

Bede College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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

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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.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Bede College

Northern Region

Inspected January 1999

Bede College is a small sixth form college in Billingham in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees. The college's self-assessment report was comprehensive, evaluative and clearly written. The report was informed by an open and self-critical process of self-assessment which included lesson observations. Governors, managers, course teams and cross-college teams each evaluated their own performance. Inspectors, in planning and undertaking the inspection, found the college's self-assessment report helpful. It identified strengths and weaknesses relating to students' examination pass rates and retention which were supported by reliable college data. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report but concluded that it understated the quality of the college management.

The college offers a wide range of academic courses and some vocational courses. Over 90% of its students are aged 16 to 18 years. College provision covers seven of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Work in three programme areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. Teaching is generally good. On many courses, examination results are excellent or improving. Retention rates are variable and some are below national averages. Experienced governors use their professional skills well to shape the college's development.

The college is well managed. Subject, course and whole-college teams operate effectively. Communication at all levels is open and efficient. There is an appropriate emphasis on equal opportunities. Efficiency gains have been achieved while maintaining a high-quality experience for students. The financial management of the college is good. Strong links have been formed with local partner schools. Students receive a high level of support and care before entry to the college and whilst attending. Their academic performance is monitored thoroughly and they participate in a wide variety of enrichment activities. There is a strong commitment to continuous improvement across the college. The programme of staff development is effective. Accommodation is clean and well maintained. The new learning centre is well used by students. There has been good investment in IT. If it is to improve its provision, the college should: improve retention rates in some subjects; improve the quality of tutorials and student action-planning; enhance literacy and numeracy support for students and develop key skills; ensure all students make effective use of IT; continue with improvements to accommodation; and continue to improve quality assurance arrangements.

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 economics	2	General resources	2
English and media studies	2	Quality assurance	2
Government and politics, history, psychology and sociology	2	Governance	2
		Management	1

The College and its Mission

1 Bede College, established in 1972, is one of the smallest colleges of its type in England. It is the only sixth form college in Billingham, a town with a population of around 35,500, situated on the northern outskirts of the borough of Stockton-on-Tees. The borough is the largest of the four unitary authorities on Teesside created in 1996 following the reorganisation of the county of Cleveland. There is another sixth form college in the borough and a college of further education which operates on two sites, one of which is in Billingham. The population of the borough is 177,700. The average level of unemployment in the borough is 7.3% which is higher than the national average of 4.7%.

2 The college recruits mainly from three 11 to 16 schools in Billingham and attracts a growing number of students from neighbouring districts. Within the borough, there are nine other 11 to 16 schools, two 11 to 18 schools, three independent schools and four special schools from which the college recruits a small number of students. In 1998, approximately 58% of pupils of school-leaving age in the borough continued in full-time education compared with 71% nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A to C in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations was 40% compared with a national average of 46%.

3 The college operates in a competitive environment for post-16 education. Within half a mile of the college is the Billingham site of a local college of further education. At the time of inspection, the college of further education was awaiting the outcome of an appeal relating to a planning application to relocate to a single site in another part of the borough. Discussions have taken place between the two local colleges, the local community and education representatives to try to find a 'Billingham Solution' to post-16 education provision. This could involve Bede College working in collaboration with other providers to maintain

adequate and sufficient provision in Billingham. A feasibility study, supported by the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) 'Collaboration Fund', aims to assess the possible financial and curriculum gains to be achieved by the three colleges in the borough working together to reduce competition and to widen participation.

4 Bede College provides courses in seven of the FEFC programme areas. It employs 31 full-time equivalent teachers and 14 full-time equivalent support staff. In 1997-98, the college had 514 students. The college's management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, assistant principal and operations manager. Three of the management team plus two further staff are section heads who are responsible for supporting designated personal tutors and their students. Most staff have a number of responsibilities in addition to their teaching commitments.

5 The college's mission is concise: 'Bede College aims to provide a quality learning environment which supports every individual's unique needs'. In achieving its mission it aims:

- to remain independent
- to maintain its role as a provider of high-quality education for mainly 16 to 19 year olds
- to explore partnerships which will be of benefit to the Billingham community.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week commencing 11 January 1999. Before this, inspectors evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. The college chose to use data on students' achievements derived from the individualised student record (ISR) for the two years 1995-96 and 1996-97 to inform the inspection. It also submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1997-98. Inspectors

Context

checked these data against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists from examination bodies and found them to be accurate. The inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 32 days. Inspectors observed 44 lessons and seven tutorials, examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. Members of the team held meetings with representatives of the Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), students, college

governors, managers and staff, and a range of other people who have an interest in the college.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons observed, 63% were judged to be good or outstanding and 4% were rated less than satisfactory. These percentages are similar to the national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	5	15	13	1	0	34
GNVQ	0	5	1	0	0	6
Other, including GCSE	1	2	1	0	0	4
Tutorials	0	4	2	1	0	7
Total (No.)	6	26	17	2	0	51
Total (%)	12	51	33	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Bede College	14.7	82
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in science covering biology, chemistry, human biology and physics at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- highly effective teaching
- excellent achievement rates
- well-organised and well-managed subject teams
- supportive and well-qualified staff

Weaknesses

- below average retention rates
- some poor time management
- some inadequate accommodation

10 The three science subjects are well managed. They offer GCE A level courses for full-time students in biological science, chemistry and physics. Teachers meet regularly. They carefully analyse performance indicators and data relating to students' achievements, retention, attendance and progression to higher education. Some of these indicators are used to provide performance targets for individual students. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the science section has many productive links with external agencies. For example, teachers organise 'taster' events for local school pupils in years 9 and 10, and for primary school children. They also organise relevant visits for college students, including field trips and work with the 'Neighbourhood Engineers' scheme.

11 Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and use a variety of teaching styles to develop the interest of students. For example, students of biology

were introduced to genetic engineering in a novel way. They undertook a well-organised project involving a range of activities such as note-writing, research amongst current scientific texts, and the drafting of a related newspaper article. Teachers are generally lively and enthusiastic. They establish good relationships with students that encourage learning. Teaching materials are of high quality and students value the study and revision guides provided. Students' views of the quality of teaching are overwhelmingly positive. The checking of students' understanding is thorough. In a few lessons time was not used productively. Students use computers for wordprocessing and the analysis of data. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the use of information technology (IT) is underdeveloped. For example, during the inspection IT was not used in the laboratories and students made little use of the internet or CD-ROMs for their research.

12 Students work diligently in lessons. They return work on time and make good progress. In the laboratories they work safely and achieve appropriate standards in practical skills. Each student has targets for personal improvement. The analysis of value-added data shows that many students achieve examination results which are better than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE qualifications. Pass rates for GCE A level subjects are above the national averages at grades A to E and grades A to C. The pass rates at grades A to E for biology and human biology have been at 100% for the last three years. Those for chemistry have been at 97% or higher for the last three years. The pass rates for biological sciences and chemistry at the higher grades A to C were at least 20% above the national average in 1996 and 1997. The results for physics have been improving and are above the averages for 16 to 18 year old students in sixth form colleges for the last two years. As the self-assessment report identified, retention rates are below the average for similar colleges. Extra support sessions are offered to

Curriculum Areas

those students deemed to be at risk of leaving courses early. However, the arrangements are not fully effective as some students identified as requiring support do not attend the additional sessions offered.

13 The science laboratories are grouped together and conveniently situated close to preparation rooms and storage areas. The college's learning centre, with its computer suites, provides good access for science students. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the self-assessment report, that some of the science accommodation needs to be improved. Some students have to sit with their

backs to teachers during theory lessons because the shape or size of classrooms restricts the arrangement of furniture. Fume cupboards in the chemistry laboratory are poorly located. Some laboratories are overcrowded during practical lessons. Teachers are well qualified and many have higher degrees. All have substantial teaching experience and a high proportion are involved in industry-related activities with their students. Technical support staff are highly valued and contribute significantly to the smooth running of the departments.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	22	15	16
		Retention (%)	73	94	76
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	27	31	33
		Retention (%)	69	78	69
		Achievement (%)	96	100	97
GCE A level human biology	3	Expected completions	16	17	21
		Retention (%)	80	85	58
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	13	18	16
		Retention (%)	72	62	62
		Achievement (%)	*	94	100

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Business and Economics

Grade 2

14 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE A level business and economics, and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) business at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- good and improving pass rates
- improved quality of GNVQ programmes
- thorough monitoring of students' performance and progress
- strong personal support provided to students

Weaknesses

- lack of variety and challenge in some lessons
- poor links with industry
- low retention rates on advanced level courses

15 Teachers work well as a team, planning lessons jointly and developing the curriculum. Issues identified through team meetings and in response to students' views of teaching result in appropriate action. Teachers have recently introduced better methods for recording students' progress and improved the presentation of examination statistics. Syllabuses have been changed to ones which students find more relevant. For example, modular courses have been introduced, leading to an improvement in examination results. Teachers analyse carefully the reasons given by students who leave their courses, and course teams set retention targets. Performance against these and other targets is monitored termly.

16 Teachers have developed good schemes of work to a common format. They prepare well for lessons and ensure that appropriate learning resources are available to students. They use a variety of teaching methods which helps to ensure that students work productively and remain interested. Teachers check students' knowledge and understanding regularly. Their relaxed and friendly manner encourages students to participate in lessons and results in energetic discussions. Tight deadlines are set for the return of work and most students meet them. Students work well in groups. For example, students in GCE A level business studies, having been given clear guidelines, devised an effective group presentation on a relevant topic. In a few lessons, the teaching was slow and unimaginative, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. This had not improved at the time of inspection. Assessment is well planned, thorough and to national standards. Teachers do not always provide sufficient comment on marked work to enable students to improve their performance. The internal verification process for GNVQ provision is effective. Teachers monitor the performance of students and take prompt and effective action in response to poor punctuality or non-attendance at lessons.

17 Students on GNVQ programmes understand the grading criteria used for assessment. They are familiar with the concept of key skills and the procedures for claiming achievement of those skills. Student performance in examinations has been above the national average for the past two years and improved significantly in 1998. Students on the GNVQ intermediate course achieved a 100% pass rate in 1998. The examination pass rate for GCE A level business studies went from 72% in 1996 to 97% in 1998. A large proportion of advanced level students progress to higher education. Many students on business courses progress from GNVQ intermediate level to advanced level. The GCE A level economics course has faced low recruitment and

Curriculum Areas

diminishing retention figures. The self-assessment report acknowledged that retention rates are low in GCE A level business studies. On courses which have low retention rates, students are provided with additional personal support.

18 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. Accommodation is adequate but the small size of some rooms limits the range of teaching and learning activities which can be

used. Students have good access to modern IT but staff have insufficient access to computers at peak times. Most students make effective use of the internet but students on GNVQ advanced business courses are not consulting a wide enough range of sources of information in their research. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the self-assessment report that business students and teachers have insufficient contact with relevant employers.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	30	14	27
		Retention (%)	100	64	74
		Achievement (%)	63	67	95
GCE A level business studies	3	Expected completions	22	37	40
		Retention (%)	82	78	73
		Achievement (%)	72	93	97
GCE A level economics	3	Expected completions	12	*	15
		Retention (%)	92	*	80
		Achievement (%)	73	*	92

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

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

English and Media Studies

Grade 2

19 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering GCE A level English literature, English language, English language and literature, media studies and GCSE English language. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- attractive learning environment for students
- effective teamwork by teachers
- some good pass rates
- high standard of students' written work
- good use of IT

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates for grades A to C in GCE A level subjects
- below national average retention on GCE A level courses

20 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the department responsible for provision in English and media studies is well managed. It provides a good range of English courses and has introduced media studies and film studies to broaden its provision. Half of the students in the college undertake courses within the department. Recruitment to the GCE A level English language and literature course has steadily increased over the past three years. Members of the department work productively together in managing and developing programmes. Each teacher takes responsibility for one or more courses, producing appropriate teaching resources which they share with colleagues. Team meetings are constructive. The department handbook is reviewed regularly. Course documentation is up to date. Detailed

class records are kept. Staff review the quality of provision regularly and monitor retention and destination data carefully.

21 Teaching is satisfactory. Schemes of work for each subject identify how key skills might be developed. They also show how IT can be used to support learning and identify potential links with other curriculum areas. In the best lessons, teachers used challenging and thought-provoking questions to encourage students to analyse complex issues. For example, a lesson on *The Taming of the Shrew* explored how women are perceived in the play; students contributed well in response to deft questioning and the teacher used the whiteboard to develop a clear framework for a related essay. To extend learning beyond the classroom, a variety of external visits are arranged to theatres, workshops and language conferences. Inspection agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report that teachers provide students with effective advice and guidance. Students spoke enthusiastically about the support which they receive. Written comments on students' work challenge and support the more able students but are less helpful for less able students.

22 Students are conscientious and punctual. Their examination achievements are good. The pass rate in GCE A level English language and literature was 100% in 1998 and it has been above 90% for the past three years. Students' achievements at grades A to C, however, are generally below the national averages for similar colleges, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report. Value-added analysis shows that students also perform less well than would be predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades on entry. Retention is improving in most GCE A level subjects except English literature. The retention rates in GCSE English language are good and steadily improving, from 86% in 1996 to 92% in 1998. This is higher than both the national average for similar colleges and the overall college rate. Students' written work is well presented and of a high standard. Students

Curriculum Areas

use IT extensively. For example, in one class each student explored the internet, gaining substantial information relevant to their work. The information gathered was shared with other members of the class.

23 Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable in their subjects. They update themselves on curriculum issues and in their use

of IT. All staff have their own teaching rooms. Each has a good stock of teaching resources. The walls have attractive and thoughtful displays of posters, current articles and students' work. Teachers are taking action to improve students' use of the full range of learning resources provided by the college.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in English and media studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English language	2	Expected completions	18	34	23
		Retention (%)	86	89	92
		Achievement (%)	61	53	70
GCE A level English literature	3	Expected completions	22	10	18
		Retention (%)	79	77	67
		Achievement (%)	95	70	100
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Expected completions	6	28	32
		Retention (%)	50	68	78
		Achievement (%)	100	93	91
GCE A level English language	3	Expected completions	27	23	34
		Retention (%)	79	77	81
		Achievement (%)	81	100	79
GCE A level media studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	76
		Achievement (%)	*	*	81

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

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Government and Politics, History, Psychology and Sociology

Grade 2

24 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering GCE A level government and politics, history, psychology and sociology. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but judged that some of the strengths in relation to planning were overstated whilst those for course management were understated.

Key strengths

- above average pass rates in most subjects
- hard-working and responsive students
- rigorous course management
- constructive and detailed written feedback to students

Weaknesses

- lack of detail in lesson plans
- under-performing students in psychology
- limited use of IT

25 Courses are managed effectively. Teachers hold regular formal and informal team meetings. They work well together, contributing to curriculum management and decision-making. They devise effective action plans which include targets for the achievement of objectives. Students' progress is monitored rigorously. Course documentation is generally good. There are comprehensive student handbooks for each subject area, a strength which was not identified in the self-assessment report.

26 Teaching is good overall. In the better lessons, teachers use skilful questioning to

encourage students to think and also to assess how well they had understood. For example, in a lesson on the emergence of law and order as a political issue, the teacher used questions to encourage students to identify key issues. Students then analysed political manifestos to assess the relevance of the issues identified. In the poorer lessons, some students are not encouraged sufficiently to participate in the lesson. Too many lesson plans focus on content rather than learning outcomes. They do not take account of each student's learning styles and needs. The self-assessment report noted as a strength the fact that key skills are identified in schemes of work. Inspection confirmed that teachers are aware of the opportunities for students to gain key skills in all lessons. However, students make insufficient use of IT to support their learning. Students' progress and performance are monitored well. Teachers rigorously monitor students' attendance and punctuality and include targets for improving retention in their action plans. Homework is set and marked regularly and returned promptly. Written feedback on students' work is detailed and constructive. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are corrected.

27 Students are enthusiastic, hard working and responsive. They enjoy their studies. Most subjects at GCE A level have pass rates which are above national averages. In 1998, the pass rates in government and politics and sociology were 100%. The pass rate for GCE A level psychology fell in 1998 but for the previous two years had been above the national average. Value-added analysis shows that in 1996 and 1997 students on sociology courses performed better than predicted from their GCSE scores. Students on psychology courses performed less well than predicted in each of the three years to 1998. In 1996, retention rates for government and politics and sociology were substantially below the national average but improved in the two subsequent years. The self-assessment report acknowledged strengths and weaknesses in retention rates.

Curriculum Areas

28 Specialist teaching resources for these subjects are of high quality. Accommodation is of a good standard, well maintained and decorated. Classrooms are comfortably furnished. Teachers have appropriate qualifications and experience. Most hold a teaching qualification. Students are supplied with appropriate course texts. Additional good learning resources are available in classrooms and in the learning centre.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in government and politics, history, psychology and sociology, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level history	3	Expected completions	37	28	40
		Retention (%)	83	82	75
		Achievement (%)	87	96	97
GCE A level psychology	3	Expected completions	16	34	38
		Retention (%)	63	56	74
		Achievement (%)	80	80	75
GCE A level sociology	3	Expected completions	20	12	15
		Retention (%)	60	83	80
		Achievement (%)	100	90	100

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

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

29 Inspectors observed seven tutorials during the inspection. The self-assessment report was detailed and provided a good critique of this aspect of provision. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report but found a few additional weaknesses. Good progress has been made in addressing some of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment.

Key strengths

- strong links with local partner schools
- well-established and thorough procedures for enrolment, induction and guidance
- effective support and care
- good participation in a wide variety of enrichment activities
- detailed monitoring of academic performance

Weaknesses

- inconsistencies in the quality of tutorials
- underdeveloped systems for literacy and numeracy support
- lack of systematic action-planning for students

30 The college has well-established and strong links with its partner schools, a strength identified in its self-assessment report. In response to the schools' needs the college plans a wide range of events designed to familiarise pupils with the college and its curriculum. For example, the 'science and IT' event involved 150 year 10 pupils from six schools. They spent half a day in the college working on scientific investigations. Many school pupils visit the college as part of year 11 group visits. They participate in a range of curriculum-based activities.

31 The college works hard to ensure that prospective students are placed on appropriate courses. The well-established recruitment, enrolment and induction procedures are thorough and effective. They include detailed arrangements for interviewing students, recording their progression, and informing students about future courses. Prospective students are well informed about the range of opportunities available in the college. The college organises a popular 'preview' induction programme, which allows students to sample subjects, meet teachers, and become familiar with the college. Students speak highly of the advice they receive from teachers and of the quality of the college's publicity. There are sound procedures to assist students in changing their course or subject.

32 Students benefit from the support and care provided by staff, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers are helpful and approachable, and students value their support, particularly in relation to confidential problems. Tutors meet their allocated tutor groups regularly to inform students of important issues. The monitoring of students' academic performance is effective. Students are aware of their personal targets. Tutors arrange a termly meeting with each student to check achievement against targets and to update their record of progress. The process, however, focuses on subject-specific targets rather than more general learning targets, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. The reviewing of students' progress does not result in the completion of an overall individual action plan. The college is piloting new arrangements to improve action-planning.

33 Each student's personal development programme is arranged through group and individual tutorials. Each section head monitors tutorial provision but the self-assessment report identified as a weakness the variation in the quality of tutorials. The observation of tutorials confirmed this judgement. The co-ordinator of the personal development programme has

Cross-college Provision

produced a package of materials to support tutors in an attempt to improve the consistency of tutorials. A full evaluation of these materials has yet to be undertaken.

34 If students require professional counselling, they are referred to external agencies. There is a thorough and effective system for supporting students applying to higher education. In 1998, 75% of those completing advanced level courses successfully progressed to higher education. The support for students seeking employment is limited, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. The college has appointed a careers co-ordinator who works with tutors and the careers service to provide students with appropriate advice. The college arranged a 'progression day' to inform all first-year students of the opportunities available. Lessons were cancelled to enable students to participate fully in the various career activities. Students' responses to the day were very positive.

35 Students on foundation and intermediate level courses undertake an initial assessment to determine whether they need additional support with literacy or numeracy. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the co-ordination of literacy and numeracy support is still underdeveloped, despite the fact that this weakness was identified by inspectors during the last inspection. Students are clear about the support available but their individual learning plans are insufficiently detailed. Subject teachers and learning centre staff are not always adequately informed about which students need support and whether they are receiving it.

36 The college offers a wide range of enrichment courses which enable students to develop personal qualities and skills. Some 25 courses are available, in recreational and competitive sport, music and performing arts and other areas. The college's football and netball teams participate in local leagues and competitions. Short courses covering topics such as first aid, a community sports leadership award and the Duke of Edinburgh award also

feature in the programme. Most students participate in enrichment activities and the average attendance is good at 87%.

General Resources

Grade 2

37 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. The college had taken action to address many of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and well-decorated interiors
- good monitoring and control of room use
- well-developed learning centre and careers area
- investment in up-to-date IT
- attention to running costs

Weaknesses

- poor fabric of the building
- limited access to some areas for students with restricted mobility

38 The college is on a single site which is shared with a comprehensive school, a primary school, and a private day nursery. The comprehensive school provides access to its sports facilities for college students. These include a swimming pool, sports hall and playing fields. Since the last inspection, car parking has been improved substantially. The external fabric of the steel-framed building is poor. The concrete cladding is deteriorating. Insulation is poor and heating costs are high. Nevertheless, the college obtains value for money in maintaining its resources through effective use of external consultants and careful control of expenditure on services and purchases. The governing body knows that the

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present buildings are inadequate. The college's accommodation strategy carefully considers most of the improvement options available. The self-assessment report acknowledged that progress with this strategy has been delayed because the college is awaiting decisions on the relocation of the general further education college within the borough.

39 A high priority is given to the provision of a secure and pleasant working environment for students and staff. Buildings are kept clean and are well decorated. There is a three-year maintenance and decorating programme. The condition of rooms and furnishings is good and these are checked monthly. The pleasant common area for students is overcrowded at peak periods. Staff also have a common room with a work area and simple catering facilities. Wall displays, many of which include students' work, enliven classrooms and corridors. The displays are changed regularly.

40 There have been a number of improvements to the interior of the college since the last inspection. A new careers area has been established. It has interview rooms and is equipped with appropriate computers and other resources. Student evaluations of this area show that it is well used and valued highly. A temporary building houses the mathematics subjects. The refectory and students' common room have been improved. Room usage is carefully monitored and well managed. Some rooms are too small for the groups using them. A number of walls are thin and offer poor sound insulation which causes occasional disruption to lessons. Students with restricted mobility do not have access to curriculum areas on the first floor, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

41 The college has improved the quality and quantity of its learning resources since the last inspection. Well-qualified and valued staff have, in a short time, made a substantial contribution to the development of a new learning centre which houses library and IT facilities.

Inspection concurred with the many strengths identified in the comprehensive self-assessment report for this area. The report also identified other developments for the learning centre. A number of these were completed before the inspection. The learning centre is open for nine hours each day and is well used by students. Surveys show that over 60% of students use the learning centre daily. There has been a considerable investment in new computers, most of which are networked. The ratio of full-time students to computers is 8:1. Regular evaluation of the learning centre by students has identified that, at peak periods, students have some difficulty getting access to computers. Teachers also have problems with access since there are few computers for their exclusive use. The lack of a computerised cataloguing system for library resources was recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report and its purchase has been given a high priority. Funds allocated to the learning centre are below national library figures. The library bookstock is supplemented by books held in departments but there is no central record of the texts held in departments.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

42 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its quality assurance arrangements. Several of the weaknesses identified during self-assessment had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- a strong commitment to improvement
- action taken to improve college performance
- comprehensive and rigorous self-assessment
- effective arrangements to induct staff and review their performance

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- an effective staff development programme

Weaknesses

- the omission of some cross-college functions from the quality system
- no sustained improvement in student retention

43 There is a strong college-wide commitment to quality assurance. This is reflected in the college's strategic objectives and the involvement of all staff in assessing the quality of provision. The framework for quality assurance builds on existing procedures and has improved since the last inspection. This strength was identified in the college's self-assessment report. Many of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed by the time of the inspection. For example, the rigour with which the quality reviews are completed has improved significantly. College data show that examination pass rates are either improving or being maintained at a high level. For example, overall pass rates in GCE A level courses have been maintained at above 90%. Students' achievements at GNVQ advanced levels improved from 68% to 90% between 1995 and 1998. Student retention rates, however, have not shown the same degree of improvement.

44 Subject teams complete interim quality reports in January and April each year. Teams are required to use a wide range of evidence in assessing the quality of provision, for example data on attendance, retention, coursework performance and external examiners' reports. These are compared with targets set at subject level to reflect college targets. The annual self-assessment report was completed in July and draws additional evidence from students' views of provision and the college's process for observing teaching and learning. A further report is written in September to take account of students' performance in examinations. College managers respond in writing to each report and

discuss their findings with the teams for which they are responsible.

45 The college produced its first self-assessment report in 1996-97. The report produced for this inspection covers all aspects of the college's operation and builds upon existing quality assurance procedures. It is comprehensive and provides a clear assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of college provision. It gives appropriate attention to most aspects of teaching and learning. The judgements in the report are supported by a wide range of evidence although, in a few cases, insufficient account was taken of the observation of lessons. A group of managers met regularly to manage the self-assessment process and validate the judgements in the report. A selection of interim reports and the final self-assessment report were validated by the chair of governors.

46 Inspectors judged that the weakness identified in the self-assessment report about insufficient links between quality assurance and operational planning had been resolved. During inspection, staff expressed their support for the quality assurance system and the way it is being developed. Teams complete the various quality reports conscientiously. Some aspects of quality assurance are not yet fully developed. For example, the questionnaires used by subjects to determine the views of students are not analysed at college level to show responses and improvements to provision.

47 All cross-college teams are involved in the quality assurance cycle. They use performance indicators to assess the quality of provision. Evidence is collected and strengths and weaknesses identified. New targets are established following a review of performance. A steering group, which meets monthly, receives regular reports on the quality of the GNVQ courses and disseminates good practice. The self-assessment report acknowledged that some functions are not yet part of the quality assurance cycle. These functions include staff

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development, the quality assurance system itself, and the operation of some college policies.

48 Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report that the process of inducting and developing staff is supportive and effective. New teachers are assigned a mentor for at least their first term. Their teaching, including a tutorial, is observed and they undertake a professional review at the end of the first term. All staff undertake a professional review with a member of the management team every 15 months. These reviews are well managed and draw on a wide range of evidence. The staff development programme takes account of the college's strategic objectives, those derived from professional reviews and through the quality assurance process. The annual programme comprises an appropriate mixture of in-house activity, including five whole-college development days and a suitable range of external events. Despite these strengths, the college has been slow to apply for Investor in People status.

Governance

Grade 2

49 Inspectors and the audit service agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report relating to governance.

Key strengths

- wide range of governor expertise that benefits the college
- effective financial monitoring
- strong role of governors in shaping the college's future
- familiarity of governors with the college's work

Weaknesses

- no targets for the performance of governors
- shortcomings in some aspects of committee work

50 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.

51 The governing body has recently increased its size to 17 members and has one vacancy. Six members are women. Governors have a wide range of professional expertise which is used extensively by the college. One governor with industrial health and safety expertise chairs the health and safety committee. The two members from universities bring considerable experience. For example, they provide advice on dealing with university entrance. Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report that the governing body ensures it maintains effective communication with all staff. The student and staff governors keep colleagues informed about the governing body and raise matters on their behalf. Governors are frequent visitors to the college. For example, they have attended parents' evenings, student introductory events, and presentation evenings. The chair recently attended a staff meeting and met groups of students. Staff know the governors well and welcome the extent of their interest in the college.

52 The governing body identified the lack of a structured training and induction programme for governors as a weakness in the self-assessment report. This weakness has been addressed by a recent skills audit and an analysis of training needs. New governors

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report that their informal induction was helpful. A formal induction process has been agreed and training sessions are to be introduced.

53 Although the governing body ensures that it fulfils its statutory duties through an annual review, the first full self-assessment of the governing body's work was in preparation for the inspection. A detailed calendar of business and schedule of meetings ensures that the governing body carries out its duties in a timely manner. However, a number of aspects relating to the composition and operation of the governing body and its committees do not comply with best practice. Targets are not set for the governing body's performance. The governing body is supported by committees relating to: finance; audit; remuneration; search; and health and safety. The finance committee reviews the college management accounts, closely monitors the setting of the annual budget, and is active in ensuring the financial stability of the college. The search committee meets as required in order to fill vacancies. Its deliberations and actions are reported verbally. The governing body receives detailed reports on health and safety and basic statistics relating to equal opportunities. Minutes of the governing body do not always indicate clearly that the audit committee's recommendations have been addressed.

54 The governing body conducts its business openly. Confidential minuting of governing body and committee business is minimal. It has a long-standing 'whistleblowing' policy and complaints procedure. The governing body has a code of conduct and standing orders. All governors and members of the college's management team have completed a register of interests. Minutes and other papers such as the register of interests are available for inspection by the public in the college's administrative office but this is not advertised widely.

55 Governors play an important role in shaping the future direction of the college. They have considered a range of options for the

college's future and regularly review its mission statement and general aims. They consider the strategic and operational plans carefully. The governing body has improved its strategic planning, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. From 1998, the governing body has received termly, rather than annual, reports on progress towards objectives. At each of its meetings the governing body considers a summary report from the principal which includes important numerical indicators such as students' attendance, retention and pass rates and summary reports on the views of students and staff.

Management

Grade 1

56 Inspection concurred with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. The weaknesses identified in the report are being addressed.

Key strengths

- effective subject and course management
- strong whole-college team spirit
- open and honest communication at all levels
- emphasis on equal opportunities
- improving efficiency whilst maintaining a high-quality student experience
- thorough monitoring of college performance
- prudent financial management

Weaknesses

- too many routine tasks carried by senior managers

57 The college is well managed at all levels. Staffing costs have been carefully controlled, and student:staff ratios and class sizes

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increased. There have been no compulsory redundancies and staff morale and motivation are high. Targets for enrolments have been exceeded. In 1997-98, the estimated actual average level of funding was reduced to £15.96 which is below the FEFC's convergence level. The college's students consistently achieve some of the best GCE A level results in the Northern Region. The college regularly appears in the top 10% of all colleges in the further education sector for average points score per GCE A level candidate in performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment.

58 The college has a flat organisational structure, containing few posts below the management team which carry permanent management responsibilities. Management arrangements at course and subject level are unusual but effective. Teachers work in teams associated with subjects or courses. The teams are responsible for deciding which of their members take particular roles, for example for monitoring finances, liaising with schools, or acting as co-ordinator for the team. Additional salary allowances are only made to those teachers who carry particular cross-college responsibilities. All roles and job descriptions are reviewed annually. The system is well understood and valued by staff. All teaching teams meet regularly to discuss details of their work, the progress of students, and a range of management information relating to their courses. The self-assessment report recognised that these arrangements, although effective, leave senior managers with too many routine duties. Management team members are taking action to address this, for example by ensuring that their meetings focus less on operational detail. They are also making provision for more management training.

59 There is a strong team spirit across the college. Discussions with staff reveal a remarkable sense of common purpose. Throughout the college, staff and students consult and communicate openly and honestly with each other. Managers offer an 'open door'

to staff for consultation. Minutes of management team meetings are posted on the staff noticeboard. All staff are asked to comment on the performance of individual managers and the management team as a whole. All students are asked to comment on the quality of teaching. Summary reports on aspects of cross-college provision are displayed on college noticeboards. Regular staff meetings are open to all staff, and these act both as a channel of information and a way of determining staff views. A staff consultation group debates issues relating to the curriculum and advises the management team. Working parties are set up as required to tackle specific issues.

60 Staff express wholehearted support for the mission and broad aims of the college. The current strategic and operational plans are well known to staff who identify strongly with them. The self-assessment report identified a number of weaknesses in the processes through which the plans were developed and in the monitoring of progress. During 1998-99, a formal development cycle is being used which strengthens links between quality assurance and the financial and planning cycles. It is enabling a range of information to be considered in a more structured manner. The operational plan now has objectives allocated to responsible staff and deadlines for their achievement. Progress towards the objectives is formally monitored each term.

61 The college plays a significant role in local developments. It works actively with the Tees Valley TEC and has responded where appropriate to its labour market information. The college's predominant market is 16 to 19 year olds and marketing efforts are principally directed at partner schools. Extensive links have been nurtured at management and curriculum level which ensure that high-quality, detailed information about prospective students, and about college resources, curriculum and performance is exchanged.

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62 The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The policy is supported by papers which advise on good practice. The core tutorial curriculum for all students addresses issues relating to gender, race, disability, harassment and sexual orientation. A college manual usefully collects together the policies, procedures and principles which guide the college's work. The college complies with its statutory duties with regard to worship. The college's Christian Union has weekly meetings which are open to all and widely advertised.

63 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. This concurs with the judgement in the self-assessment report. The college has a small but appropriately sized finance team. Its finances are tightly controlled and it has managed to accumulate a reasonable level of reserves which are invested to generate a small investment income. However, the current three-year financial forecast indicates that the college's financial position will deteriorate. The results of the work of the internal auditors do not indicate any significant control weaknesses. The level and detail of management accounts are adequate to meet the needs of the college. Financial regulations are clear and concise, and are updated regularly.

64 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the present management information systems have enabled the college to make accurate and timely statistical returns to the FEFC. Essential curriculum, financial, staffing and student information is regularly and widely distributed. Extensive data relating to college performance are analysed monthly and discussed at the management meetings. Staff with cross-college responsibilities make regular formal reports to the management team.

Conclusions

65 The college's self-assessment arrangements are thorough and self-critical. The college composed its first self-assessment report in 1996-97. The self-assessment report produced for inspection contained clearly expressed, evaluative judgements based on robust evidence. It provided a sound basis for planning the inspection. The process of self-assessment encompassed all aspects of the college's provision and involved contributions for each subject area. Contributory self-assessment reports contained comprehensive action plans. The college had addressed many of the weaknesses by the time of inspection. The judgements contained in the various reports were verified by the vice-principal and a college manager. A sample of these reports was verified further by the chair of governors. Inspectors agreed with all judgements for the curriculum areas inspected and all the cross-college aspects except management, for which inspectors thought the college was overcritical.

66 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 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	92
19-24 years	5
25+ years	3
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	3
Intermediate	4
Advanced	93
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	136	1	26
Business	58	2	12
Hotel and catering	18	0	4
Health and community care	28	12	8
Art and design	28	3	6
Humanities	219	4	43
Basic education	5	0	1
Total	492	22	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 16% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (December 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	29	2	0	31
Supporting direct learning contact	5	0	0	5
Other support	9	0	0	9
Total	43	2	0	45

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£1,391,000	£1,441,000	£1,425,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.97	£17.05	£16.48
Payroll as a proportion of income	73%	72%	73%
Achievement of funding target	112%	129%	103%
Diversity of income	8%	6%	7%
Operating surplus	-£89,000	-£19,000	-£71,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	63	51	36	8	4	2
	Retention (%)	25	90	83	75	100	100
	Achievement (%)	100	59	90	100	25	100
2	Expected completions	81	105	145	1	12	2
	Retention (%)	78	90	81	100	75	100
	Achievement (%)	97	51	50	100	56	0
3	Expected completions	–	818	740	–	3	9
	Retention (%)	–	72	66	–	0	33
	Achievement (%)	88	85	89	89	n/a	67
4 or 5	Expected completions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Expected completions	11	61	99	0	84	166
	Retention (%)	100	100	98	n/a	99	96
	Achievement (%)	100	64	74	n/a	59	78
Unknown/ unclassified	Expected completions	n/a	72	49	22	70	58
	Retention (%)	n/a	96	63	n/a	86	83
	Achievement (%)	n/a	54	84	n/a	100	92

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

n/a not applicable

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