

Tynemouth College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Tynemouth College

Northern Region

Inspected February 1998

Tynemouth College is a sixth form college situated in North Shields on the north bank of the river Tyne. The college's first self-assessment report and its action plan were produced in 1997. The college has made the self-assessment process an integral part of its quality assurance arrangements. The self-assessment report is based upon contributory self-assessment reports from teaching and support teams. It contains a thorough analysis of the college's strengths and weaknesses which is supported by evidence. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made in the report, and these are well supported by evidence. Staff and governors take pride in their involvement in the self-assessment process.

The college offers a range of courses in eight of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Many students are 16 to 18 years of age studying on advanced level courses. In recent years, the college has successfully introduced courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, foundation level programmes and part-time courses for adults. Four curriculum areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The curriculum is well

managed and there is good teaching across all programmes. Support for students is good. Considerable care is taken to identify progression routes for students on courses below GCSE level. Pass rates on most courses are at or above the national average figures for sixth form colleges. The college's accommodation has been improved through substantial refurbishment. Excellent IT and learning resource areas are well used and highly valued by students. The rigorous self-assessment process has improved the quality assurance system and has led to consistently good teaching and student support arrangements. Governors contribute significantly to the college's strategic planning and they have formal links with curriculum areas and with support services. The college is well led and managed. The college should improve: declining recruitment and retention rates on some courses; aspects of the tutorial system; arrangements for reporting on the work of the committees; the monitoring and control of some staff workloads.

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	2	General resources	2
Art and design	2	Quality assurance	1
English, communications and media studies	2	Governance	2
Geography, psychology and sociology	2	Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Tynemouth College was established as a sixth form college in 1972. It mainly serves an area that lies between the north bank of the river Tyne and the North Sea coast. The local economy of this area is dominated by small companies with fewer than 25 employees.

2 The population of the area served by the college is about 700,000. The proportions of pensioners, single parents and adults living on their own in the area are higher than the national average. The proportion of local people aged 24 or less is increasing, but it remains below the national average. Fifty-five per cent of the population in the area are home owners, compared with 66 per cent nationally. The unemployment rate is 9.3 per cent compared with 6.7 per cent nationally.

3 The college competes with other educational and training providers. Ten local schools have sixth forms, and there is a further education college within two miles of Tynemouth College. Of the 1,019 full-time students attending the college, approximately 40 per cent come from local schools, and 30 per cent come from other schools in the wider North Tyneside area. There are 782 part-time students. They attend the same lessons as students aged 16 to 19, or specific courses for adults or evening classes. The college offers courses in eight of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. In 1996-97, the college offered 32 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects and 13 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects. It also provided courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in five vocational areas, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects and courses leading to RSA Examinations Board (RSA) and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) qualifications. In January 1998, the college employed 101 full-time equivalent staff of whom 39 full-time equivalents were support staff. The college is

organised into three academic divisions: language, image and performance; science, technology and business; and social studies.

4 The college's mission statement was produced in 1993 after consultation with staff and governors. It has been reviewed and modified and commits the college to provide 'quality opportunities to acquire knowledge and develop skills which give students a greater degree of control over important decisions in life'.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 23 February 1998. The inspection team had previously considered the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. These were compared against information from primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies.

6 Approximately two months before the inspection, the college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by seven inspectors over 30 days and by an auditor over five days. They observed 54 lessons and five tutorials, and examined students' work and college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff, students and a representative of Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

7 Of the lessons inspected, 87 per cent were rated good or outstanding. No lesson was less than satisfactory. This profile is significantly better than the average for all colleges inspected during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The

average level of attendance during the inspection was 82 per cent; this compares with an average of 84 per cent for sixth form colleges reported in the same report. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	6	26	4	0	0	36
GCSE	0	5	0	0	0	5
GNVQ	0	4	2	0	0	6
Other including basic education	2	4	1	0	0	7
Total	8	39	7	0	0	54

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 2

8 Inspectors observed 11 science lessons and a tutorial. They were in general agreement with the strengths and weaknesses of this curriculum area, identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- comprehensive course documentation
- results in most subjects at or above the national average
- high attendance rates
- good curricular management
- good links with industry and universities

Weaknesses

- an insufficient range of teaching and learning methods
- insufficiently-thorough reviews of students' progress

9 The science section within the division of science, technology and business, offers GCE A level courses in biology, chemistry, environmental science, geology and physics, and GCSE courses in science. It also contributes to the 'stepping stones' course which is intended to meet the needs of foundation level students. There has been a significant increase in enrolments for biology and chemistry courses. However, as a result of poor recruitment, the section no longer offers a GNVQ advanced course in science and a GCE AS electronics course. Students are introduced to GCE A level subjects through a bridging course. This covers the basic knowledge required to start a GCE A level course and it is much appreciated by students. The section is well managed. Staff have a regular schedule of minuted meetings. The college identified insufficient formality in the running of meetings as a weakness in its

self-assessment report, but this has now been remedied. In order to monitor the division's performance, the head of division receives regular reports on students' attendance, retention, examination results and their success in progressing to further study or employment. He also receives information on the value-added factor in students' achievements which is calculated by comparing the students' GCE A level grades with the GCSE grades they held when they started their course. The science section does not have direct curriculum links with its partner schools and its marketing strategies remain underdeveloped.

10 The quality of teaching is consistently good. Lessons are well planned. Staff enjoy excellent working relationships with students. Ten out of the 11 lessons observed were graded as good or outstanding, and none was less than satisfactory. Documentation is comprehensive. Teaching schemes relate closely to the syllabus. They identify the skills, knowledge, concepts the students will cover and the resources required for lessons. The inspectors could not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is a variety of teaching and learning methods in this curriculum area. At the time of inspection, many GCE A level groups were carrying out revision for modular examinations, and this involved them in little practical work or the use of information technology (IT) facilities. Physics students are taught extra mathematics and they receive help in the use of sophisticated calculators. Students receive regular reviews of their progress in each subject. This review process is not thorough. Staff make insufficient evaluation of each student's progress towards reaching identified targets. The college has some good external links with universities and industry. For example, it has established a project with support from the University of York which involves GCE A level chemistry students in research into the most effective way to break down a polymer commonly used in drinks bottles. The project is continuous and one of its

Curriculum Areas

notable features is that students from one intake pass their findings on to students in the next intake.

11 In the last three years, examination results in most subjects have been at or above the national average for sixth form colleges. Students' attendance and punctuality are good. In most subjects, students obtain higher grades in GCE A level than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE grades. Students' retention rates vary considerably from year to year and some are poor. Students' files of work on GCE A level courses are of a high standard and their written assignments are thoroughly researched. However, students' files of work on the GCSE course are of a low standard. The inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that a large number of students fail to complete homework.

12 Science staff are well qualified. All teachers have degrees and a teaching qualification. Support staff have BTEC national certificates in science, and health and safety qualifications. During 1996-97, all staff took part in appropriate professional development training. The science area provides students with a welcoming environment. Laboratories are spacious and bright and they are enlivened by colourful wall displays. Most of the rooms have a bench layout that can be used flexibly.

Examples of students' achievements in science, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level biology	Retention (%)	80	75	67
	Pass rate (%)	63	98	89
GCE A level chemistry	Retention (%)	78	76	68
	Pass rate (%)	92	95	80
GCE A level environmental science	Retention (%)	62	85	83
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	95
GCE A level physics	Retention (%)	59	67	73
	Pass rate (%)	96	93	88
GCE A level geology	Retention (%)	64	52	71
	Pass rate (%)	100	92	80
GCSE science	Retention (%)	78	65	83
	Pass rate (%)	77	44	64

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

13 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering courses leading to GNVQ business at intermediate and advanced levels, GCE A level in economics and business, and the RSA wordprocessing certificate. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but considered that some strengths and some weaknesses of provision in business were understated.

Key strengths

- teaching of a good standard across all courses
- good pass rates on GCE A level and wordprocessing courses
- the significant value-added factor in students' achievements over three years
- students' success in progressing to higher education

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on most courses
- falling recruitment and poor pass rates on GNVQ courses

14 The curriculum area mostly offers full-time courses for school-leavers. A significant number of part-time students, mostly adults, attend some courses such as the one held on Saturdays in wordprocessing. Most full-time students in the section are on the joint economics and business GCE A level course. This is a successful replacement for the separate GCE A level accounting and economics courses which were discontinued in 1995 because of poor recruitment. Recruitment to most courses is good but it is falling on GNVQ courses. There is a small amount of open learning provision, mainly in book-keeping, for students who want to study on their own, using learning materials suited to their individual needs. Inspectors

agreed with the claim in the self-assessment report that courses are well planned and effectively managed. A small team of staff work well together and they hold regular meetings. Annual curriculum reviews cover aspects of performance such as students' retention rates and achievements. Surveys of students' perceptions of their courses are carried out. The curriculum area has good links with business and through these visiting speakers come to the college and two-week work placements are arranged for students.

15 The majority of lessons are good and provide students with a range of appropriate activities. Teachers make particularly effective use of case studies which engage and sustain the students' interest. Teaching and learning materials are of good quality and they are up to date. There are good schemes of work and lessons are well planned. Most teachers make effective use of questioning as an aid to learning. In a minority of lessons, however, teachers did not question the students regularly to check their understanding of the concepts they were learning. Teachers set students a range of assignments. Their marking is fair and they assess work to the appropriate standard. The self-assessment report recognises that internal verification procedures are adequate. Staff monitor students' attendance closely and they undertake reviews of students' progress.

16 Since 1996, pass rates for GCE A level economics and business have been above the national average for sixth form colleges. The college's analysis of the value-added factor in students' achievements shows that students attain better results than those predicted for them on the basis of their entry qualifications. The college is at an early stage in calculating the value-added factor on GNVQ courses. A large proportion of students progress to higher education. Other students are successful in obtaining employment. Pass rates and retention rates are good on wordprocessing courses. The self-assessment report does not identify the poor

Curriculum Areas

pass rates for GNVQ courses. For example, in 1997, the pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course was 59 per cent, which is significantly below the national average. Retention rates on GCE A level and GNVQ courses are poor and they have fallen significantly since 1995.

17 Teachers are appropriately qualified. Accommodation is of good quality. Rooms are well decorated and display relevant materials. Students have access to modern computers, textbooks, video films and company reports. A small number of part-time staff are not always able to attend team meetings.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level economics and business	Retention (%)	87	77	58
	Pass rate (%)	82	97	92
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	73	76	60
	Pass rate (%)	95	68	59
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	100	80	33
	Pass rate (%)	100	58	50
Wordprocessing	Retention (%)	65	93	87
	Pass rate (%)	95	94	98

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

18 Inspectors observed nine lessons and a tutorial. The inspection covered advanced level courses in photography, theatre studies, art and design, and GCSE and GNVQ intermediate level courses. The inspectors agreed with the key strengths and weaknesses of provision in art and design which were identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses to meet students' needs
- effective teaching using a variety of methods
- frequent and accurate assessment of students' work
- students' success in progressing to higher education courses
- good, lively and well-researched work by students

Weaknesses

- pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course below the national average
- insufficient reference to portfolios of work when interviewing prospective students
- inappropriate use of accommodation

19 The planning of provision is good and takes into account the needs of the students and the requirements of the examining bodies. There are effective lesson plans for all lessons. Where appropriate, students receive written briefs for projects. Many projects are imaginative and the students find them exciting. Their introduction is carefully staged to allow progressive development of the students' skills and learning. Students engage in research and develop their

work sequentially. Inspectors agreed with the findings in the self-assessment report that teachers use a variety of teaching and learning strategies and that they carry out frequent checks on the students' understanding of lessons. They provide students with thorough assessment of their work, both formally and informally. Their assessment enables the students to recognise the progress they have made, and it helps them to identify aspects of their work which require further improvement. Students are encouraged to participate in group critiques in order to assess their own work and that of their peers. In a small number of lessons, issues identified by the teachers when working with individuals were not shared with the rest of the group.

20 Students' achievements are in line with the national average for sixth form colleges. Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that students on art and design, and performing arts courses are successful in progressing to higher education. Students' work is of an appropriate standard and much is creative. Teachers have established good links with external organisations. These links have helped students to work on industry-related projects with visiting artists or designers. In 1996 and 1997, students' pass rates were below the national average for sixth form colleges. When interviewing applicants for courses, staff do not make sufficient use of portfolios of students' work. As a result, teachers have had difficulty in placing prospective students on the right course because they have been unsure about the quality and standard of their work.

21 Teachers are appropriately qualified. They work effectively in teams to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes and to monitor students' achievements. Inspectors agreed that equipment and consumable resources are sufficient and of good quality. Studios display students' work and other materials which are visually stimulating. Some lessons last only one hour which restricts the type of learning activity

Curriculum Areas

which students can undertake. Because of timetabling arrangements to ensure that students are provided with the subject combinations they want, the size of some groups of students on a particular course differ considerably. As a result, there is some inefficient use of space. Classes in a specialist area used on performing arts courses are occasionally disrupted because this is used as a thoroughfare.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE and GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	82	77	95
	Pass rate (%)	78	68	77
GCE A level and GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	90	80	77
	Pass rate (%)	96	90	94

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English, Communications and Media Studies

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering English, media studies, communications and a tutorial. In general, inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but they considered that some strengths and weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- a range of well-designed courses
- excellent course and lesson planning
- varied learning activities and experiences for students
- highly-motivated and hard-working students
- good attendance by students
- examination results mostly above national averages

Weaknesses

- the failure of some teachers to check students' understanding of the lesson
- insufficient guidance for students on how to work on their own
- low retention rates on some courses

23 Students are well served by the provision of several GCE A level English syllabuses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that each course is well organised. A scheme of work for each syllabus is complemented by detailed lesson plans which are shared by all staff teaching on a particular course. For example, five different teachers who teach six GCSE English language classes between them, all follow the same scheme of work for the year. This identifies learning objectives, lesson content, suggested teaching and learning methods and requisite resources.

Some teachers, however, do not share lesson objectives with the students. Many lessons are of two hours' duration and in these, the teachers provide students with varied learning activities which engage their interest and involvement. Teachers manage lesson time well. For example, one teacher divided a literature class into groups; two groups received help with their investigations using CD-ROM and the internet, while two other groups worked on a text book. The students benefit from organised visits to the theatre and the cinema which are relevant to the texts they are studying.

24 There are constructive working relationships between teachers and students and, in turn, students support one another in their learning. Teachers make good use of the system for reviewing students' progress. In general, students are confident about their studies and they are appreciative of the support they receive. The self-assessment report fails to identify that teachers' marking of students' work is sometimes insufficiently detailed. Students are uncertain how the grades they receive for specific pieces of work relate to those used in their progress reviews. Although students work hard outside lessons, they do not receive sufficient guidance on ways of working on their own effectively.

25 Attendance at lessons is good. Students are enthusiastic. They settle to their work quickly and finish the task in hand with little prompting. Most take part in discussions. In general, they have a good grasp of the principles of critical analysis and can make sound judgements. The section has launched several initiatives to encourage private reading. Since 1995, pass rates on most courses have remained the same or have improved and most are above the national average for sixth form colleges. Students usually obtain better results than those predicted for them on the basis of their entry qualifications. The self-assessment report identifies the low pass rates on some courses and course teams are developing appropriate

Curriculum Areas

measures to improve these. The section is also committed to improving the proportion of students gaining A to C grades at GCE A level.

26 The English section has its own self-contained specialist accommodation with easy access to appropriate learning resources. This accommodation has a strong subject identity, to which students respond positively. Rooms are suitably furnished and most are attractively decorated. Staff are well qualified and most are full time. They are supported by some hard-working, part-time colleagues. Like their students, the teachers work hard, collaboratively and enthusiastically.

Examples of students' achievements in English, communications and media studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level English	Retention (%)	89	66	76
	Pass rate (%)	84	65	87
GCE A level English language	Retention (%)	94	87	81
	Pass rate (%)	94	81	92
GCE A level English literature	Retention (%)	91	56	76
	Pass rate (%)	94	100	100
GCE A level media studies	Retention (%)	95	63	80
	Pass rate (%)	100	98	98
GCSE English language	Retention (%)	81	93	69
	Pass rate (%)	61	55	56

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Geography, Psychology and Sociology

Grade 2

27 The inspection covered psychology, sociology and geography courses. Thirteen GCSE and GCE A/AS lessons, and two tutorials were observed. The inspection team broadly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses and thoroughly-prepared lessons
- good teaching
- constructive marking of students' work
- students' positive attitudes to their work
- effective course management

Weaknesses

- inadequate development of students' analytical skills
- few strategies for meeting individual students' learning needs
- insufficient in-depth discussion in lessons

28 Most of the teaching in these subjects is good. Lesson content is well planned to ensure that the examination syllabus is covered. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that most lessons include a variety of appropriate teaching methods. In one geography lesson, good use was made of a video presentation and handout materials. The teacher directed in-depth discussions that strengthened students' understanding of various developmental theories and their potential application to Tanzania. However, in some lessons, teachers do not allow sufficient time for discussions or provide students with the opportunities to develop their skills in presenting argument. Some teachers fail to

ensure that learning activities meet the needs of students with differing abilities within the same class.

29 The majority of students respond readily to the tasks set, and have a positive attitude to work. Good relationships exist between students and staff and between students themselves, especially when students work in groups. Inspection evidence supported the college's claim that the quality and level of students' written work are appropriate. Teachers mark assignments thoroughly and carefully and they give students written feedback on how they may improve their work. Teachers place due emphasis on the importance of IT and communication skills. They provide students with model answers to examination questions and essay structures to guide them in their studies. In 1995 and 1996, examination pass rates for GCE A level geography were at the national average for sixth form colleges. For two years out of the last three, the pass rates on the two-year GCE A level courses in psychology and sociology have been above the national averages. Since 1995, the pass rate on the one-year GCE A level course has been below the national average for sixth form colleges. Although pass rates for GCSE sociology are at or above the national average for sixth form colleges they are in decline. Retention rates on courses in some subjects are poor compared with the average for full-time students in sixth form colleges for 1995 and 1996.

30 Teachers are well qualified and most possess teaching qualifications. They produce learning materials of good quality. For example, some sociology handouts are outstandingly good being both highly informative and concise. Most rooms have good furnishings and displays of subject materials. The self-assessment report acknowledges that some temporary accommodation is unsatisfactory and it is not well used. For example, furniture was formally arranged in rows limiting good group work.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in geography, psychology and sociology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level geography	Retention (%)	84	69	78
	Pass rate (%)	84	84	98
GCE A level psychology	Retention (%)	51	61	58
	Pass rate (%)	86	72	94
GCE A level sociology	Retention (%)	80	84	76
	Pass rate (%)	73	78	58
GCSE psychology	Retention (%)	69	74	93
	Pass rate (%)	83	94	90
GCSE sociology	Retention (%)	87	67	92
	Pass rate (%)	91	70	65

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

31 The inspectors broadly agreed with the identification, in the self-assessment report, of strengths and weaknesses in the provision of support for students. However, inspectors considered that some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- strong, clear direction of support for students by staff
- detailed and thorough pre-entry and initial guidance for students
- effective information and guidance on progression
- effective system for reviewing students' progress
- good internal progression routes for students on foundation level programmes
- good confidential counselling services

Weaknesses

- inadequacies in monitoring the effectiveness of the tutorial system
- group tutorials do not prove worthwhile to many students

32 The student support service is centrally located in a welcoming suite adjacent to the main learning resources area. This service aims to put students at the heart of its work and to be accessible to them. Student support is provided by a team of staff who are responsible for providing students with guidance before they join their course, support for them whilst they are on their course, and information on progression routes open to them. The team also co-ordinates the college-wide programme of student action-planning and reviews of their progress. The college's provision of support for students is of high quality. The student support

service has a strong sense of direction and it is well managed. Members of the student support team are mutually supportive and they work together productively. They carry out their complex tasks in the college well and they liaise effectively with external agencies. Surveys of students' opinions about the quality of the college's provision indicate that students are appreciative of the student support service.

33 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the arrangements for informing prospective students of the opportunities the college provides are effective. The pre-entry and initial guidance which students receive is provided by senior and middle managers who have had specific training in offering guidance. All new students undergo an initial assessment process which is well documented. Students speak well of the information and advice they receive and of the introductory and induction days. Some course teams are considering ways of improving guidance to students on entry in order to redress the falling retention rates which are a feature of certain courses.

34 The provision of careers advice and information on progression routes is effective and well co-ordinated. Staff give careful thought to the review of students' progress and to their application to higher education. Parents of students aged 16 to 18 are kept informed. Increased involvement of employers, and more work experience for students are under development. Many students continue to maintain their national record of achievement using the college computer network.

35 At enrolment, all students are tested to find out whether they need help with their basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The learning support team takes timely decisions on the kind of support which individual students need. Appropriate one-to-one help is provided for students until they are sufficiently confident to be timetabled into mathematics and literacy workshops. Students' attendance at these

Cross-college Provision

workshops is carefully monitored. Students may be referred for learning support by tutors at any time during their course. The self-assessment report indicates that the standard screening tests used by the college may not be the most appropriate for many students. Inspectors agreed with this evaluation. The college offers good opportunities for students with modest levels of achievement on entry. For example, 15 full-time and 30 part-time students who have moderate to severe learning difficulties attend the specific course for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Another 20 students attend the 'stepping stones' course for those not currently ready for GCSE courses. Of these, five are students under 16 years of age who have been excluded from secondary school. A 'pre-vocational achievement course' at four different levels below GCSE is being piloted.

36 All full-time teachers are timetabled for one-and-a-half hours each week for tutorial work. They spend one hour on a group tutorial with 18 to 20 students, and they use the remaining time with individual students. In the group tutorials, students undertake a programme of activities, some of which lead to qualifications such as those in computer literacy and information technology. Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that the tutorial programme is carefully planned, firmly directed and adequately resourced. However, although most students greatly value their tutors' personal support, many are not motivated by the group tutorial activities and they said that they could not see their value. Some staff are also unconvinced that group tutorials are worthwhile. Course managers have no system for directly monitoring the effectiveness of tutorials. Comments on the tutorial system are made, however, by the students in their responses to questionnaires about the quality of the college's provision.

37 A high-quality, confidential counselling service is provided by a well-qualified counsellor who attends the college for 22 hours each week.

General Resources

Grade 2

38 The self-assessment report provides a comprehensive assessment of the college's resources. The inspectors agreed with the judgements in the report. A number of the weaknesses in the college's resources which the report identified have already been corrected or are in the process of being addressed.

Key strengths

- good standard of accommodation
- attractive and well-equipped facilities for IT
- continuous adaptation of accommodation to meet the college's changing needs
- an imaginatively-designed and well-stocked learning resource centre
- good furnishings and equipment
- good subject area displays

Weaknesses

- some unsuitable accommodation
- some poor use of space

39 The college is housed in an Edwardian building that was formerly a high school, and accommodation that was purpose built in the 1970s for a sixth form college. The college's first strategic plan identified that the accommodation was generally not well suited for its purpose, and that it was inefficient in terms of space usage, estate management, energy and maintenance costs. Since the last inspection, a significant programme of improvements to the accommodation was implemented and this is still being carried out. A capital loan has been approved to meet the college's short and medium-term accommodation needs for the next five years.

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This aims to provide: more adaptable teaching accommodation; increased facilities for IT; better sports facilities and private study areas; and improved accessibility of buildings to those with restricted mobility. A new sports hall is scheduled to be completed by September 1998 and a new teaching block by December 1998. In general, the college's accommodation is of a good standard but some rooms are too small for the classes wishing to use them. There are good displays of subject materials in classrooms and circulation areas throughout the college. The college's accommodation strategy is clear and it specifies standards and performance measures against which the effectiveness of the accommodation may be judged.

Accommodation surveys are carried out and the findings from these are used to inform accommodation planning and timetabling. The self-assessment report acknowledges that room usage is low and averages less than 50 per cent. Site security is good and there are electronic sensor alarms and security barriers. The reprographic unit provides a high-quality service, and undertakes external contracts.

40 There is no dedicated social area for students but seating is provided in some of the circulation areas. The planned new sports block will include a fitness centre and all-weather pitches for team sports. College students can temporarily use the facilities of a local leisure centre. The accessibility of the buildings to students with restricted mobility has improved since the last inspection and is good. There is ramped access to all buildings. Toilet facilities for people with disabilities are available and some have notices in Braille. Much of the recent refurbishment, including a lift in the former high school building and automatic corridor doors, had not been completed when the self-assessment report was written. The crèche has capacity for 14 children. Catering facilities are of a good standard, and there is a bright, modern, central refectory which is operated by external contractors. These facilities are open throughout the day until mid afternoon. Staff

work areas are good and there is designated desk space for part-time staff.

41 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that IT provision is good. The college has 190 modern computers giving a ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of 1:6. Through the Public Private Partnership initiative, the college has recently contracted a private company to manage its IT facilities at a cost of more than £1 million to be paid over six years. The contract guarantees the college a minimum standard of hardware, provides for consultancy and for staff development in IT learning strategies. College managers anticipate that this initiative will enable it to be at the forefront of developments in IT. A recently-refurbished floor in the former high school building provides high-quality accommodation for teaching IT with 90 modern computers, all linked to the internet. This forms part of a conference centre and a facility for providing external training for businesses. A logging system indicates that daytime usage of computers averages 50 per cent and that it reaches 100 per cent at peak periods. There are also good computer-assisted design facilities. Staff have undertaken training in internet awareness and in the use of IT.

42 Inspection confirmed the college's claim that it has a good learning resource centre, with modern facilities containing an appropriate stock of periodicals, daily newspapers, audio and video resources and some CD-ROMs. There are quiet study areas and the computer 'drop-in' centre has 15 networked terminals. The bookstock is of good quality and totals 9,150 volumes in addition to the books located in the curriculum areas. Combined annual expenditure for these learning resources is £81,000. The college has redirected some of its bookstock expenditure into IT resources. Usage of the learning resource centre is monitored, and records show that on average, each student visits the centre twice a week. There is effective liaison between the learning resource staff and the teaching staff.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 1

43 Inspection evidence supported the findings in the self-assessment report in relation to the college's quality assurance arrangements. Since the report was written, the college has taken action to remedy many of the weaknesses in its quality assurance system which were identified in the report.

Key strengths

- the positive emphasis on quality in the college's main planning documents
- the rigorous application of the self-assessment process
- the strong emphasis given to improving the quality of teaching
- effective processes for gathering the views of students and clients on the college
- the well-established staff review system

Weaknesses

- the failure of recently-established 'quality circles' to have an impact

44 Inspectors agreed with the college that it emphasises the importance of quality in all its key documents. Improvements to the college's quality assurance processes have continued since the last inspection. The college's GCE A level results have shown an overall improvement, pass rates on vocational courses at intermediate and advanced level have risen and retention rates have gone up. The college has acted upon Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. It has established a team of staff responsible for the internal assessment of the college's provision and for managing the college's revised quality assurance system. The college has been operating a system of 'quality circles' whereby small teams of staff review and evaluate components of the

college's operations. It has recently added four 'quality circles' to those already established but three of these are too new to have had any impact on the college's provision.

45 Self-assessment is now the central feature of the college's quality assurance system. Initial self-assessment reports from teaching and support teams are validated internally and then collated to form an overall self-assessment report for the college. Staff and governors take pride in their involvement in compiling these reports. Teams identify actions to build on strengths and to address weaknesses. The college's self-assessment report contains a clear analysis of the college's strengths and weaknesses. Judgements in the report are firmly supported by evidence. The inspection team concurred with the great majority of these judgements.

46 As part of the annual review process, each teaching team leader agrees course targets with the principal. These include targets for students' achievements, retention rates and the value-added factor in the students' performance. National averages and year-on-year trends within the college are used as comparators for judging the quality and effectiveness of a course. The college is attempting to extend its value-added analysis to include students' achievements on vocational and non-advanced courses.

47 Considerable emphasis is placed on encouraging good practice in teaching. For some years, the principal has observed the lessons given by all teachers and he has discussed ways of improving these with them. In addition, a teaching observation team set up in 1997, carries out a regular programme of lesson observations and it is responsible for disseminating good practice. Using a pro forma, observers record detailed comments on all aspects of the way the lesson is taught. They discuss the lesson with the students and record the students' views on further pro forma.

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Observers share their findings with the teachers concerned. These are confidential but many individual teachers discuss them with fellow members of their teams. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the college places emphasis upon the importance of good teaching. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or better has increased since the last inspection. The internal assessment team verifies the self-assessment reports of each programme area on an annual basis.

48 There are effective processes for gathering the views of students and external clients on the quality of the college's provision and services. Summaries of students' responses to questionnaires are distributed widely to staff but they are not issued to students as a matter of routine. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there is no formal process whereby managers can identify whether action is taken in response to the students' views. Teaching teams have developed effective ways of obtaining students' opinions about their courses. These include additional questionnaires, staff/student 'focus groups' and the attendance of students at course team meetings. Non-teaching teams have formal methods for gathering the views of those who use their services. Most teams also measure their effectiveness against agreed performance indicators. A survey was carried out of the views of local residents on what it was like to have the college as a neighbour. Other than through questionnaires to those attending parent evenings, the college does not routinely seek parents' views on its organisation and curriculum.

49 The college's charter has been revised. In their responses to questionnaires, students admitted that they had little knowledge of the charter. The students' lack of awareness of the charter was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Most students are now aware of the charter and of what it covers. The charter now forms part of the students'

handbook and it is introduced to students during their induction. The charter contains little specification of standards against which the college may be judged.

50 All staff receive a thorough annual review at which their performance is judged against specific job objectives. During their review, staff identify their training objectives. Staff report that the review system is well understood, sympathetically implemented, and useful to them. The overall plan for staff development in the college is drawn up in the light of the college's long-term and operational needs, the results of staff reviews and requests from staff teams. The college invests in excess of 1 per cent of the payroll budget in direct staff training costs. It estimates that the notional cost of the increasing amount of staff development activity which staff organise themselves in the college, and free training from external sources is equivalent to almost three times the actual staff training costs. Investor in People status was achieved by the college in December 1997.

Governance

Grade 2

51 Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report in relation to governance. They concluded that some strengths were overstated, however, and some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- the substantial involvement of governors in strategic planning processes
- the governors' strong commitment to the college
- individual governors' links with curriculum areas and support services
- the governors' close monitoring of important aspects of college operation
- the broad range of governors' expertise

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Weaknesses

- shortcomings in the operation of the audit committee
- the lack of written reports of committee meetings for the corporation

52 The FEFC audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. Although members operate in an open and transparent way, there are defects in the way the corporation operates. The audit committee has not fully met all of its responsibilities. For example, it has not given sufficient advice to the corporation on the internal control system.

53 The small but effective corporation has 11 members, including six who are independent governors. Four members are women, including the chair and deputy chair. There are staff, parent and co-opted members, a TEC nominee and the principal. A student observer has speaking rights but may not vote. All members serve on at least one committee of the corporation. Inspectors agreed with the college that, between them, members have a good range of professional skills which are used to the benefit of the college, for example, in finance, commerce, facilities management and education. In general, the corporation conducts its business through its employment and finance committee, its audit and remuneration committee and its accommodation working party. The employment and finance committee receives regular management accounts and informs the corporation of the college's performance in relation to these. However, there are shortcomings in reporting arrangements. The chairs of committees report orally on their work. Members do not receive the minutes of committee meetings.

54 The corporation has a comprehensive code of conduct that relates to the college's main policies and to relevant statutory instruments. Individual governors have good links with curriculum and service divisions of the college to enable them to have greater understanding of the college's work, but they do not involve themselves in operational matters. They helped to determine the priorities for the 1997 to 2000 strategic plan by participating in a wide range of strategic planning processes including a residential event. The corporation meets regularly and attendance at meetings is good, at 76 per cent. This attendance rate has been affected by the continuous absence of one member who has recently resigned, following long-term sickness.

55 Members of the corporation are highly committed to the college. There is a strong sense of team spirit among members. Members value the strong leadership provided by the principal and senior managers but do not necessarily accept all their recommendations. New members receive a thorough introduction to the college and information about their own responsibilities. They regularly monitor and review the college's performance against a range of indicators, especially those relating to the college's financial position. They are provided with clear and easy-to-read management accounts. They have also reviewed reports from a number of independent consultancies commissioned by the college to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the college's operations.

56 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the corporation is kept well informed of, and contributes to, the development of important policies such as equality of opportunity, and health and safety. Governors have helped to shape the college's strategies for widening participation and for tackling major issues relating to further education. Governors first evaluated their own performance when participating in the college's

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self-assessment process. They have not, however, established a set of performance indicators to help them in the evaluation of their own performance.

Management

Grade 2

57 The inspection team generally agreed with the college's assessment of its management but they disagreed with some specific judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective strategic and operational planning
- effective management of change
- good internal communications
- high participation of staff in numerous college activities
- the college's consistent achievement of most key performance targets
- the effective collaboration of the college with a wide range of partners
- the college's strong commitment to equality of opportunity and health and safety

Weaknesses

- the lack of time for some key staff to manage their work
- the lack of focus in management information reports
- varying rationale for allocating divisional budgets

58 The college has exceeded its main FEFC targets since incorporation and it has increased its effectiveness. It has also substantially improved strategic and operational planning. The college now offers a broader and more vocationally-oriented curriculum whilst retaining

the best features of its established general education courses. Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that its strategic plan is thorough and it is informed by detailed market information. It has been shared with Tyneside TEC and with a range of other partners. Staff participated in developing the current strategic plan. Each curriculum area and support area has clear operational statements and monitors its progress towards achieving strategic targets by specified deadlines.

59 The college has changed rapidly to be more responsive and efficient. This process of change has been managed well. Costs have been reduced and more responsibility has been delegated to staff. The senior management group consists of the principal and two directors responsible for curriculum and operations, respectively. The senior managers work well together, and with governors and staff. There is equal status between curriculum managers and managers of support services, and between support staff and teaching staff. Directors are responsible for a wide functional area, and they are supported by divisional managers and team leaders. The board of studies and the corporate services group oversee curriculum and operational matters effectively. There are numerous other committees and temporary working groups convened for a particular purpose and these are made up of teachers or support staff. There is a carefully-planned programme of meetings and this ensures that groups meet regularly.

60 College staff are well deployed. They receive a formal induction to their roles and they have well-defined job descriptions. Inspection confirmed that communication across the college is good. Staff display much enthusiasm for, and growing optimism about, their work. The roles of some staff, however, are still developing. The promotion of equality of opportunity and the observance of health and safety regulations are given high priority across the college. The college's self-assessment report

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failed to acknowledge that some key staff, and particularly those who are part time, have insufficient time to carry out their leadership role fully and effectively. Different managers have different rationales for allocating budgets to their teams. As a result, some teams are unclear how the budget allocation process operates and they are uncertain of the basis on which allocations are made.

61 College statistical returns to the FEFC are on time and generally accurate. The college's management system is effective but not user-friendly. The manager and his team provide comprehensive monthly management reports in a form that meet most managers' needs. However, the reports are bulky and, in some areas, difficult to analyse. They do not always focus clearly on key performance aspects and trends. The board of studies is investigating ways of making the reports more effective. The college has introduced an electronic system for registering students. The system is potentially effective. It has, however, not been fully understood by some teachers, and as a result, some unnecessary duplication of effort has occurred.

62 Inspectors agreed that the college has collaborated with a wide range of partners on strategic and operational issues. Senior managers and other staff attend meetings with staff from three local high schools from which the college recruits students. The college has been less successful in liaising with the many schools with sixth forms in the area. It values its participation in the North East Sixth Form Colleges' Forum and has a growing strategic partnership with Tyneside TEC. For example, projects are being developed with the TEC and with North Tyneside College. The college has learnt much about developing submissions for new curriculum projects. The TEC views the college as a willing partner in helping it to implement national education and training strategies, by providing, for example, new opportunities for young people who do not

normally participate in learning. The college has also developed courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Despite considerable efforts, the college has made little progress in providing services to employers.

63 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the financial management of the college is good. The college has a financial health score of A and has achieved a historical cost surplus in 1996-97. An appropriately-qualified director is well supported by the finance team. Inspection evidence confirmed that management accounts are produced monthly for review by the senior management group, the employment and finance committee and other governors. The average level of funding is £17.74 per unit for 1997-98. The median for sixth form colleges is £17.50 per unit. The college does not produce a 12-monthly rolling cashflow statement in the management of its accounts.

Conclusions

64 The college's self-assessment report was rigorous and detailed. It served as a useful basis upon which to plan the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report and with the grades awarded by the college to curriculum areas and for aspects of cross-college provision. The college's quality assurance system has been greatly improved by the self-assessment process. The college has implemented much of the action plan which accompanied its self-assessment report, and it has carried out significant improvements to its provision.

65 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	51
19-24 years	10
25+ years	38
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	6
Intermediate	38
Advanced	46
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	8
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	228	204	24
Engineering	6	43	3
Business	78	224	17
Hotel and catering	37	16	3
Health and community care	65	54	6
Art and design	130	87	12
Humanities	408	135	30
Basic education	67	19	5
Total	1,019	782	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	56	0	6	62
Supporting direct learning contact	10	0	0	10
Other support	29	0	0	29
Total	95	0	6	101

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,577,000	£4,105,000	£4,035,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.81	£17.81	£19.69
Payroll as a proportion of income	75%	66%	65%
Achievement of funding target	106%	117%	111%
Diversity of income	8%	12%	10%
Operating surplus	-£282,000	-£208,000	-£133,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	309	342	409
	Average point score per entry	4.7	4.9	4.9
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	58	78	75
	Percentage achieving qualification	72%	77%	81%
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	68	35
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	78%	91%
	Position in tables	*	top third	top 10%

Source: DfEE

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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