditions. Seven out of Plymouth's 20 wards were amongst the bottom 10% in England on these measures.

4 The college's mission is to provide innovative and high-quality education and training for the visual arts, crafts, design and media, meeting the needs of commerce, the community and the individual. The senior management team comprises the principal and the directors of curriculum, finance and administration, and marketing. There are five teaching schools and seven business units. Heads of school and the college librarian report to the director of curriculum. Heads of the seven business support units report to the other two directors. There are 101 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 37 are teachers and 27 are staff directly supporting learning.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 30 November 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn 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 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and found to be substantially accurate. The inspection was

carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor working for 31 days in the college. They inspected three curriculum areas, examined students' work and college documents and observed 37 lessons. They met college governors, managers, staff and students.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 59% were judged to be good or outstanding and 11% less than satisfactory. These figures are not as good as the average figures for colleges in the sector inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Higher education	0	2	0	0	0	2
Other vocational*	3	17	11	4	0	35
Total (No)	3	19	11	4	0	37
Total (%)	8	51	30	11	0	100
National average, all 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*

*includes BTEC national diplomas and the foundation art and design diploma

Context

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. For all inspected specialist colleges the average number of students was 9.5 in each class and the average attendance was 84%. The college operates a core studies programme, which

students from all the specialist BTEC national diploma courses and the foundation course are required to attend. While overall attendance at specialist lessons was approximately the same as the national average, attendance at these core studies lessons was often low. The average class size is well above the national average.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Plymouth College of Art and Design	18.5	76
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

Graphic Design, Signwork and Calligraphy

Grade 3

8 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering courses in calligraphy, graphic design, and signwork. They largely agreed with the college's overall assessment of the strengths and weaknesses. However, the college overstated some strengths and understated some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good schemes of work and lesson plans
- high-quality practical work
- good pass rates for students completing their courses
- good rate of progression to higher education and employment
- effective technical support for teachers and students

Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching
- failure to set projects at appropriate levels and provide clear aims
- poor retention on some courses
- lack of punctuality disrupting some lessons
- underdeveloped curriculum management and organisation
- unsatisfactory accommodation for students working on practical signwork
- insufficient use of information technology (IT) to support teaching and learning

9 Courses are managed within the school of graphic communication. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that, following restructuring, some changes to roles and responsibilities are not yet fully supported or understood. The head of school is supported by

programme co-ordinators who are responsible for course organisation and management. School meetings are held once a term and students' representatives meet regularly with programme co-ordinators. Some programme co-ordinators have difficulty in reconciling their teaching commitment with their new management responsibilities and, consequently, their performance of the latter is not yet fully effective. Targets for enrolment, retention, achievement and progression have recently been set for the school.

10 Most teaching is satisfactory or good, although in a few lessons observed, it was unsatisfactory. Inspectors considered that the college's assessment of the quality of teaching and learning was overstated. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of their students and give them a great deal of support. There are good schemes of work and lesson plans. Project briefs provide students with aims and objectives, assessment criteria and deadlines for completion. Teachers on graphic design courses make good use of competitions and commercial projects. These projects help students understand the requirements of employers. Work placements are effectively used on the signwork course to give students an understanding of commercial practices, particularly in meeting deadlines. However, some projects are too broad in their aims, set at an inappropriate level and provide insufficient direction for students. Some projects are not broken down into shorter components and lack specific targets. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the reduction in teaching hours is restricting teaching and learning methods. Inspectors agreed with this assessment and found that changes were limiting the scope of some assignments and projects. The additional work in calligraphy for students on the signwork course is a useful attempt to overcome this problem. In a few cases, students on graphic design courses had insufficient time to experiment and explore ideas. A lack of punctuality was allowed to

Curriculum Areas

disrupt teaching and learning in some lessons. For example, several students attending a core studies lesson were over 30 minutes late and missed the introduction.

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that students' achievements on courses are generally good. For example, pass rates in 1998 on the national diploma courses in graphic design and signwork were high at 95% and 100%, respectively. However, retention rates were below national figures with only 69% and 50% of students completing their course. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Some students' work is of a high standard and there is evidence of students developing a range of skills and individual styles in drawing, colour work, lettering, layout and typography. Portfolios of students' graphic work and samples of finished signwork demonstrate that they have acquired a good variety of techniques. However, a few students are not achieving appropriate standards in basic drawing and design skills. There is little evidence of computer-aided design in students' portfolios or of new technology being used to

support teaching and learning. There is some good progression to higher education and a growing number of students obtaining employment in design related areas.

12 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced in their specialist areas. The head of school has recognised as a priority the need for staff development in the use of new technology. Teachers and students are effectively supported by specialist technicians. Some specialist accommodation has improved since the last inspection. Most design studios and workshops are light and provide an appropriate environment, although some are untidy. The space used for practical signwork is too small and has an adverse effect on the quality of students' work. For example, in one lesson observed students could not move without disturbing each other. Some students' work had been spoilt by poor storage. There is insufficient storage space. The self-assessment report understated this weakness. Some specialist equipment used for signwork and graphic design is old and outdated.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in graphic design, signwork and calligraphy, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
BTEC national diploma in graphic design	3	Expected completions	61	54	57
		Retention (%)	69	78	69
		Achievement (%)	100	100	95
BTEC national diploma in signwork	3	Expected completions	22	21	18
		Retention (%)	55	67	50
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
BTEC higher national certificate in graphic design	4	Expected completions	*	*	14
		Retention (%)	*	*	70
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Fashion

Grade 2

13 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with much of the college's assessment of its strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the good standard of most teaching
- consistently good pass rates on the national diploma course
- the high standard of coursework
- good course management and teamwork
- effective development of garment production skills
- good links with industry providing realistic project work and effective work placements
- rigorous and fair assessment procedures
- high level of technical expertise of staff

Weaknesses

- some overcrowded studios and workshops
- poor retention and pass rates on the higher national certificate course
- ageing equipment
- lack of facilities for fashion-related computer-aided design

14 The college's well-established national diploma in fashion offers good opportunities for students to progress to higher education or employment. In 1996, the provision of fashion studies was expanded to include a part-time higher national certificate course. The college plans to introduce a full-time higher national diploma course in September 1998. Course management is good. Staff work well together. Their responsibilities are clearly assigned. Course documentation gives students clear

information on how courses are structured and taught. Assessment schedules are prepared at the beginning of the year and are followed.

15 Teaching and learning are supported by detailed schemes of work. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly, explain new topics clearly and use an appropriate variety of teaching methods. They emphasise the relevance of theory to vocational practice. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that most teaching is effective. Assignments provide suitable opportunities for students to gain and apply knowledge. Practical work is carefully structured to meet the different abilities of students. Supporting materials are informative and of good quality. Staff have a high level of technical expertise. They draw on their own professional experience and knowledge to particularly good effect during garment production lessons. Students are encouraged to work towards high professional standards. They learn to handle a wide range of fabrics. Staff place much emphasis on safe workshop practices. Teachers regularly review students' progress during studio and workshop sessions. Students appreciate the readiness of staff to give them help whenever it is needed.

16 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that strong links with industry effectively support teaching and ensure staff and students keep up to date with current developments. Designers, garment manufacturers and fashion retailers play an important role in students' practical assignments. They offer opportunities for students to carry out assignments within the college based on realistic examples from industry; provide fabrics; and help to assess students' work. College work is supplemented by work experience and practical activities outside the college. Work placements are well organised and carefully monitored. Students visit fashion centres such as London and Paris and participate in competitions, exhibitions and fashion shows. They have choreographed fashion shows for local businesses, modelled

Curriculum Areas

garments on television, developed promotional garment displays for local shop owners and worked on a fashion photography assignment. Students have been asked to design scuba diving garments for women, bridal wear, leather motorbike suits and garments for a 10-piece soul band.

17 Students' practical work is of a good standard. Coursework is consistently well presented. Most students carry out thorough research when completing assignments. They display a sound knowledge of garment production and achieve high standards. They have done well in competitions. The college identified high pass rates as a strength and inspectors agreed with this judgement. Over the past three years, all students who completed the full-time diploma in fashion course passed. Most achieved a merit or distinction. Retention rates on the national diploma course have been close to national averages for two of the past three years, but retention was less satisfactory on the course finishing in 1998. There has been a significant improvement this year. At the time of the inspection, retention was 83% on the 1997 to 1999 national diploma course. In 1996, the

college offered, for the first time, a two-year part-time higher national certificate for a small number of students. There were staffing difficulties which have now been resolved with the appointment of a new course leader. The pass rate and retention rate for the first cohort was low. At the time of the inspection, there was a marked improvement. The retention rate is now close to the national average. The majority of students who complete their course progress to employment in fashion or relevant industries or to higher level courses.

18 Sufficient industrial standard equipment is available to students, but much of it is ageing. Accommodation is often inadequate. The small size of some studios restricts the size of groups and the effectiveness of some lessons. Space is not used effectively. For example, the fashion design studio, the garment production workshop and staff workrooms are located on different floors of the building. There are no computers with relevant software for use during practical and theory sessions. There is inadequate storage for the safekeeping of students' work. The college acknowledged these problems in its self-assessment report.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
BTEC national diploma in fashion	3	Expected completions	25	29	29
		Retention (%)	72	76	56
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Foundation Studies and General Art and Design

Grade 3

19 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They considered that the college's self-assessment report had overstated some strengths and failed to identify other strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- pass rates for foundation students above the national average
- comprehensive assignment briefs
- good standard of most students' work

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on the national diploma in general art and design
- low staff morale
- poor attendance at core module sessions
- lack of recent review of national diploma in general art and design
- ineffective implementation and development of IT skills

20 The self-assessment report does not adequately differentiate the key features of the courses. In particular, it does not indicate that foundation studies is a one-year course and that general art and design is a two-year course and that the courses recruit students with different levels of experience and achievement. Course reviews also fail to distinguish between the two courses. These weaknesses were not recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The BTEC national diploma in general art and design has not been reviewed since it was validated by BTEC in September 1991. Inspectors agreed with the college's recognition of this as a weakness.

21 Second-year general art and design students and foundation course students share a common teaching programme. Teachers of both courses plan their teaching well. There is some outstanding teaching and learning practice. For example, an excellent introduction to a practical photographic project engaged students in a lively discussion about works of contemporary photographic art. Assignment briefs are comprehensive and written to a common standard. Teachers issue good supporting materials with project assignments.

Assessments are effectively scheduled and teachers provide regular and supportive feedback to students. Course handbooks are comprehensive and informative. The programme of art and design history is well structured and effectively taught. The implementation and development of IT skills is underdeveloped and ineffective. Some of the classwork experiences provided by teachers are mechanistic and some are not sufficiently demanding to motivate students. The college's self-assessment did not identify these weaknesses.

22 Most students' work is of a good standard. Many students progress to higher education. The examination pass rates for foundation students are above the national average. First-year general art and design students responded well to a demanding assignment which led them to explore elements of still life in tone and colour through sketches which developed into three-dimensional works. Retention rates for general art and design students are poor at 63% and have been around this level for three years. The college identified this weakness in its self-assessment report. Attendance was high in specialist classes, but was only 58% in core studies classes. There is no satisfactory system for monitoring students' use of time in some of the supervised workshops.

23 College managers have not convinced staff of the benefits of the management restructuring.

Curriculum Areas

The courses are delivered through a timetable that is not clear to students and which fails to achieve the optimum deployment of staff and studio resources. There is a heavy loading of responsibilities on the few full-time members of staff, including the head of school. All of these factors are contributing to low staff morale and have an adverse impact on students' learning. There are examples of good course management at programme level and teachers provide good informal support for students.

24 Studios are generally equipped with appropriate furniture and specialist equipment. Inspectors identified poor studio management and, in particular, the storage of three-dimensional work as a weakness. There is an IT resource centre in the Sutton building. The level of technical support is good and a college shop and a small refectory provide a valuable service for the courses.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in foundation studies and general art and design, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
BTEC national diploma in general art and design	3	Expected completions	28	38	46
		Retention (%)	65	63	63
		Achievement (%)	93	100	90
South West Association for Further Education and Training national diploma in foundation studies in art and design	3	Expected completions	89	86	88
		Retention (%)	88	87	84
		Achievement (%)	99	99	97

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

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

25 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but thought that some weaknesses had been overlooked.

Key strengths

- productive links with schools
- good initial guidance and advice
- good learning support for students with literacy problems
- much good tutorial support
- effective counselling service including access to external support agencies

Weaknesses

- the lack of overall co-ordination for student support services
- ineffective initial assessment and provision of learning support in numeracy and IT
- insufficient support to assist personal tutors to fulfil their role
- general careers education and guidance not well established
- lack of an enrichment or optional activities programme
- inadequate access to welfare and financial advice

26 Inspectors agreed with the college that though it provides much good support for students the lack of overall co-ordination is a weakness. In particular, the quality of the provision and the extent to which it is provided effectively for all students is not monitored adequately.

27 There are effective arrangements to help students find out about the college and its courses. Productive links have been established

between the college and local schools. In addition to careers events held in schools, the college offers open and 'taster' days, and longer periods of work experience. School pupils use the college's specialist facilities during Saturday morning and summer art workshops. Most publicity materials are attractively presented and informative. The part-time prospectus, however, provides too little explanation of courses. The college acknowledges this weakness and is taking steps to address it. Prospective students receive an efficient service from the central admissions office. A programme of general and specialist interviews helps them to choose their course. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that arrangements for initial advice and guidance are a strength.

28 All full-time and some part-time students follow a one-week programme of induction to the college and their course. A varied range of activities includes visits to college facilities, local galleries, a popular bus tour of the local area and a boat trip. Students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities. Students who have joined college from school find induction useful in helping them settle into college life. However, some students express dissatisfaction with the content and delivery of their induction programme. The college failed to identify weaknesses in the implementation of induction in its self-assessment report.

29 The college assesses all full-time and some part-time students to discover whether they need support with basic literacy. Learning support is then offered by a learning support tutor who provides students with help either on a 'drop-in' or appointment basis. Students who attend receive good support in literacy and essay writing. Tutors maintain close contact with the learning support tutor. Although the college noted in its self-assessment report that some students are reluctant to seek assistance, it did not comment on the narrow scope of its learning support service. The college has not

Cross-college Provision

developed adequate ways of identifying all those who need support in numeracy and IT.

30 Students value the support they receive from their tutors but tutors are not well supported in their work. The role of the tutor is only briefly described in college documents.

There is no formal induction into the role and insufficient staff development to enable them to fulfil the role effectively. All full-time and some part-time students are allocated a tutor who teaches on their course. They have a minimum of one tutorial each term. In some courses, tutors also use group meetings for briefings or discussion. Communication between tutors and some central services are sometimes ineffective. Tutors do not receive sufficient information to enable them to monitor students' attendance. The college did not identify the significance of these weaknesses.

31 The college's self-assessment report failed to draw attention to weaknesses in general careers education and guidance. Students have good access to advice from their tutors, particularly regarding courses in higher education, and they are carefully prepared for their higher education interviews. Careers service staff are available for interviews, but the service is underused. The college has increased the publicity given to the careers service and careers staff have visited student groups during induction. However, most tutors have not established effective links with the careers service. There are insufficient opportunities for a broad range of careers education to help students make informed decisions.

32 The counselling service is well regarded by tutors and students but access to advice on financial and welfare issues is inadequate. There are good links with external support agencies, including those dealing with matters of finance and accommodation. However, the college registry and finance office are open to give advice for only two-and-a-half hours each day. Some students have had difficulties in obtaining satisfactory answers to financial

enquiries. There is no programme of sport or other activities for students. The college has tried to maintain a student union, but there has been little student interest. The self-assessment report overlooked many of these weaknesses.

General Resources

Grade 3

33 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in resources.

Key strengths

- a carefully-planned accommodation and estates strategy
- improvements to accommodation and resources since the last inspection
- industrial standard equipment in most specialist areas
- good specialist library stock
- sufficient computers and up-to-date software

Weaknesses

- difficult access to some accommodation
- insufficient social areas for students
- the small number of study spaces for students
- some unsatisfactory teaching accommodation
- underused accommodation

34 As part of its well-thought-out strategy for rationalising and improving its accommodation, the college has begun the phased closure of unsatisfactory annexes with a view to concentrating provision on its Tavistock Place and Regent Street sites. The main site, at Tavistock Place, was purpose built as an art and design college in 1973. It is the college administrative centre and houses design crafts, graphic design, photography, printing and

Cross-college Provision

media. Most teaching areas are fit for their purpose. The majority are attractive, comfortably furnished and well equipped. Vocational areas are well supported by industrial standard equipment. The college gallery is used to display students' work and exhibitions by practising artists. The college lecture theatre seats 150 people and has full projection and sound facilities. The Regent Street site is in good condition internally and accommodates motor vehicle body repair and finishing. The Sutton site houses fashion, general art and design, graphic design and signwriting. The site at Beech Avenue is used to teach interior design. As the college highlighted in its self-assessment report, both the Sutton and Beech Avenue sites duplicate services and resources and cannot be readily adapted to current needs. Some of the workshops and studios in them are of poor quality and have insufficient storage space for students' work and learning materials.

35 A programme of refurbishment and redecoration began in 1997. Areas of the college which have been refurbished provide a clean and well-decorated environment. Areas which have not yet been decorated are often dull and shabby. Health and safety weaknesses are being addressed through awareness raising and training sessions for students and staff. All general classrooms have been equipped with video, television and slide facilities.

36 The self-assessment report demonstrates the college's awareness that the accommodation is inefficient in terms of space usage, energy and maintenance costs. Some areas are overcrowded while others are underused. Regular space utilisation surveys and new accommodation data collection methods have been introduced to improve monitoring and enable the development of a logical system of room allocation.

37 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that although 93% of the accommodation at Tavistock Place, Beech

Avenue and Regent Street can be reached by students with restricted mobility, access is often difficult. Only 19% of the Sutton annexe is accessible to wheelchair users. The college has so far been unable to find an affordable solution to this problem.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the library is well resourced. The stock of books and periodicals is sufficient for the number of students in the college. Specialist art and design books and periodicals are plentiful. There is a good selection of tapes, videos and CD-ROM databases. A new computer centre in the library has 30 terminals linked to the internet. There is a detailed student study guide to the library. Librarians provide effective advice and help for students. There is good liaison between library and teaching staff. However, there are only 22 study spaces which is insufficient to meet students' needs. The library is often overcrowded. The book aisles are too narrow to accommodate wheelchair users.

39 The college has 161 computers for students, most of which are of high specification, and a wide range of software is available. The majority of machines are networked. Most of the computers are located in the computer suite at Tavistock Place. The remainder are located in the Sutton annexe. Teachers and students can book computers or use spare computers on a 'drop-in' basis. Inspectors judged that too few computers are available to teachers and students in their classrooms and studios. Technical IT support for staff and students is co-ordinated through a help desk. An IT systems manager has been appointed to co-ordinate IT across the college. An IT user group has been established and is developing a strategic approach to IT.

40 The catering facilities are popular with staff and students, particularly for the quality of the food and its value for money. The refectory kitchen at Tavistock Place is of a high standard. The refectory at Sutton is less well equipped.

Cross-college Provision

Vending machines provide beverages and snacks when the kitchens are closed. Both refectories are overcrowded at peak times. As the college acknowledged in its self-assessment report, there are few social facilities for students. There is no crèche, student common room or sports facilities. There is a small staff common room at Tavistock Place. Some staff workrooms are small and of poor quality.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

41 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report gave an incomplete account of quality assurance in the college. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses recognised in the report but identified a number of additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-developed procedures for staff appraisal
- clear new structure for course reviews
- close attention by course teams to external verifiers' reports
- effective internal verification

Weaknesses

- no formal quality assurance system embracing all aspects of the college
- slow progress in improving quality assurance
- the lack of impact of quality assurance procedures on students' achievements, particularly retention rates
- insufficient evaluation of students' achievements in course reviews
- some poor aspects of the system for lesson observations
- no formal monitoring of the student charter

- lack of complaints procedure and insufficient monitoring of complaints
- overgenerous assessment of teaching quality

42 The college has made little progress with the development of quality assurance since the last inspection. It has failed to convince all staff of the importance of quality improvement despite a clear commitment to this in the strategic plan. The college's self-assessment report stated that there is 'no formal quality system embracing all aspects of the college'. Inspectors broadly agreed with this, but found some examples of good practice in the college. Elements of the emerging quality assurance system, such as class observation, staff appraisal, course review and self-assessment are not clearly linked. There is no quality assurance manual and no forum where quality assurance issues are routinely discussed.

43 Quality assurance measures have not yet led to improvements in performance. The majority of the college's students take level 3 qualifications. Comparison of level 3 data from the college's ISR returns and the FEFC benchmarking data based on the ISR returns for all specialist colleges shows that, in both 1996 and 1997, the college was below national benchmarks for retention, but above pass rate benchmarks. Between 1996 and 1997 both retention rates and pass rates declined.

44 A new framework for course review was introduced in 1998. This includes: evaluation of progress against action plans; statistical analysis; external verifiers' comments; students' views; an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and an action plan. Some of the 1998 course reviews are useful, but many are incomplete. Some do not include students' attendance, retention and pass rates. Standards and performance indicators are not routinely used to measure performance. At the end of the 1996-97 academic year, many teams

Cross-college Provision

did not carry out a course review and, in 1997-98, the committee monitoring course reviews did not meet. A new group has recently been set up for this purpose, but it has not yet looked at the 1998 reviews. Managers and course teams keep in close touch with external verifiers and pay close attention to their reports. Senior managers check that required action has been taken. Internal verification is operating effectively, based on a new system introduced in September 1998.

45 Lesson observation of about 80% of full-time teachers was carried out between March and May 1998. The college's judgement of the quality of lessons was overgenerous. The outcomes of lesson observations have not been centrally analysed, nor used to inform staff development to improve the quality of teaching. It is not yet clear how lesson observation will be incorporated into the quality assurance system.

46 Students have good opportunities to express their views through elected course representatives who attend course team meetings. Students' views on the quality of provision and college facilities are also collected through two annual questionnaires. A full analysis of responses provides useful information for college managers but the response rate to questionnaires is poor. Most students receive the college charter but the charter lacks measurable commitments, and does not refer to employers or the community. There is no formal monitoring of charter commitments. The college does not have a complaints procedure, a log of complaints received, or a record of its responses to them.

47 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the annual staff appraisal is a strength. Staff are supportive of the appraisal system and appraisals are up to date. The needs identified through appraisal inform a staff development plan. The majority of requests for individual development activities are met. Some staff do not complete the

required evaluation of their staff development activities. There is no overall evaluation of the benefits of staff development to the college.

48 There are service standards for most college support services but quality assurance for the services provided is not referred to in the self-assessment report. Managers monitor some aspects but this is not done on a systematic basis. Most areas do not undertake reviews of their services, although the library produces a report at the end of each year. Task observation has been introduced for support staff. To date, few observations have been carried out.

49 Teachers and support staff prepared self-assessment reports which formed the basis for the college's self-assessment report. Most course team reports made few references to standards of teaching and learning, students' achievements, or specialist resources. Most staff regarded self-assessment as worthwhile. The college self-assessment report contains many frank judgements. However, judgements about cross-college provision are sometimes included under the wrong headings. Actions are included for each weakness. These are summarised in an action plan which includes responsibilities and timescales. The summary action plan does not include any actions to address weaknesses in governance.

Governance

Grade 4

50 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report did not acknowledge some significant and long-standing weaknesses which have been previously drawn to the college's attention.

Key strengths

- committed and active board members with valuable skills

Cross-college Provision

- positive measures to inform governors about the curriculum
- good working relationships with senior managers

Weaknesses

- lack of response to significant governance issues raised by audit reports
- some ineffective management of corporation business including mismanagement of the re-election of some governors and officers
- unsatisfactory clerking
- alterations to committee structure not approved by corporation
- insufficient monitoring of students' achievements

51 Governors are fully committed to the success of the college and give generously of their time. They have a good range of professional and business skills of value to the college. Three members have an art and design background. At present there are three vacancies on the corporation, one of which has been unfilled for some years. The corporation meets every three months for its general business meetings, with the recent addition of eight meetings focused on specific topics, such as estates, marketing and resources. The finance and general purposes committee meets monthly. Governors are actively seeking a fuller understanding of curriculum areas. Heads of school periodically present the work of their schools. Governors hold a planned programme of informal consultations with staff and students.

52 Despite these positive aspects there are significant weaknesses in the governance of the college. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and

articles of government. It does substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has not responded to some key governance issues raised by the internal auditors and the FEFC audit service. The corporation has failed to determine the number of governors in each category. The college's instrument of government requires governors to re-elect the chair and vice-chair of the corporation annually, but this has only happened once in the last four years. The re-election of governors due to retire has been mismanaged.

53 Clerking arrangements are unsatisfactory. Members have expressed concerns about the degree to which minutes satisfactorily record significant matters. The board has not been well advised on matters such as the terms of reference of committees and the election of board members. The committee structure has recently been changed, with the corporation assuming a more direct role in respect of estates and employment policy. This reallocation of employment policy from the personnel committee to the corporation has not been formally approved by the corporation. The terms of reference of committees and the standing orders have not been reviewed and updated to reflect the new structure. The finance and general purposes committee considers the latest monthly accounts at each meeting, but there is no evidence to confirm that this is routinely notified to the corporation. These weaknesses were not reflected in the self-assessment report.

54 There is a register of interests covering governors and college budget holders and a code of conduct. College staff and governors are issued with guidance on how they can raise concerns about governance. The guidance identifies audit committee members who may be approached. Inspectors and auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that these matters have been carefully addressed.

Cross-college Provision

55 The board has a performance review group which drew up the self-assessment report on governance. It is intended that this group will evaluate the work of the board annually. Performance indicators for governance are under consideration. There are two training days each year for board members. The induction pack for new governors requires updating.

56 Working relationships between the board and senior managers of the college are good. The board was closely involved in and supported the changes introduced by the principal during 1997-98. The board now has a clear understanding of the boundary between governance and management. Previously there was a pre-occupation with operational detail at the expense of key strategic issues. Board members ask pertinent questions at meetings and will call for clarification and resubmission of proposals when they feel it necessary. For example, they have recently called for a better view of course costings.

57 Information on students' achievements are presented to the board, but there are no performance indicators against which to monitor the college's progress. The board is considering performance indicators for different areas of the college's activities. For example, they recently called for performance indicators for marketing operations and have called for more regular reports on enrolments and retention and better systems for students' registration and for monitoring their progress. The lack of thorough monitoring of students' achievements by governors was not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

58 Governors contribute to the formulation of strategic objectives. Governor representation is invited at the strategic planning group which draws up the first draft of the plan but, for the current plan, the group met without governor involvement. The full board received the draft strategic plan for consideration and approval. A summary of progress with strategic objectives

and operational targets is presented to the board at regular intervals. Governors actively consider the summary and make proposals based on it.

Management

Grade 3

59 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and found others which were not included.

Key strengths

- good financial management
- decisive action to improve flexibility
- effective management communications
- good links with businesses and other organisations

Weaknesses

- some less effective curriculum management
- unsatisfactory meetings structure
- ineffective target-setting and monitoring of students' achievements
- inadequate student registration system and attendance monitoring

60 The college was slow to respond to the prospect of converging FEFC funding levels and the effect of this on the college's budget. Following the current principal's appointment in April 1997, extensive restructuring was carried out between April and September of that year. A significant number of the teachers took early retirement or voluntary redundancy. The college is still adjusting to the effects of this period of fundamental change.

61 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The director of finance has wide cross-college responsibilities

Cross-college Provision

and has delegated much of the detailed financial work to the well-qualified and experienced college accountant. Financial reporting to governors and the senior management team is clear and concise. It includes a monthly cashflow analysis and 12 month rolling forecast. Variances are explained. Financial regulations and procedures have been recently updated. The college has maintained a healthy financial reserve. In 1996-97, internal and external auditors identified significant financial management issues, which the college has now addressed.

62 Communications are generally good. Staff feel that senior managers keep them well informed about the college's position and the need for particular actions. The weekly newsletter is appreciated. Most college teams meet at regular intervals and take notes from such meetings for future action. The senior management team reviews these regularly. Manuals for full-time and part-time staff have helped to clarify matters during a time of considerable change. Senior managers are regarded as open and helpful by many teachers and support staff.

63 The self-assessment report acknowledged some difficulties in middle management and identified a need to review arrangements. Managers are still trying to deal with the pressures created by the staff reductions in 1997-98. There is uncertainty about the role of course co-ordinators. Although staff morale is improving, it is still not good in some areas. Heads of school were new to the role in 1997. They have a very heavy workload and attend a large number of meetings. The function and composition of college committees are in need of review. Targets for students' achievements are agreed between heads of school and the director of curriculum but these targets are not being actively used to monitor performance.

64 All staff are involved in the early stages of strategic planning which is then developed further by the strategic planning group.

Operational targets are derived from strategic objectives for each curriculum and service area of the college and incorporated in the plan. Although the three-year financial forecast is linked to the strategic plan, operational targets are not costed and few targets are quantified. Senior managers are updated monthly on the achievement of operational targets.

65 Heads of school and other middle managers are not using management information effectively to monitor students' progress and achievements. Last year the college had difficulty generating an accurate and timely account of student withdrawals and retention rates through the management information system. A new registration system was introduced in September 1998 but it is not yet producing full and accurate reports. This makes it difficult for tutors to respond promptly to student absences and for managers to obtain an accurate picture of attendance. The financial reporting system is trusted by middle managers, but it is not as accessible as they would like. Consequently, they run their own independent systems, causing unnecessary duplication. Difficulties over registering attendance were identified in the self-assessment report.

66 There are good links with employers and other external organisations. The college has recently established a clear marketing strategy. Despite a highly competitive local context for courses in general art and design, some good work is being done on schools liaison. Local and national organisations provide work placements. Collaborative projects include work on adult education with Plymouth College of Further Education. There are close links with the University of Plymouth. However, the self-assessment report acknowledged that the college needs more specific market research and more vocational links in some areas.

67 College policies have been extensively rewritten. The equal opportunities policy was revised in August 1998 but has only been subject to limited monitoring. A health and

Cross-college Provision

safety committee meets to receive reports on incidents. Regular inspections by management and union representatives are about to be re-instituted. Health and safety matters need greater prominence in some curriculum areas.

Conclusions

68 While the self-assessment report was useful in planning the inspection, inspectors judged that the college failed to identify some significant weaknesses. The self-assessment report did not cover all aspects of the college's work. Weaknesses in teaching and learning were sometimes understated. Inspectors agreed with the curriculum grades and three of the cross-college grades proposed by the college. In those areas where the judgements of inspectors and the college differed, inspection evidence indicated that the college had been overgenerous in its grading.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	34
19-24 years	33
25+ years	33
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	10
Intermediate	8
Advanced	44
Higher education	34
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	4
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Engineering	17	59	6
Business	0	23	2
Art and design	831	428	92
Total	848	510	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 31% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	35	2	0	37
Supporting direct learning contact	27	0	0	27
Other support	39	0	0	39
Total	101	2	0	103

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,526,000	£3,473,000	£3,440,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£21.73	£20.80	£19.10
Payroll as a proportion of income	67%	82%*	63%
Achievement of funding target	108%	110%	99%
Diversity of income	35%	35%	37%
Operating surplus	-£146,000	-£634,000	-£18,000

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), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

*includes restructuring costs

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	17	24	17	41	108	99
	Retention (%)	82	63	76	93	63	67
	Achievement (%)	71	67	77	30	61	58
2	Expected completions	37	33	28	24	31	30
	Retention (%)	84	79	75	83	68	53
	Achievement (%)	71	48	65	65	75	69
3	Expected completions	n/a	212	178	n/a	199	167
	Retention (%)	n/a	68	65	n/a	66	63
	Achievement (%)	89	92	85	72	81	80
4 or 5	Expected completions	n/a	1	0	n/a	38	21
	Retention (%)	n/a	100	n/a	n/a	95	95
	Achievement (%)	n/a	0	n/a	53	56	80
Short courses	Expected completions	5	5	15	5	53	49
	Retention (%)	100	100	40	80	94	84
	Achievement (%)	20	60	17	0	62	66
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	87	87	92	51	55	67
	Retention (%)	92	91	86	92	91	88
	Achievement (%)	100	97	97	100	98	100

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

FEFC Inspection Report 34/99

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council**

Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>

© FEFC March 1999