

Seevic College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

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 024 7686 3000
Fax 024 7686 3100
Website www.fefc.ac.uk*

© FEFC 2001 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
<hr/>	
Summary	
<hr/>	
Context	
The college and its mission	1
The inspection	5
<hr/>	
Curriculum areas	
Science	8
Business and administration	14
Art, design and media	19
English	25
Social sciences	31
<hr/>	
Cross-college provision	
Support for students	37
General resources	44
Quality assurance	51
Governance	58
Management	66
Conclusions	75
<hr/>	
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 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. 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 included.

Summary

Seevic College

Eastern Region

Inspected January 2001

Seevic College is one of two sixth form colleges in south Essex. It was established in 1972. At the time of the last inspection it catered primarily for students between the ages of 16 and 19 in full-time education. It has subsequently expanded its provision for adults on part-time courses, both at its site at Benfleet and its 'Training for the Millennium' centres at Canvey Island and Rochford. The college produced a self-assessment report for the inspection that was clearly presented, comprehensive and self-critical. Governors and staff at all levels were involved in producing the report. There was substantial evidence to support judgements. The report provided a good basis for carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, and with nine of the 10 grades as assessed by the college.

The college offers provision in eight of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Four of these areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Students' achievements and retention rates are generally above national averages for sixth form colleges. The proportion

of lessons judged to be good or outstanding was above the national average for 1999-2000 and has improved since the previous inspection. Class sizes and attendance rates are above the average for the sector. Support for students is good. Students speak highly of the personal support they receive from staff. The college's arrangements for quality assurance are understood by all staff, and are effective. The management of the college is outstanding. Management at all levels is well organised and has led the college to significant improvements in provision since the last inspection. The introduction of curriculum 2000 has been effectively planned. Staff have a wide range of opportunities for development and training. There have been significant improvements in the quality of general resources since the last inspection, including substantial investment in IT resources. Governors monitor the college's educational provision and the students' achievements closely. The college should address: the poor retention on some courses; some unsuitable accommodation; the unproductive and unfocused use of some tutorial time; the lack of systematic procedures for gathering employers' views; the insufficient monitoring and review of equal opportunities; and the monitoring of some aspects of governance business.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	2	Support for students	2
Business and administration	2	General resources	2
Art, design and media	2	Quality assurance	2
English	2	Governance	2
Social sciences	2	Management	1

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Seevic College was established in 1972 as South East Essex Sixth Form College. It is located on a single site in pleasant woodland next to a large residential area in Benfleet and serves six partner 11 to 16 schools in the Castle Point and Rochford areas of south Essex. Of its full-time students, 52% are drawn from these schools. Five other former partner schools have acquired sixth forms. There are four general further education colleges and one other sixth form college within a 10-mile radius. The staying-on rate in full-time education for 16 year olds in the county is high, at 74%. Minority ethnic groups make up 3% of the resident population and 5% of the college's students are drawn from these groups. The college is a core member of the South Essex Learning Partnership and plays an active part in developing partnership activities. The area has a high percentage of small businesses. The local unemployment rate is low. In Castle Point and Rochford it was 1.9% in November 2000. Significant numbers of commuters travel from the area to London each day.

2 In the year 1999-2000, the college enrolled 1,549 full-time students and 1,117 part-time students. The college offers courses in eight of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. The number of courses has been expanded to provide more opportunities for part-time students and a wider variety of vocational courses. Some 800 part-time adult students study on information technology (IT) courses at the Training for the Millennium centres. Full-time courses include 41 general certificate of education advanced supplementary (GCE AS) subjects, and advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) in seven vocational areas. Of the 16 to 19 full-time students, 49% are currently on GCE A/AS level programmes, 36% on advanced vocational, 11% on foundation and intermediate vocational, 2% on general certificate of secondary education

(GCSE) courses, and 2% on a course for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

3 The college employs 85 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 65 full-time equivalent support staff. It achieved Investor in People accreditation in 1998. There are four senior postholders, including the principal. Following the appointment of a new principal in February 1997, the college senior management was immediately restructured. Support services and curriculum management were subsequently restructured. A revised faculty structure was introduced in September 1999. Each of the five faculties provides a group of related courses and subjects.

4 The college's mission is 'to be responsive to the needs of the community, working in partnership with schools, employers and other agencies to promote and provide a high quality of teaching and learning'. The main strategic objectives arising from the mission focus on achievement, teaching and learning, the use of IT for a range of applications, lifelong learning development and partnership working.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 15 January 2001. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college agreed that the inspection would be based on individualised student record (ISR) data for 1998 and 1999 and its own data on achievements for 2000. The college's data were checked by inspectors in advance of the inspection, using primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. Ten inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 47 days, carried out the inspection. They observed

Context

lessons, examined students' work and college documentation and held meetings with 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 1999-2000. Of the 70 lessons observed, 70% were judged to be good or outstanding and 4% were rated as less than satisfactory. This compares well with the national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	6	21	9	0	0	36
GCSE	0	4	1	0	0	5
GNVQ	0	8	4	0	0	12
Other*	3	7	4	3	0	17
Total (No.)	9	40	18	3	0	70
Total (%)	13	57	26	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Note: percentages subject to rounding

**includes tutorials*

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Seevic College	13.0	81
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 2

8 The self-assessment report contains a curriculum area report for biology, chemistry, physics and GCSE science. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's overall assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors observed 11 lessons.

Key strengths

- consistently good teaching
- effective on-course support for students
- good pass rates on most courses
- effective management of the curriculum

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates in some subjects
- unsuitable layout and fittings in laboratories

9 The college offers GCE A/AS levels courses in biology, chemistry, human biology and physics. Most first-year students study four GCE AS subjects together with general studies, key skills and an enrichment programme. There is also a single science GCSE course. Inspectors agreed that the curriculum is well planned and well managed. There are regular faculty meetings, which are used by teachers to review the way in which the curriculum is taught and to share good practice. Targets for retention and achievement are set by subject leaders and agreed by the head of faculty. Performance is monitored against these targets. Results in chemistry improved following the production of an action plan to address poor achievement and retention.

10 Teaching is consistently good. Lessons are well planned and carefully structured and there are comprehensive schemes of work. In most lessons, teachers set a variety of tasks to

develop students' understanding. In nearly all lessons, students were attentive and involved in the work. In physics and chemistry, students were provided with workbooks containing outline notes, exercises and calculations. In a chemistry lesson these enabled students to work on their own on equations of organic reaction mechanisms with support from the teacher. For biology students who had particular difficulty in understanding the process of DNA transcription, a role-play of the process was used to help them learn. In the same lesson the final stages of protein synthesis were explored through the use of a video, texts and further role-play. Students carried out practical work effectively and observed the safe working practices emphasised by the teachers. However, in two biology practical lessons on factors affecting the growth of micro-organisms, there was insufficient equipment available for students to work productively in small groups. Increasing use is made of computers in lessons, particularly in chemistry where resources for students' use are available on the college intranet.

11 Inspectors agreed that there is effective on-course support for students. In chemistry there are opportunities for students to attend 'drop-in' workshops to address their individual needs. Teachers systematically review students' progress on GCE A/AS level courses against predicted GCE A level grades and unsatisfactory progress is acted upon. The review mechanisms in physics are particularly thorough.

12 All theory and practical lessons take place in laboratories. The laboratories are clean and well maintained but the work benches restrict the range of approaches to teaching and learning that might be used. Most laboratories are open plan and, although screens had been placed between them, there was noise from neighbouring laboratories. Some classes are too large for these laboratories. The college identified this weakness. Specialist equipment is appropriate for the levels of courses offered

Curriculum Areas

but there are some shortages of equipment for large classes. All students are provided with textbooks and there is an adequate stock of library books, but the number of journals and CD-ROMs is small. There is a good range of other resources to support learning, including learning materials and student workbooks in chemistry and physics. Students have good access to computers. However, the faculty's records show that they are little used in biology. Teaching staff and technicians are generally well experienced and well qualified.

13 Homework is set regularly and marked promptly in physics and chemistry. However, in biology, regularly assessed homework is set less often. In all subjects, regular tests are used to monitor students' progress. Students' files are

generally well organised. Some coursework in biology is of a high standard and well presented. As the self-assessment report identifies, pass rates at GCE A level in biology, human biology and physics are mostly above the national average for sixth form colleges and results in chemistry have recently improved significantly. Success rates for GCSE science are well in excess of the national average for sixth form colleges. The college's value-added data show that most students, except in chemistry, are achieving their predicted grades. Retention rates for most GCE A level courses have been well below the national average for sixth form colleges. However, recent results show improvement, particularly in physics and chemistry, where retention is now good.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in science, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE science	2	Number of starters	†	38	27
		Retention (%)	†	71	78
		Achievement (%)	†	67	67
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	76	36	54
		Retention (%)	66	86	69
		Achievement (%)	92	90	92
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	62	45	49
		Retention (%)	68	69	86
		Achievement (%)	76	68	86
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	69	39	49
		Retention (%)	65	82	88
		Achievement (%)	86	78	95
GCE A level human biology	3	Number of starters	58	56	51
		Retention (%)	53	63	71
		Achievement (%)	100	97	94

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business and Administration

Grade 2

14 The inspection covered GCE A/AS level courses and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ)/AVCE courses in business, the diploma in administrative and secretarial procedures and GCE AS courses in accounting. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- innovative teaching
- high pass rates on vocational courses
- good attention to individual learning needs of students
- strong tutorial support
- wide range of provision with good opportunities for progression
- good training arrangements for administration students

Weaknesses

- insufficient challenge in some lessons
- poor retention on some courses
- few curriculum links with employers

15 The college offers an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses in business studies. Full-time courses include GNVQ programmes at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, GCE A/AS level in business studies and accounting and GCSE business studies. The college has introduced a diploma in administrative and secretarial procedures to meet the changing needs of administration students. Secretarial, integrated business technology and Association of Accounting Technicians courses are offered part time. All full-time vocational students benefit from

well-planned work experience with a wide range of employers. This regularly leads to suitable employment at the end of courses. The faculty is well managed. Teachers share expertise and materials and there is much good practice in meeting the needs of students. Inspectors agreed that particular attention is given to providing tutorial support to enable students to overcome difficulties and achieve good results. Extensive, informal tutorial assistance is provided in addition to the formal college entitlement. Students greatly appreciate the guidance teachers give them.

16 There is much good, innovative teaching. As noted in the college's self-assessment, most lessons are well planned and include activities designed to meet the individual needs of a wide range of students. Students often work well together in pairs and small groups to achieve their learning goals. In one lesson, GNVQ intermediate students co-operated to give well-balanced views to the group on consumer protection legislation. Students often work on their own at computers, drawing on detailed business information from the Internet. Teachers take great care to see that students' key skills are developed. Informal additional help is given to develop study skills, such as note-taking for GCE A level students. Administration lessons reflect the best workplace practice and students undertake actual work in the realistic training office. Good practical examples are used to illustrate theoretical concepts in GCSE lessons. However, in a few lessons the work set was insufficiently challenging for all students and the teaching was inappropriate. For example, teachers read lengthy handouts to a class and failed to make clear what note-taking was required. Consequently, some students became inattentive. The less effective teaching was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers give attendance and punctuality high priority.

Curriculum Areas

17 Teachers are well qualified and many have industrial experience related to their teaching. They have participated in training in inclusive learning styles, computer supported learning and for the introduction of curriculum 2000. The smooth introduction of new courses in the faculty reflects the extent of the preparation undertaken. For example, an assignment on cashflow forecasting for GCE A level business studies students provides opportunities for them to develop and be assessed in the key skills of IT and application of number. This approach has addressed the lack of access to IT for GCE A level students, which was noted in the self-assessment report. Links with local businesses to support the curriculum are insufficiently developed. There are a few links with major employers but little contact is made with smaller local businesses. A target to increase links is included in the self-assessment action plan.

18 The high pass rates, particularly on vocational courses, are noted in the self-assessment report. Pass rates for GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced are well above sector averages. Pass rates of 100% have been achieved over the past two years for GNVQ intermediate and foundation and national vocational qualification (NVQ) administration. All students who completed the diploma in administrative and clerical procedures passed in 2000. However, the retention rate was only 66% as a number of students took advantage of attractive job offers before they completed their programme. Pass rates for part-time students of Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) secretarial subjects and integrated business technology have generally been above sector averages over the last three years although retention has fluctuated widely. GCE A level pass rates in business studies and in accounting have generally matched the national averages for sixth form colleges. However, pass rates and retention on GCE A level business courses as a whole have declined over the past three years.

The low retention on some courses is being addressed through the self-assessment action plan. Retention in GNVQ foundation has fluctuated around the sector average but high retention has been consistent in NVQ and GNVQ intermediate over the last two years. As the self-assessment report states, many students achieve good results and progress successfully to employment or to higher education.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business and administration, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	16	10	14
		Retention (%)	75	60	71
		Achievement (%)	92	100	100
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	26	22	19
		Retention (%)	69	100	89
		Achievement (%)	61	100	100
GCSE business studies	2	Number of starters	*	†	14
		Retention (%)	*	†	57
		Achievement (%)	*	†	50
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	34	39	29
		Retention (%)	82	90	97
		Achievement (%)	96	100	100
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	43	31	48
		Retention (%)	70	77	75
		Achievement (%)	80	96	97
GCE A level business	3	Number of starters	95	60	94
		Retention (%)	73	70	65
		Achievement (%)	94	89	87

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

†course not running

**data unavailable*

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Media

Grade 2

19 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in art, design and media courses. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and inspectors agreed with most judgements, although they identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- effective curriculum management
- high achievement rates on all courses
- good resources for media students
- good progression to higher education for art and design students

Weaknesses

- poor retention on some courses
- some inappropriate accommodation and timetabling

20 The management of the curriculum is effective. The varied range of courses offered by the programme area enables students to study at a level most appropriate to their needs and abilities. There are academic and vocational options for students at level 3 and, in addition, at level 2 in media studies.

21 The small size of programme teams ensures a productive dialogue between staff and assists the effective exchange of information. However, minutes of team meetings do not satisfactorily record items of discussion or action. Insufficient attention has been given to the induction of students. Work experience opportunities for students on these programmes are few and there is little contact with the local community. Employers are not involved in the design of vocational programmes.

22 As the self-assessment report states, most teaching is good. Courses are planned effectively to take account of syllabus demands and to interest students. For instance, the investigation of the conventions of 'film noir', including the concept of the femme fatale, is effectively incorporated into the media studies course. Staff use a variety of appropriate teaching methods, including whole-class teaching, individual study and group projects. The balance between practical exploration and academic research is effectively managed. Video is used productively and students are expected to take notes when viewing. An analysis of the influence of New Hollywood in the films of Robert Altman and Arthur Penn was enhanced by the selective use of extracts in a film studies lesson. Interesting and stimulating projects are developed to engage the interest of students and provide them with the required under-pinning knowledge. Assignments are well designed and the themes and topics chosen are appropriate and demanding. Students display a sophisticated grasp of the use of information and communications technology in their assignment work. They make good use of desktop publishing and image manipulation, but less effective use of wordprocessing. Students take responsibility for their own learning. Art and design students are skilled in using the Internet as an appropriate source of information. The time allowed for some lessons is too short to promote effective learning in art and design.

23 The new media centre is impressive. Media studies students have the use of digital cameras and good-quality audio and video recording equipment. Inspectors agreed that the large number of new computers installed ensures that most students can gain immediate access to a machine. At times, the technology and the staff cannot cope with the increased demand. The accommodation for art and design is situated in a linking open-plan area which enables staff to move easily between

Curriculum Areas

groups. However, the expansion of student numbers through curriculum 2000 developments has placed excessive demands on this accommodation, sometimes to the detriment of students' learning. Rooms are sometimes too small for the classes allocated to them. The self-assessment report did not record this weakness. There are facilities to study ceramics. However, the options available to students are restricted by the lack of a three-dimensional workshop. Staff are well qualified and have, as stated in the self-assessment report, assessor and verifier qualifications. They are encouraged to update their skills through a variety of internal and external training opportunities. The provision for art and design has been further enhanced by the appointment of a successful practitioner as a member of the course team. The learning

centre is well designed and has an appropriate set of texts and supporting materials.

24 Achievement rates are good and have improved significantly since the last inspection. Virtually all students who complete their programmes are successful. All art and design students who applied for higher education places in 2000 were successful. The self-assessment report recognises that retention is generally below national averages and poor on some programmes. For instance, the retention rates on the GNVQ advanced courses were very poor in 2000. Teachers insist on punctuality and attendance is satisfactory. External verifiers and moderators comment on the satisfactory standards attained by students in relation to syllabus requirements and national standards. Most students are confident and articulate and enjoy their studies.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in horticulture, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate media	2	Number of starters	†	15	9
		Retention (%)	†	80	89
		Achievement (%)	†	50	100
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	14	14	6
		Retention (%)	71	71	67
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GNVQ advanced media	3	Number of starters	17	11	17
		Retention (%)	82	82	65
		Achievement (%)	93	100	100
GCE A level media studies/ film studies	3	Number of starters	72	51	53
		Retention (%)	71	61	79
		Achievement (%)	92	100	100
GCE A level art and design	3	Number of starters	65	27	27
		Retention (%)	58	93	81
		Achievement (%)	89	96	95

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Curriculum Areas

English

Grade 2

25 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering GCE A/AS level and GCSE English courses. They were in broad agreement with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- teaching of high quality
- high achievement rates
- effective course management
- good-quality resources and accommodation
- effective marking and assessment practices

Weaknesses

- GCE A level grades in the combined English language and literature course lower than expectations
- ineffective use of time in some lessons

26 The English department provides GCE A/AS level and GCSE courses, a certificate of proficiency in English and modules of an Anglia Polytechnic University degree course. The communication component of key skills is incorporated with GCE AS and GCSE courses. Inspectors agreed that course leadership is effective. Course files are meticulously maintained and staff monitor all key aspects of the provision carefully. Observation of each other's lessons helps teachers to establish consistent standards in their teaching. Good practice is shared. Weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report are addressed in an action plan, which specifies clear responsibilities and timescales.

27 The high quality of the teaching is recognised in the self-assessment report. Lessons are almost always well prepared and well structured. Aims and objectives of lessons are shared with students. In the best lessons, teachers provide a short summary which draws key points together and illustrates the progress that students have made. Some lessons were outstanding. One lesson was memorable for the way in which the study of an examination text was imaginatively located within its authentic, historical context through the use of the art and music of the times. The teacher played the harp to help students pick up the rhythm of Chaucer's text and the lesson concluded with the 'escargot' dance. The students relished this way of heightening their perception, awareness and understanding of the text. Students discuss ideas in pairs and groups and report back on key points. They are systematically learning how to present an argument firmly founded on textual evidence. A lively debate involving their peers and the teachers often ensues, helping students to gain confidence in their own critical ability. Teachers encourage students to develop the skills they need to learn independently, although sometimes the pace of the work is slowed by tasks running on for too long and, as a consequence, some students disengage from the lesson. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Relationships between students and staff are good and are based on mutual respect. Students value the help that teachers provide outside of lessons. In several lessons a learning assistant supported individual students effectively. In other lessons, a teacher working with a trainee teacher enabled students to receive individual attention.

28 Thorough and comprehensive marking of their work helps students to make progress. Detailed comments on written work show students how to improve their performance. There is evidence in some students' files of definite progress following their teachers' advice. External moderators are complimentary

Curriculum Areas

about the accuracy of the department's assessment. Students' oral work is lively and students sometimes show themselves capable of really perceptive comment. Many can express themselves fluently and with confidence. However, some students are reticent contributors.

29 Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. The library bookstock is good. There is a good stock of specialist videos and a start has been made with making specialist English software available on the college intranet and CD-ROM. Students use the Internet increasingly for their research and much of their work is wordprocessed. Teaching accommodation is very good. English is taught in a suite of rooms which are bright, warm and welcoming with good acoustics.

30 The self-assessment report identifies as a strength pass rates well above the national average in GCSE English, although retention on this course is a concern. Inspectors agreed with these judgements. GCE A level English literature results consistently exceed the national average both in overall passes and the achievement of higher grades. GCE A level English language pass rates also exceeded the national average in 1998 and 2000. However, the proportion of higher grade passes remained below the national average. The college's value-added data indicate that many students do not achieve the grades expected of them. GCE A level English language and literature achievements remain slightly below the national average.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	118	107	73
		Retention (%)	69	64	74
		Achievement (%)	68	70	62
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	101	74	64
		Retention (%)	80	81	78
		Achievement (%)	83	92	90
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	51	61	44
		Retention (%)	80	82	77
		Achievement (%)	93	88	94
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	86	38	66
		Retention (%)	78	79	79
		Achievement (%)	96	97	98

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Social Sciences

Grade 2

31 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in psychology and sociology. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses in teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- effective course management
- well-structured teaching and learning
- good GCE A level achievements
- high standard of students' coursework
- thorough assessment of a wide variety of assignments

Weaknesses

- poor pass and retention rates on some courses
- undeveloped use of IT in lessons
- the slow pace of work and lack of challenge in some lessons

32 Psychology and sociology courses are offered at GCSE and GCE A/AS level and as part of an access to higher education programme. Enrolments on GCE A level courses, declining in recent years, have risen again with the introduction of curriculum 2000. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that courses are carefully managed. Teachers are committed to the achievement of their students and the improvement of their courses. Action plans for dealing with weaknesses in retention and achievement have been implemented with positive effect. Psychology and sociology teachers work together closely. They have devised common policies and practices well suited to the needs of their students. Opportunities for GCE A/AS level students to

develop their key skills have been clearly identified.

33 Teaching is well planned. Teachers use carefully devised handouts to guide students through induction, coursework and revision. Students acquire a clear understanding of what they must do to complete their courses successfully. In lessons, teachers reinforce students' previous learning. They use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to develop students' knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, psychology students reinforced their understanding of Bowlby's theory of attachment, first by discussing their own experience and later by observing a video about a child's early development. Teachers encourage students to elaborate their views by careful questioning. A sociology teacher suggested different views from those expressed by some students and helped students reach a balanced conclusion. Students gain confidence in their ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of an argument through group work, written exercises or teachers' questions. In some lessons, however, the pace of work was too slow because the teacher did not vary the work sufficiently. In other lessons, time was wasted on mundane tasks. There is little use of IT in lessons. Inspectors judged that the college's self-assessment report correctly identified its strengths in teaching and learning, but omitted the weaknesses.

34 Inspectors agreed that the assessment of students' work and the standard of students' coursework are strengths. The standard of students' coursework is good, and sometimes outstanding. The best work is fluently expressed and incorporates a high level of evaluative discussion. There is a clear assessment policy. A wide variety of assignments is used to assess students' performance and students are given clear deadlines. Assessment criteria for the work of students on the access course are particularly clear and meticulously addressed by teachers.

Curriculum Areas

Teachers mark students' coursework with precision and rigour. Written work is accurately graded and promptly returned, usually with constructive comments. The monitoring of students' attendance and progress is effective. Attendance at lessons is generally good, but punctuality is often poor. There are clear procedures for supporting students who need additional support.

35 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of students' achievements and retention. Pass rates in GCE A level psychology are good, and the percentage of higher grades is well above the national average for sixth form colleges. Actions taken as a result of self-assessment contributed to the good pass rate in GCE A level sociology in 2000. On GCSE and GCE AS courses, pass rates in psychology are consistently at the national averages, whilst those in sociology vary considerably from low to high. Retention rates in sociology are mostly good. On the GCE A/AS level psychology courses, retention rates have improved significantly since 1998. By contrast retention on the GCSE psychology course has declined and is now below the national average. The college does not make use of detailed destination data on its students.

36 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements on staffing and specialist resources. All teachers have relevant degrees and teaching qualifications. They take part in a good range of professional development activities. Students have sufficient up-to-date textbooks and benefit from an extensive video library. Specialist IT resources are few. The college intranet contains a small amount of revision material enabling students to check their understanding of psychological theories. There are no computers in classrooms where sociology and psychology are taught, though access to computing facilities elsewhere in the college is good. Students are beginning to use the Internet to research material but IT is not yet sufficiently incorporated with the students' assignments.

Teaching takes place in ageing temporary classrooms which are adequate in size but not soundproofed. Efforts have been made to maintain the rooms in good decorative condition and to improve their appearance by the extensive displays of students' work.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in social sciences, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE psychology	2	Number of starters	37	25	16
		Retention (%)	89	68	56
		Achievement (%)	58	59	67
GCSE sociology	2	Number of starters	22	17	†
		Retention (%)	91	94	†
		Achievement (%)	45	81	†
GCE A level psychology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	175	116	115
		Retention (%)	65	85	79
		Achievement (%)	94	87	94
GCE A level sociology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	65	54	50
		Retention (%)	78	81	66
		Achievement (%)	94	72	94
GCE AS psychology and sociology (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	21	22	24
		Retention (%)	62	82	88
		Achievement (%)	69	50	55

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

37 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- high standard of pre-course advice and information
- effective transition and induction procedures
- strong links with parents
- well-organised careers provision
- learning support closely linked to students' courses
- rigorous review of students' progress
- effective development of inclusive learning initiatives

Weaknesses

- unproductive and unfocused use of some tutorial time
- inadequate resourcing of some aspects of learning support

38 Support for students is good. The college is welcoming and friendly. Inspectors agreed that there are effective recruitment and admissions procedures for students to receive impartial information and sound advice. There is a range of attractive publicity materials including a clear prospectus, an analysis of past students' achievements and information leaflets. Students are well supported in transferring to the college, which has effective links with partner schools. Students often visit the college several times before their courses start.

39 Students' induction is well planned and thorough. Full-time students receive a planner

which highlights the services available to them. Throughout the year, timely information is communicated through noticeboards, the college council and tutorials. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that induction is effectively evaluated and that students and parents are highly satisfied with the arrangements. Part-time students experience a modified admissions and induction process appropriate to their needs.

40 Students speak highly of the unstinting help which staff provide. Staff are approachable and listen to students' views. Full-time students have a personal tutor and short tutorial sessions on four days each week. The planned tutorial programme is supported by well-designed materials. A weekly bulletin informs students of college events and student services, though this is sometimes not well used by tutors. Some short group tutorial sessions are unstructured and make poor use of time. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. In addition to the short tutorial sessions, a schedule of extended group tutorials helps students to settle into the college, recognise their responsibilities and manage their time effectively. Students are encouraged to analyse their learning styles in order to improve their learning skills. Students' attendance and performance are closely monitored. Individual tutorials help each student to identify attendance and achievement targets and to discuss progress. An action plan is agreed if achievement and attendance fall below target. Records in students' files are exemplary. Progress reports and consultation evenings for parents are carefully timed. Communication with parents is good and there is a useful parents' guide. Surveys of parents' views show high levels of satisfaction with the college's support for students. A qualified counsellor is available at the main site and staff provide effective welfare advice to students.

41 Learning support is closely linked to students' courses. Each full-time student is

Cross-college Provision

assessed on entry using a diagnostic method linked to the level of the proposed course. Assessment results also inform the level of the key skills courses which students take as part of their programmes. Students receiving additional support have an individual education plan containing clear achievement targets. For example, the learning support tutor for one student discussed the student's future course activities in law with the subject teacher. Course materials in criminal defence were used effectively to improve spelling and develop the student's language and study skills. Support is provided for a wide range of students with sensory impairments and the college has valuable links with external specialist services. The extra support is either integrated within lessons or provided individually in a small learning support room located in a temporary classroom. The room is under-resourced. This restricts the range of activities which might be used. Reviews of students' progress and attendance are comprehensively documented. Students value the support received and can demonstrate the benefits. In 1999-2000, approximately 10% of full-time students were identified as needing learning support. Almost all these students took up the support, and 94% of them were retained on their courses. The development of an inclusive approach to learning has been energetically supported across the college. A professional development programme, which include a checklist for course teams and the development of learning and progression policies, has raised staff awareness of project initiatives.

42 Inspectors agreed that careers education, information and guidance are effectively organised and well used. A careers centre in the library and information centre was opened in 1999. Students are confident in using a range of computer software for information on progression opportunities. They make individual appointments with specialist careers staff or drop in for advice, when convenient. Careers

staff work closely with the tutorial services team. The college maintains links with Essex Careers and Business Partnership. Help for students seeking to enter higher education is good. An analysis of known students' destinations shows that 40% progress to higher education and around 40% to employment. Recently, the college has emphasised opportunities for the increasing numbers of students who may progress directly into work. Focused group activities and weekly 'job shop' sessions are valued by students, though there are few productive careers links with local employers.

43 The college offers a wide range of enrichment activities including trips abroad, college clubs and sports events. Students' views are freely expressed through the college council and effective links between the council and senior managers and governors ensure that students' concerns are considered and addressed. The council has been active in raising funds for local charities.

General Resources

Grade 2

44 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- a welcoming and attractive environment
- well-planned accommodation
- excellent computer facilities
- good sports and recreation facilities
- good-quality accommodation and facilities at the Training for the Millennium centres

Weaknesses

- some poor temporary teaching accommodation
- inadequate common areas for students

Cross-college Provision

45 The college is located on a single site in pleasant, well-maintained grounds. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the quality of accommodation is good. There have been well-planned developments since the last inspection. The college's recent £2.2 million building project has led to the refurbishment of parts of the main building, and created a large new teaching block. The new building includes computer suites and a sports science laboratory. The buildings provide a welcoming and attractive environment for students and staff. The reception area is bright and spacious and staffed throughout the day. Lively displays of photographs and students' own artwork in public areas celebrate the social and sporting life of the college.

46 Teaching accommodation has been improved. Most classrooms are well equipped, and many contain displays of students' work. The college's use of temporary buildings has been reduced from 54% at the last inspection to 25%. However, some temporary teaching accommodation is unsatisfactory. Some of these rooms have inadequate heating and ventilation, and are noisy. The college identified this weakness in its self-assessment report and is seeking to replace this temporary accommodation. There are insufficient directional signs in some parts of the college. The college has improved access to most areas for wheelchair users. The main dining area is still not accessible, however, and the learning support workshop situated in one of the temporary buildings is difficult to reach. Since the last inspection the college has collaborated with community organisations to open two Training for the Millennium centres at Canvey Island and Rochford which provide training in computer skills to adult learners. They provide good-quality accommodation. They are decorated and furnished to a high standard and are equipped with networked computer suites and a wide range of appropriate learning resources.

47 A group of senior managers, chaired by the deputy principal, meets monthly to monitor the management of facilities. Maintenance is good and a five-year maintenance plan has been developed to address systematic upgrading and refurbishment. There are effective arrangements for managing routine maintenance, most of which is carried out by the college's own staff. There are high standards of cleanliness throughout the college. Catering facilities are good and offer a wide range of meals and snacks throughout the day. The service is popular with students. The dining area is very crowded at busy times, and some students are unable to find a seat. There is no student common room, and few indoor areas in which students can congregate, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff rooms are equipped with networked computers and have adequate space for teachers to work. The college reprographics service provides assistance with the design and layout of handouts and presentation materials, and provides a typing and copying service.

48 The college has made a major investment in the development of its computer facilities. There are good, modern, and accessible general-purpose IT resources which are well managed. Inspectors agreed that this provision is a strength. Overall, there are 18 computer centres with a total of 465 computers. There is one modern workstation for every 3.6 full-time students. All are networked and provide access to the college intranet and to the Internet. Most curriculum areas have their own computer centre, many with specialist applications. There is a comprehensive strategy for the continued development of information and communication technologies, and the network infrastructure is appropriate to support these developments. The college operates an effective helpdesk system which provides technical assistance as well as logging faults and reporting their nature and frequency to managers.

Cross-college Provision

49 The learning centre provides 100 study spaces and 60 computer workstations. It is well used. The bookstock comprises 23,000 items, with good coverage of most subjects. However, the links between teachers in curriculum areas and library staff are not wholly effective. Teaching departments have responsibility for purchasing stock, some of which is retained in subject base rooms. A computerised library administration system now catalogues the main library lending stock. Records of book issue and attendance are available, but no targets are set for the performance of the library. The library opening hours are restricted to 08.30 to 16.30 hours on five days a week, although students are able to use the computer resources outside these hours.

50 There are good sports and recreational facilities. Students benefit from the well-equipped sports hall and the outdoor games pitches, which have been substantially upgraded in collaboration with Southend United Football Club. Students also have access to facilities in local sports centres, clubs, and the swimming pool. The sporting ethos in the college is strong. Students are encouraged to participate and are offered coaching in most sports. Evening drama and music clubs make use of the excellent theatre-in-the-round.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

51 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's judgements on quality assurance in the self-assessment report but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- effective quality assurance arrangements leading to improvements in students' achievements
- comprehensive self-assessment process

- good use of target-setting in curriculum areas
- good analysis and use of student feedback
- staff development effectively linked to strategic objectives

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped quality standards for service areas
- shortcomings in monitoring the charter commitments
- the lack of systematic procedures for gathering employers' views

52 The college has a strong commitment to quality assurance. Staff and governors strive to achieve continuous improvement. Since the previous inspection, the college has modified its policies and procedures relating to quality assurance to take account of the changing needs of the college and the national priorities for improvement in the sector. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff have a good understanding of the quality assurance arrangements. However, some shortcomings in the coherence of the quality assurance system, identified at the last inspection, have not been fully addressed. For example, the self-assessment process is not fully integrated with the college's strategic planning cycle.

53 The college has developed an extensive range of key performance indicators to measure and monitor its academic performance. Staff and governors carefully monitor statistics relating to retention, attendance, students' achievements and the value added on GCE A level courses. Underperforming courses are routinely identified. Course teams are required to take prompt remedial action and produce action plans for improvement. Inspectors agreed with the college that

Cross-college Provision

ambitious but realistic targets are set for student retention and achievement by course teams. The quality assurance arrangements have been effective in raising standards. The average GCE A level points score and the examination pass rates on most courses have improved over the last three years.

54 The college produced its third self-assessment report in preparation for this inspection. Inspectors agreed that the self-assessment process is comprehensive and involves all staff and governors. All teaching teams and business support areas complete self-assessment reports which contribute to the college's report. The validity of the evidence and clarity of the judgements is checked by managers within the college and by a team of senior managers from other sixth form colleges. The report is evaluative and self-critical. Appropriate use is made of national benchmarking data in judgements on students' achievements. Weaknesses identified are addressed in action plans. However, some plans do not provide sufficient detail of the actions required to bring about improvements.

55 The college's system for the observation of lessons is well established. Useful guidance notes for observers include a checklist to monitor equal opportunities. Most staff are observed at least once during the year. Newly qualified teachers are observed four times in their first year and other new staff twice in their first sixth months. Lesson observations are also carried out at the college's Training for the Millennium centres and on franchised provision. The college acknowledges that observations have not been extended to include all tutorial activities. The proportion of lessons graded good or outstanding by inspectors has increased by 5% since the last inspection to 70%. This is above the sector average but not as high as the grades awarded by the college in its own observation programme.

56 The college systematically collects and analyses the views of students on the quality of its provision, and implements improvements as a result. For example, the organisation and timing of assessment on some courses has been improved in response to comments gathered through student questionnaires. Staff and student focus groups consider specific issues. These have included improvements to accommodation and the induction of new staff. Surveys of students', staff and parents' views demonstrate high levels of satisfaction. However, the self-assessment report does not identify that there are no procedures to systematically gather the views of employers about the college and its courses. The charter sets out statements of students' entitlement but does not set measurable service standards to enable effective monitoring. The college has not met its own commitment to review the charter annually. The complaints procedure is clear, but the college has identified that the monitoring and analysis of complaints is inadequate. A complaints policy has recently been approved by the corporation. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that quality standards in non-teaching areas are at an early stage of development.

57 The college gives priority to the professional development of its staff. It offers effective training opportunities, either directly or through external agencies. There is a good framework for staff development that is aligned with the priorities in the strategic plan. The need for staff development is also identified through the professional review of teachers and support staff. However, the college acknowledges that not all staff have been appraised within the planned timescale. The college has held Investor in People status since 1998.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 2

58 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- significant improvements since the last inspection
- effective planned recruitment to the governing body
- good support for and understanding of the college's work
- effective involvement in strategic planning
- close monitoring of academic performance
- effective arrangements for the appraisal of senior staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of some aspects of college activity and governing body's business
- inadequate formalisation of training of governors

59 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The governing body 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.

60 There have been significant improvements since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed that governors have effectively overseen the restructuring of the management of the college

and significant improvements in its financial position and students' achievements. Effective procedures for the conduct of business have been developed. Governors have produced a specific profile for the board's composition which includes consideration of professional and community experience and personal characteristics. New governors have been recruited successfully to meet these requirements. The governing body has 16 members, including a student governor, who have a wide range of relevant skills and experience. There are the following committees: finance and estates; human resources; client services; audit; search; and remuneration. Committees have appropriate terms of reference and report accurately to the governing body. Chairs of committees meet regularly to co-ordinate business. They take a lead role in the self-assessment of governance. Governors are self-critical. They complete questionnaires on the effectiveness of various aspects of their business. Judgements of strengths and weaknesses are discussed in the chairs' group and the full board and a report is produced each year.

61 Governors provide good support for the college. Attendance at meetings is satisfactory, except for the audit committee, where it is low. Each governor has been linked with a teaching department or cross-college area. The role of these links is still being developed in some areas. A few governors have a considerable involvement. For example, a governor who has expertise in computer networking has provided a high level of technical advice to the college. Another governor, in addition to the student member, occasionally attends meetings of the student council. The active student governor brings a perspective to meetings which assists other members' understanding of the college. The chair of governors often visits the college. Some governors attend college events and there are informal contacts between staff and governors. Working relationships between senior managers and governors are good.

Cross-college Provision

62 The management of governors' business is mostly effective. Inspectors agreed that meetings are conducted efficiently. Papers are received well in advance and contain appropriate detail. Clerking is provided by an independent firm which serves several colleges, providing useful opportunities to share good practice. Governors are satisfied that they receive good advice and support from the clerk. Minutes are well written and decisions are recorded clearly. However, there is no indication of action points following governors' deliberations. There are some weaknesses in managing aspects of the governing body's business which were not identified in the self-assessment report. For example, the register of interests has not been updated in the last year by several governors. Two meetings of the audit committee were not recognised as being inquorate. The availability of minutes for public scrutiny is not well publicised in the college.

63 As noted in the college's self-assessment report, governors are highly involved in strategic planning. Two residential conferences each year focus on strategic issues. Senior managers present useful summary reports on progress towards strategic objectives and issues to be considered for forward planning. Governors are actively involved in major strategic decisions and challenge senior managers appropriately, when necessary. For example, managers were required to produce further risk analysis in developing the accommodation strategy. There are effective arrangements for the appraisal of senior staff. They are interviewed by a review team formed from members of the corporation, and targets linked to the strategic plan are set and reviewed annually.

64 Inspectors agreed with the college that governors monitor the academic performance of the college effectively. The client services committee receives relevant reports on performance indicators, students' achievements, destinations and underperforming courses. The college's self-assessment report and targets for

retention and achievement are appropriately reviewed and approved by the governing body. Some aspects of monitoring college activity are not effective. For example, a weakness recognised by governors is the lack of monitoring of the equal opportunities policy. The monitoring of income targets is not sufficiently rigorous.

65 The college recognised in its self-assessment report that training and development of governors is not sufficiently formalised. The governors adopted a policy on training and development in June 2000. Governors receive training and development through briefings at meetings, relevant reading material and external training events. Governors have completed a questionnaire about their training needs but at the time of inspection, the results had not been used to construct a training programme. The induction of new governors is supported by some briefing meetings and reading material but there is no detailed induction plan.

Management

Grade 1

66 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- successful management of change
- effective curriculum management
- high standards of personal accountability
- clear structure and good communications
- productive external links
- good marketing

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring and review of equal opportunities

Cross-college Provision

67 The college is extremely well managed. Inspectors agreed that considerable progress has been made since the last inspection. The college has developed from a sixth form college focusing on academic programmes for school-leavers to a community college providing a wide range of academic and vocational courses for young people and adults. A new management structure has been implemented and the college has become more efficient. Throughout this time overall retention and achievement rates have steadily improved. Most courses now have rates which are above the national average for sixth form colleges. In addition, a major building programme has been completed in Benfleet. The Training for the Millennium centres in Canvey Island and Rochford have contributed to an increase in the number of adult students. The number of full-time students has increased despite strong competition from local colleges and schools with sixth forms.

68 Inspectors agreed that management of the curriculum is highly effective. The use of performance indicators is well established. Senior managers compare performance against targets. If performance is poor the reasons are investigated and appropriate action is taken. Cross-college curriculum developments are well managed. For example, co-ordinators for key skills and inclusive learning have produced comprehensive action plans and worked effectively with managers and teachers to introduce changes to the curriculum.

69 The strategic plan contains clear objectives focused on improving achievements, increasing participation in education and developing appropriate learning strategies. Senior managers and curriculum managers have specific targets related to these key objectives. Progress is monitored at regular meetings between either the principal or the vice-principal and the staff reporting to them. Inspectors agreed that high standards of personal accountability and positive working

relationships between senior managers ensure that progress is made towards meeting targets. However, the records of some meetings are informal and the reporting of progress to the senior management team is not systematic.

70 Line management arrangements for teaching and support staff are easily understood and appreciated by staff. All staff have current job descriptions. Communication within the college is good. There is a monthly staff meeting. Minutes of senior management meetings are published on the college intranet. Teachers have adequate opportunities to meet together with their line managers. An appropriate range of committees and working groups deal with cross-college issues. Working groups are promptly disbanded when their purpose has been achieved. A wide range of policies and an informative staff handbook help to ensure consistent practice.

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The financial health of the college has significantly improved. It has high levels of solvency and reserves, which have been maintained over the last two years. The director of finance is a qualified accountant who is a member of the college executive. Most monthly cost centre reports are produced promptly and are helpful to budget managers. Monthly management accounts are normally available within six weeks of the month's end. They provide historic and forecast financial information but omit a rolling cashflow forecast. The accompanying commentary does not always explain all the significant variances. Senior managers review the management accounts. The use of financial performance indicators is underdeveloped. The college's financial regulations contain some omissions. The internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in internal control.

Cross-college Provision

72 Inspectors agreed that external links are productive. Strong links with partner schools have increased the number of school-leavers progressing to the college. Links with adult and community colleges, local councils and the Canvey Island Citizens Advice Bureau have led to research projects, successful funding applications and new community provision. For example, a project with the citizens advice bureau identified the need for basic skills education on Canvey Island. As a result of this partnership, 104 students were provided with basic skills training during 1999-2000 in the bureau's office on the island.

73 Some delay in addressing equal opportunities issues is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The policy is in need of review and updating. There is no forum for the discussion of equal opportunities. An equal opportunities co-ordinator was not appointed until January 2001. There is no systematic monitoring and reporting of equal opportunities issues. However, the college pursues good practice in its recruitment of staff. The tutorial programme requires tutors to address equal opportunities issues, and lesson observation criteria require observers to comment on equal opportunities where relevant. The college broadly fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* for collective worship and religious education.

74 College marketing is effective. New course developments are informed by market research. There is a wide range of promotional activities and informative college prospectuses. The college management information system is reliable. The inspection team was provided with accurate data on students' achievements. Students' attendance is closely monitored. A suitable range of reports is available to managers, although not all managers can access this information from computers in their offices. Support areas, for example, student services and estates, are well managed.

Conclusions

75 Inspectors found the college's self-assessment report comprehensive and well focused. Evidence cited in the report was detailed and appropriate. All areas have produced an action plan. Most actions are specific and useful. Inspectors largely agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. Many weaknesses which had been acknowledged had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with nine of the 10 grades in the self-assessment and awarded a higher grade for one cross-college area.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	56
19-24 years	4
25+ years	40
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	27
Level 2 (intermediate)	18
Level 3 (advanced)	52
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Level not specified	2
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 2000)

Programme area	Full-time	Part-time	Total provision (%)
Science	421	766	45
Engineering	41	0	2
Business	200	207	15
Hotel and catering	70	1	3
Health and community care	66	0	2
Art and design	163	9	6
Humanities	447	81	20
Basic education	141	53	7
Total	1,549	1,117	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 5% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	69	16	0	85
Supporting direct learning contact	9	5	0	14
Other support	48	2	1	51
Total	126	23	1	150

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£5,441,000	£5,616,000	£5,861,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.83	£17.29	£17.32
Payroll as a proportion of income	66%	66%	67%
Achievement of funding target	99%	98%	98%
Diversity of income	4%	9%	13%
Operating surplus	£110,000	£123,000	£145,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1998-99 (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	521	613	415	53	316	372
	Retention (%)	71	85	85	72	72	79
	Achievement (%)	47	66	88	56	78	43
2	Number of starters	718	876	763	21	117	130
	Retention (%)	72	79	75	38	61	78
	Achievement (%)	53	79	90	43	70	86
3	Number of starters	2,638	3,477	2,588	75	132	133
	Retention (%)	74	74	79	41	53	69
	Achievement (%)	82	76	73	70	70	70
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	9	0
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	0	100	0
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	0	100	0
Short courses	Number of starters	25	218	430	332	642	704
	Retention (%)	100	95	97	91	92	94
	Achievement (%)	32	80	78	71	70	69
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,281	370	212	62	10	17
	Retention (%)	81	90	81	71	100	35
	Achievement (%)	12	45	42	40	40	67

Source: ISR

FEFC Inspection Report 50/01

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
© FEFC 2001**

March 2001

Extracts from this publication may be reproduced for non-commercial educational or training purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged and the findings are not misrepresented.

This publication is available in an electronic form on the Council's website (www.fefc.ac.uk).

Further copies can be obtained by contacting
the communications team at:

The Further Education Funding Council
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone 024 7686 3265

Fax 024 7686 3025

E-mail fehcpubs@fefc.ac.uk

The print run for this document was 1,400 copies

Please quote the reference number below when ordering.
Reference INSREP/1220/01