

Bexley College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

**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.

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	9

Curriculum areas

Mathematics and information technology	12
Construction	18
Engineering	24
Business	31
Health and care	36
ESOL and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	43
Basic skills	50

Cross-college provision

Support for students	55
General resources	63
Quality assurance	69
Governance	78
Management	87
Conclusions	95

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 104 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 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 students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Bexley College ***Greater London Region***

Inspected February 2000

Bexley College is a general further education college in the London Borough of Bexley.

In preparation for the inspection and following a process of consultation with staff and corporation members, the college produced a self-assessment report which identified many of the strengths and weaknesses of its provision. Inspectors considered that weaknesses in teaching and learning and in some aspects of cross-college provision were understated in the self-assessment report. The report did not acknowledge fully the unreliability of the college's data on student retention and achievement rates.

The college provides courses in all 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in six of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has been successful in widening participation and attracting those who may not previously have considered entering further education. It has increased the number of adult students by offering a range of courses on Saturdays and during traditional holiday periods. Since the last inspection, the college has improved student retention and achievement rates on some courses. It has

developed links with schools and has productive partnerships with private sector and public sector employers. Governors and managers work well together. The college provides good courses in construction and business studies. Courses are well managed. Teaching in many areas is satisfactory or good. The college should improve: the monitoring and evaluation of its student support service; teaching in some areas; some students' attendance and punctuality; student retention and achievement rates on some courses; the quality of annual reports from some course teams; the reliability of data on students' achievements and retention; and the monitoring of students' performance by governors and senior managers.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and information technology	3	Support for students	3
Construction	2	General resources	3
Engineering	3	Quality assurance	3
Business	2	Governance	3
Health and care	3	Management	3
ESOL and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Bexley College is a general further education college in the London Borough of Bexley. It serves predominantly urban areas within south east London and north Kent. The college has three main sites situated in the north of Bexley and a smaller site in Sidcup in the south of the borough. The college also provides courses for a range of employers, using employers' premises in Woolwich and Dartford. The borough is home to a diverse community, which includes a significant number of minority ethnic groups. The majority of the college's students are from Bexley, but a significant proportion, approaching 40%, come from outside the borough.

2 The different needs of students are met through a range of courses at pre-foundation, foundation, intermediate and advanced level. There are courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs); general certificate of secondary education (GCSE); and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A levels). The college also provides a number of access courses for students who do not have formal qualifications. Courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) are offered in nine occupational areas. The college, through its managing agency, provides modern apprenticeships and training to around 300 trainees. A specialist unit provides the education and training option for New Deal. Bexley College is an associate college of the University of Greenwich.

3 In November 1999, the college enrolled a total of 7,569 students, 2,357 of whom were on full-time courses. During the last five years, the balance between 16 to 19 year old students and adult students has shifted significantly. Over 65% of the college's students are over the age of 19.

4 The college competes with other educational institutions. Within Bexley, there are both grammar schools and comprehensive schools with sixth forms. Close to Bexley there are

three other general further education colleges. Employment opportunities in the area are diverse. Many local residents work in London. The unemployment rate in the area is 8.6%, which is slightly above the national average. There are pockets of high unemployment in the northern wards of Crayford, Thamesmead and Slade Green.

5 Since the last inspection, the college has expanded its construction and engineering provision to meet the extra demand created by course closures in other local colleges. This expansion has been accompanied by improvements in physical resources and a considerable increase in the number of women students working in areas where, traditionally, men have been in the majority. The college's commitment to equal opportunities is recognised in its aim to encourage students to learn, irrespective of their race, gender or age.

6 The college's mission was reviewed by the corporation in June 1999 with an intention to redefine priorities up to the year 2003. The purpose of the review was to aim for a sharper focus on widening participation, community service and lifelong learning whilst retaining the college's overall commitment to vocational training and education.

7 The college has specified a number of 'strategic aims' for the period 1999 to 2003.

These are:

- assisting students to be well prepared for and coping with life
- preparing students for employment
- ensuring that all clients achieve their primary learning aims
- ensuring that the college environment enables all students to fulfil their potential
- developing staff as a key resource
- managing all resources, both public and private, effectively and ethically
- working closely with other providers to widen participation and support lifelong learning.

Context

8 The college intends to continue to develop these aims and to ensure that governors and senior managers monitor progress in achieving them. To assist the college in achieving its aims, a number of initiatives are being developed and refined. These include:

- the completion of a major workshop rebuilding programme
- the initiation and construction of a major link bridge programme to improve access for people with disabilities
- a language partnership programme for business with Dartford Grammar School
- growth in the modern apprenticeships
- improving students' leisure facilities
- promotion of education opportunities within local minority ethnic communities
- extension of a 'School Link' programme
- further development of the New Deal programme.

The Inspection

9 The college was inspected during the week beginning 14 February 2000. The inspection team had previously considered the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on student retention and achievement rates for 1999 which were validated against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The individualised student record (ISR) information on student retention and achievement rates for 1997 and 1998 was also used by inspectors. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor working in the college for a total of 56 days. Five inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training the college provided in construction, engineering, business

and hairdressing. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading the college's FEFC-funded provision. Inspectors also inspected basic skills across the college.

10 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 51% were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% to be less than satisfactory or poor, compared with national figures of 65% and 6% respectively, for 1998-99.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	1	3	3	0	0	7
GNVQ	2	7	4	1	0	14
NVQ	2	5	6	1	1	15
Other vocational	2	6	7	1	0	16
Other*	4	10	15	1	0	30
Total (No.)	11	31	35	4	1	82
Total (%)	13	38	43	5	1	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

*includes ESOL and basic skills courses, and tutorials

11 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Bexley College	8.9	65
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Information Technology

Grade 3

12 Inspectors observed 10 lessons from a range of courses in mathematics and information technology (IT). They agreed with most of the judgements contained in the college's self-assessment report but considered that weaknesses concerning students' achievements were understated.

Key strengths

- much good teaching particularly in linking theory and practice
- good course documentation
- good pass rates in NVQ IT

Weaknesses

- a lack of IT support in mathematics teaching
- students' poor results in GCSE mathematics and computer literacy and information technology
- lack of co-ordination of mathematics provision

13 IT courses are effectively managed by the school of information technology and access studies. There is a range of courses from foundation to advanced level. There are, however, insufficient suitable alternative courses for those students for whom a GCSE mathematics course is not appropriate. GCE A level mathematics is provided by the school of GCE and GCSE studies but other mathematics courses are organised by other schools. The co-ordination of mathematics across the college is poor and aspects of good practice are not shared among staff.

14 Much of the teaching is good. Teachers effectively link theory with practical work. In many of the lessons observed, topics were

related to realistic situations, which were relevant to the students' experience. Teachers devise good learning materials and these are used effectively in lessons to further students' acquisition of specific skills and understanding of particular concepts. In an advanced GNVQ lesson in IT, students were all involved in a stimulating discussion. The teacher encouraged all students to contribute to this and one student felt confident enough to address the whole group using a diagram to demonstrate his ideas. However, in a few less effective lessons, the students quickly lost interest in their work. Visual aids are used to good effect by teachers. Inspectors agreed with the strengths in teaching and learning acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

15 The student achievement rate on the NVQ course in IT is good. Students' results in GCSE mathematics, and GCSE computer literacy and information technology, however, are poor. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the retention rate on part-time courses, attended mainly by adult students, is good and sometimes excellent. Student retention rates on full-time courses are mainly poor. Many full-time students have a poor attendance record. The initial testing of students, carried out during induction, is not always effective. Students receive insufficient guidance when choosing their course. For example, some students are on mathematics courses which are too demanding for them. Computer literacy and information technology sessions are offered within several programme areas. However, some students do not complete enough modules to enable them to gain a full qualification. These weaknesses are understated in the college's self-assessment report. The college is aware of them and has produced an appropriate action plan to rectify them.

16 Classrooms used for IT courses are well equipped and suitable for their purpose. Workshops on the college's Tower Road site are

Curriculum Areas

well resourced and used effectively. Students spoke positively about these facilities and expressed their appreciation of the assistance they receive from their teachers. However, some students have problems in obtaining access to IT resources outside their timetabled lessons. Weaknesses relating to the accessibility of computing facilities to teachers and students were noted in the self-assessment report. The difficulties for teachers, in this respect, have been partially resolved by increasing the number of computers in staff rooms.

17 A lack of teaching qualifications on the part of staff was noted as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Since the report was produced, action has been taken to rectify this and all IT teachers are undertaking appropriate professional training activities. Students are highly motivated and they hold their teachers in high regard.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G in IT	1	Number of starters	19	51	55
		Retention (%)	*	76	65
		Achievement (%)	*	74	58
C&G in IT	2	Number of starters	87	68	63
		Retention (%)	71	*	62
		Achievement (%)	50	57	64
NVQ using IT	2	Number of starters	**	27	37
		Retention (%)	**	70	73
		Achievement (%)	**	63	93
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	169	226	203
		Retention (%)	*	*	69
		Achievement (%)	20	24	26
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	27	20	23
		Retention (%)	63	80	57
		Achievement (%)	29	29	70

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data may be unreliable

**course not running

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 2

18 Inspectors observed 13 practical and theory lessons in construction crafts, technician and professional courses. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but found a few weaknesses the college had not identified. They also considered that some strengths were overstated in the self-assessment report. Inspectors from the TSC observed four training sessions in construction for work-based trainees.

Key strengths

- students' good retention and achievement rates on professional courses
- good teaching in practical lessons
- high standard of students' practical work
- productive links with employers
- good workshops

Weaknesses

- lack of pre-foundation and foundation level courses
- students' poor attendance at additional support lessons
- insufficiently demanding work for students in some theory lessons

19 The college offers courses in the main construction crafts, including heating and ventilation, plumbing and electrical installation, at the Erith Road site, and technician, higher technician, supervisory, managerial and professional studies courses at the Tower Road site. The college also offers opportunities for school pupils to undertake foundation level craft studies. There are, however, few opportunities for students to study craft subjects at entry level and at level 1. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, most technician students

progress to professional courses and the opportunity for them to do so represents a strength of this curriculum area.

20 Managers monitor students' progress at the end of each term. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that data on students' retention and achievements used by managers are sometimes in conflict with that held centrally. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the programme areas have useful links with major employers in the construction industry and with the Chartered Surveyors' Training Trust. Through these links, staff have set up external projects and have found work placements for students. Courses are well planned. Good course manuals and handbooks provide students with useful information on course content and methods of assessment. Students' files are well organised. Teachers review these regularly and give the students useful advice on how to improve their work.

21 Most teaching is good or satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers ensured that all students were fully involved in demanding activities which helped them to develop their skills and extend their knowledge. Teachers matched different learning tasks to the aptitude and skills of individual students. Practical activities were well planned. They enabled students to work at their own pace and develop a range of skills. Students were provided with good-quality learning materials. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that many students demonstrate high levels of practical skill. Teachers often relate classroom activities to current construction site practice and draw on the experience of those students who have appropriate industrial experience. Some teaching was less effective. Some lessons were inadequately prepared. Students were given insufficiently demanding tasks which had to be completed by unrealistic deadlines. The criteria for assessment of students' performance in these tasks were

Curriculum Areas

unclear. The teaching of key skills as an integral part of vocational courses has been piloted effectively on plumbing courses and is now being introduced to other courses. Many full-time students take initial tests to identify their needs for additional learning support. Literacy and numeracy sessions are timetabled for students who need them. Although teachers encourage students to attend these sessions, few students do so.

22 Student retention and achievement rates have improved on many courses since 1997. Student achievement rates on the NVQ construction crafts course and on professional courses are above the national average for the sector. Student retention rates on national diploma and professional courses, and intermediate level painting and decorating and advanced level carpentry and joinery courses are also above the national average. Most students' portfolios contain work of a high standard. The success of construction students in regularly winning prizes in local and national competitions was recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. Recent examples include: the Chartered Institute of Building award for the best overall student, and two silver and two bronze awards; and the Painter-Stainer national award.

23 The workshops and equipment used for craft courses are good. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the newly built specialist workshops for painting and decorating, carpentry and joinery, brickwork and plumbing are of a high standard. Students clean their own workspaces but agency staff are responsible for general cleaning. A computer room and a resource centre are available to students at the Erith Road site. The computer room contains 16 terminals and two printers. However, apart from timetabled lessons, students can only use the room for five hours each week. The range of CD-ROM learning materials is narrow. Computers do not give access to the Internet. There is insufficient

storage space in some craft workshops. Lockers for students are in short supply and there are no changing facilities or showers in some areas. These deficiencies were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in construction, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ construction crafts	2	Number of starters	**	432	481
		Retention (%)	**	62	68
		Achievement (%)	**	86	74
Electrical installation intermediate	2	Number of starters	44	32	63
		Retention (%)	*	*	55
		Achievement (%)	56	62	52
GNVQ and precursors	3	Number of starters	37	37	43
		Retention (%)	59	59	65
		Achievement (%)	69	72	72
NVQ construction crafts	3	Number of starters	52	75	142
		Retention (%)	*	59	70
		Achievement (%)	*	*	53
The Chartered Institute of Building professional	3	Number of starters	120	161	219
		Retention (%)	80	80	84
		Achievement (%)	55	53	73

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data may be unreliable

**course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

24 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in electronic, mechanical and motor vehicle engineering. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the college had understated weaknesses in teaching and learning and students' achievements. Inspectors from the TSC observed five lessons in engineering for work-based trainees.

Key strengths

- the broad range of engineering courses
- well-managed entry level course
- effective work experience opportunities for full-time motor vehicle engineering students
- improvement in student retention and achievement rates on some courses
- well-equipped, spacious welding workshop

Weaknesses

- poor attendance by some students
- uninspiring theory teaching
- poor recording of students' progress in practical lessons
- students' low achievement rates on level 2 electronics servicing course
- some outdated motor vehicle and electronic engineering workshops

25 As noted in the self-assessment report, the college offers a broad range of engineering courses, which include motor vehicle servicing and body repair, electronics and computer maintenance, security and alarm systems, computer-aided draughting, and welding. Engineering courses are managed by the school of motor vehicle engineering, the school of electronics and computing, and the built

environment school. Enrolments on electronic servicing courses have declined. The college has now introduced an electronics and computer maintenance course that is recruiting well. Full-time motor vehicle engineering students benefit from well-organised work placements. However, the school of electronic engineering and computing has had little success in establishing productive links with employers, and full-time students in these subject areas have few work placement opportunities. The timetables for some engineering courses are flexibly arranged to allow students to attend at times to suit their needs.

26 Course teams carry out an annual review of courses. They hold meetings each term to discuss issues affecting their courses. Proceedings at these meetings are well recorded. Heads of the engineering schools produce action plans and discuss progress in implementing these during meetings of school staff. However, course teams do not produce action plans to rectify weaknesses identified through the review process, and rarely consider student retention rates and achievement during their meetings.

27 Some lessons are well planned. In the best lessons, teachers were effective in linking theory to practical applications and students were often stimulated by the variety of tasks set. Teachers frequently checked students' understanding of the lesson. For example, in a key skills lesson, students were working on numerical tasks which were closely related to motor vehicle applications. The teacher frequently assessed the students' learning through effective questioning and careful monitoring of students' work. Many lessons, however, were poorly planned. Teachers had given insufficient thought to ensuring that learning tasks and teaching and assessment methods were effective and suited to the students' needs. The teaching in some theory lessons was unimaginative. In these lessons, the teacher talked for too long and rarely used demonstrations to help students

Curriculum Areas

understand the topic. Weaknesses in teaching and learning were not identified by the college in its self-assessment report. In many practical lessons in the workshop, students were given practical tasks which they found stimulating. The tasks, which they had to complete in clearly defined stages, enabled them to develop requisite skills. However, teachers often failed to record the progress the students were making. Students' attendance in some lessons is poor. Students who attend evening classes in electronic engineering are often late for lessons.

28 As part of the college's strategy to improve student retention rates and achievement in basic skills, the school of motor vehicle engineering has recently been involved in the introduction of an entry level course, which includes a practical motor vehicle engineering element. Lessons in the motor vehicle workshop are carefully planned and enable students to develop their numeracy and literacy skills through practical engineering tasks.

29 Students' achievements on some courses have improved and are now good. For example, the pass rate on the computer-aided draughting course is above the average for the sector. The pass rate on the electronic servicing at level 1 is improving. There has, however, been a decline in pass rates on welding courses. Students' achievements on the level 2 electronic servicing courses remain very low although there has been some improvement in retention rates. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, student retention rates on some courses are poor. For example, they are below the national average on the NVQ level 2 motor vehicle and security alarm courses. The standard of some students' practical work is good. However, in some instances, teachers fail to provide students with enough guidance on how their written work could be improved.

30 The college has recently developed a well-equipped and spacious welding workshop.

Some motor vehicle engineering workshops are untidy and outdated, as are some of the cars. Students on level 3 courses have few opportunities to work on modern vehicle systems or to use computer-based diagnostic equipment. In lessons, teachers made little use of computer-assisted learning software. Teachers are suitably qualified in their subjects, and many hold assessor and verifier awards.

Curriculum Areas

A sample of retention and achievement rates in engineering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 2240 part 1 electronics Servicing	1	Number of starters	*	17	16
		Retention (%)	*	81	81
		Achievement (%)	*	67	73
Welding courses	1 and 2	Number of starters	22	16	10
		Retention (%)	82	94	70
		Achievement (%)	56	92	57
C&G 2240 part 2 electronics servicing	2	Number of starters	28	26	11
		Retention (%)	50	61	91
		Achievement (%)	30	25	30
NVQ vehicle mechanical and electronic systems	2	Number of starters	62	33	35
		Retention (%)	24	52	51
		Achievement (%)	77	*	67
C&G 4351 AutoCAD	2	Number of starters	**	48	47
		Retention (%)	**	90	80
		Achievement (%)	**	48	80
C&G 1851 security alarm systems	3	Number of starters	**	44	43
		Retention (%)	**	59	58
		Achievement (%)	**	*	63

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data may be unreliable

**course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

31 Inspectors observed 13 lessons on business courses provided by the schools of business education, and office technology/secretarial skills. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Inspectors from the TSC observed three training sessions in business administration for work-based trainees.

Key strengths

- well-managed courses
- much good teaching
- students' good retention and achievement rates on some courses
- effective support for individual learners
- thorough course review and evaluation

Weaknesses

- students' lack of punctuality and poor attendance on some courses
- some inappropriate use of accommodation

32 The programme area is well managed. The two schools which provide business courses are effectively organised with clear line management structures. Staff work well together as a team. Most data on students' achievements and retention are reliable and they are taken into account when planning and developing courses. Quality assurance procedures follow college guidelines and staff have a clear commitment to continuous improvement. These procedures are well established and appropriate records are maintained. Most students do not yet have access to electronic mail facilities in order that they may communicate more easily with staff.

33 There is much good teaching. Lessons are well planned and include an appropriate range

of learning activities. The grades inspectors gave to lessons are broadly similar to those awarded by the college through its process of lesson observation. Students are highly motivated and confident of their ability to progress into employment or higher education. In one particularly effective lesson, students were planning a social event. They exhibited an understanding of business and skills that would clearly help them in their future business activities. In other highly effective lessons, students used role-play activities to demonstrate and develop quick business thinking. There is a wide variety of additional learning support for students. Although the numeracy and literacy needs of full-time students are assessed and help is offered to those who need it, students do not make best use of this assistance. Some only attend learning support sessions when they have an assignment to complete. The range of provision of part-time business courses on the Tower Road site is narrow.

34 In general, student retention and achievement rates are good. Students' attendance on some courses is poor. For example, it is poor on GNVQ courses. Some teachers allow lessons to be disrupted by a significant number of students who arrive late. This problem was acknowledged in the self-assessment report and on some courses, successful action has been taken to resolve it. Many students make good progress within the college and go on to higher education. There are effective work placements for students and good secondments for staff to local businesses. These help students and teachers to keep abreast of the needs of employers. The assessment of students' work is fair and well organised. All assessed work is thoroughly marked, and returned promptly to students. Portfolios of work show that most students are confident in using IT.

35 Teachers are well qualified. There are good opportunities for staff development. Most

Curriculum Areas

accommodation is adequate and classrooms are appropriately furnished. A few rooms have very old and dilapidated furniture, however, and some are inappropriate for the work carried out in them. For example, some computer work is carried out in rooms without blinds and students cannot see the computer screens because of the glare. Many workstations do not have adjustable chairs. Some rooms are bare and there are few displays of students' work. These deficiencies have been raised by students in their responses to questionnaires. The college's learning centre provides a good service. It has a good range of up-to-date business and office technology texts. There are, however, times when the specialist learning centre is not available to students who wish to study there because it is also used as a classroom. Access to the Internet is improving, and most students make use of this facility. There are a significant number of personal computers available to students who make the most of the college's arrangements to use them on a 'drop-in' basis.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Foundation	1	Number of starters	34	22	34
		Retention (%)	71	64	79
		Achievement (%)	62	*	82
Short	1 and 2	Number of starters	1,346	1,033	664
		Retention (%)	*	*	97
		Achievement (%)	60	75	65
Intermediate	2	Number of starters	226	214	297
		Retention (%)	76	82	76
		Achievement (%)	58	82	77
Advanced	3	Number of starters	408	317	294
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	57	78	76

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data may be unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 3

36 Inspectors observed 11 lessons on part-time and full-time courses. These included NVQ, National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB), GNVQ and access to higher education courses. Inspectors were in general agreement with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but they considered that some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- effective course organisation and planning
- comprehensive and well-structured schemes of work
- well-organised internal verification
- effective use of work experience

Weaknesses

- students' poor attendance and lack of punctuality on some courses
- insufficiently demanding activities for more able students in some lessons
- failure of some staff to complete students' assessment records
- failure to make key skills an integral part of vocational courses
- low pass rates on GNVQ courses

37 There is a good range of full-time and part-time health and care courses, including a successful access to health studies programme. The college has been successful in developing a number of evening courses such as those in dental nursing. There is an expanding provision of courses offered in collaboration with employers such as the local health authority. Course planning is clear and effective. Teachers set targets for student retention and achievement rates. Staff gather information on students' destinations and progression to other

courses. Course teams take this information into account effectively when carrying out course planning and review.

38 Much teaching is satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers use a good variety of appropriate teaching methods and provide students with good learning materials. When planning the content of lessons, teachers ensure it is clearly relevant to students' work experience. Schemes of work are good. Lesson plans contain clear aims and objectives. Teachers regularly check that students understand the lesson. In some particularly successful lessons, students participated with enthusiasm in lively, and sometimes humorous, discussions. In these lessons, the needs of individual students were always considered and met. For example, in a practical cookery lesson, students were cooking a meal suitable for a young child. It was clear that the students had different levels of knowledge and ability and the teacher helped each student effectively. In some lessons, however, the more able students were not given sufficiently demanding activities which challenged them to think rigorously and use their skills to the full. For example, there were occasions when these students had an adverse effect on lessons by dominating discussions and imposing their views on the rest of the class. In some lessons, a lack of punctuality on the part of some students was allowed to disturb learning. Some teachers did not take students to task for being late. These defects are acknowledged in the self-assessment report and action to rectify them is under consideration.

39 There is a well-planned programme of tutorials. During tutorials, students receive advice and guidance on progression to higher education or employment. Students have a tutorial entitlement that includes individual and group work. All students have a tutorial record book. This contains a record of their progress and action plans for improving their performance. As the self-assessment report

Curriculum Areas

acknowledges, some tutors fail to complete the students' record books, and action is planned to ensure they do so. Full-time and part-time students undertake work placements as an integral part of their course. These are well planned and students speak positively about them. However, some students on work placements are rarely visited by their tutors. Guest speakers from healthcare sectors are invited to address the students. Their presentations help students to understand what employers expect of their employees.

40 Student retention and achievement rates on some courses are good. For example the pass rate on the access to health course is above the national average for the sector and the retention rate is also high. The pass rate of 82% on the diploma in nursery nursing is also good. However, the student achievement rate on the GNVQ intermediate course is low. The pass rate on the GNVQ advanced course is below the national average. These weaknesses in students' achievements and retention on some courses are recognised in the self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	23	9	10
		Retention (%)	68	64	82
		Achievement (%)	11	44	11
National diploma in childhood studies	3	Number of starters	7	4	10
		Retention (%)	83	100	70
		Achievement (%)	100	75	86
Access to health	3	Number of starters	21	25	38
		Retention (%)	84	84	77
		Achievement (%)	71	88	84
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	37	17	22
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	76	94	82

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data may be unreliable

41 In general, students' work is carefully assessed. Students' receive appropriate and helpful feedback on the quality of their work. Some teachers, however, do not always complete assessment records. Staff have designed some good assignments to help students develop key skills. There is, however, insufficient teaching of key skills as an integral part of a vocational context. This weakness is not sufficiently recognised in the self-assessment report. There is a well-organised internal verification system which meets with awarding body regulations.

42 Staff are well qualified. They have undertaken a range of professional training and development activities. Staff development needs are clearly identified and related to new curriculum initiatives. All new teachers have mentors who provide them with effective support during their first months in the college. Teaching accommodation is adequate. Teachers make good use of students' work and murals to brighten up the old accommodation.

Curriculum Areas

ESOL and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

43 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering courses for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors considered that the college had not been sufficiently rigorous in its self-assessment of these areas of work. They agreed with some of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report, but found weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- productive partnerships with external agencies
- the enthusiasm and keen commitment to their studies of students with sensory impairment
- good progression routes from some courses

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of some students' progress
- failure of some teaching methods to encourage students to work on their own
- some students' poor attendance and low retention rates on ESOL courses

44 The self-assessment report recognised that the comprehensive range of courses available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a strength. The courses provide students with valuable opportunities to develop their independent living skills and to sample activities which have a vocational relevance. The college has developed good links with local special schools and productive partnerships with external agencies. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to recognise these links as a

strength. Through them, the college is able to help those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to enjoy learning.

45 In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of their students. Students carry out a variety of tasks. These challenge them to use their skills to the full to achieve further success, and help them to extend their knowledge. In an electronics lesson, the teacher enabled the students to build on their knowledge of electrical circuits in order to wire transistor boards and to use a soldering iron to fix connections. The students were absorbed in their task and worked well in a relaxed but purposeful way. Similarly, in a lesson on an ESOL course at foundation level, the tutor skilfully developed the students' understanding of adjectives to enable them to describe a person's appearance. In many lessons, students spent too much time completing worksheets to the exclusion of more imaginative activities. Some worksheets, such as those for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, required them to complete word searches which were not always effective or appropriate. Some teachers missed opportunities to encourage and help students to learn to work effectively on their own. Students trust their teachers and most have developed the confidence to discuss any concerns or problems with them.

46 In accordance with the college's tutorial policy, teachers discuss with students the progress they are making. There is, however, no rigorous assessment or recording of the specific learning needs and progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Students are given initial tests in literacy and numeracy. Their results are not always taken into account in their learning plans and some students are not provided with the additional learning support they need.

47 Most students enjoy their studies. On one IT course, which has attracted a large number

Curriculum Areas

of elderly students with hearing impairments, students are highly motivated, enthusiastic and committed to their work. They particularly enjoy being able to understand the computer terminology used by their grandchildren. At the start of the course, most were afraid of the technology but, with good support from the tutor, their confidence has developed and they look forward to taking the Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) computer literacy and information technology examination. Attendance is high on these courses. However, on some ESOL courses, students' attendance and retention rates are poor.

48 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities feel they have all increased their self-confidence since joining the college. Many students have the opportunity to take part in extra-curricular activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and visits to places of interest locally and nationally. These activities help them develop social skills they need to live in the community. Since the last inspection, progression opportunities for students have increased. Some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on the general training and education courses have progressed to mainstream courses at level 1 or 2. One student has gained a City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) preliminary cookery certificate and is now working three days a week in a local restaurant.

49 Overall, the courses are managed effectively. Course teams hold regular meetings and consider curriculum development and quality assurance issues. Staff meet regularly with representatives of external agencies to discuss the content and format of courses. As a result of collaboration with the local authority's sensory support team, further courses for visually impaired people are planned. Many staff are undertaking professional training and development activities to help them work more effectively with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Overall, the accommodation

and equipment is satisfactory. A creative writing course for visually impaired students takes place in the kitchen of the bungalow used as a resource centre, however, and this does not provide a satisfactory learning environment. Where necessary, hearing-impaired students are helped in class by signers.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

50 Inspectors observed eight basic skills lessons on literacy courses, vocational ‘taster’ courses and a course for women returning to learning. They also attended some group sessions for students receiving additional learning support. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses in basic skills provision not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective new developments in entry level and level 1 provision
- comprehensive review and evaluation of courses
- systematic arrangements for giving students additional learning support

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-ordination of basic skills provision across the curriculum
- poor attendance in some lessons
- inappropriate over-concentration on work for qualifications

51 The college offers a basic skills programme at a number of local community centres. Tuition in basic skills is also part of rehabilitation programmes. The college has identified 782 students from across the college who are in need of additional learning support in literacy and numeracy. This year, approximately 650 students have taken up this support. Some, however, have failed to attend learning support sessions regularly. Learning support is also available for individual students who have special needs and 20 students are currently in receipt of this support. The college has recently set up a level 1, full-time programme for 16 to 19 year olds. The ‘Choices’ programme offers students basic skills with an opportunity to

sample a range of vocational ‘taster’ options. The ‘New Opportunities for Women’ 10-week programme also offers a range of basic skills and confidence building modules that provide a valuable starting point for adults returning to study. The college does not, however, have an overall strategy for co-ordinating all its basic skills initiatives.

52 Most teaching is good. The college recognises the need to offer basic skills provision at entry level and at level 1. Inspectors observed lessons on main college sites and at two community centres. Teachers create a learning environment in which students feel well supported. They develop good relationships with the students and work hard to meet their diverse needs. In the best lessons, teachers were successful in motivating students. They gave the students tasks which helped them to extend their knowledge and skills and were appropriate to their individual needs. Whilst using various methods successfully to control students’ behaviour, teachers also provided students with opportunities to work together, engage in discussion and learn from one another. In a few lessons, the support needs of individual students were not met. In their marking of students’ work, teachers sometimes failed to inform students of how to make progress.

53 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the college’s self-assessment report that the development of the ‘Choices’ programme as part of the college’s strategy to improve student retention rates, is a significant step forward and it is proving effective. Students can progress from the courses in the community centres to other courses in the college. Over-concentration on work towards qualifications does not suit the aptitude, or meet the needs of, some students. In some lessons, classroom activities focused almost entirely on work towards a qualification. Students were not provided with a broad range of imaginative learning styles and tasks which aimed to further their personal development and

Curriculum Areas

help them to use basic skills with greater confidence.

54 Resources are adequate. There are specific rooms where additional learning support is provided but they are small and cramped. There are few places where students and their teachers can discuss confidential issues. Learning materials are plentiful and of good quality. However, there are few computers. Staff are appropriately qualified and receive professional training and development.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

55 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated. They found some weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- well-defined student induction arrangements
- much good tutorial provision
- good careers education and guidance

Weaknesses

- students' poor attendance at additional support lessons
- inadequate target-setting for students
- lack of overall planning and co-ordination of support for students across the college

56 There are clear arrangements for recruiting and enrolling students. Staff attend a variety of local events to promote the college's provision. Increasingly, they undertake recruitment drives with the aim of widening participation and attracting people from groups in the local community under-represented in the college. Links with local schools are improving. Most applications are handled through a central guidance and admissions unit and are dealt with promptly. Some course information is dated and at the time of the inspection there was no published information available on new curriculum initiatives for 16 to 18 year old students. These weaknesses were not included in the self-assessment report.

57 As the self-assessment report recognises, the induction programme for all full-time and many part-time students is well organised. Students said they found their induction helpful and that it provided them with a range of useful

information about the college and its courses. Students are given an informative student handbook which contains the college charter, the equal opportunities policy and details of the college's services and facilities. Some students, however, are unaware of their entitlements under the college charter.

58 A good range of financial support is available to students. Access funding has increased significantly this year, enabling many more students to receive help. Where appropriate, students receive financial assistance for purchase of books, equipment and materials, transport costs, course and assessment fees. Thirty-three students are currently using the college's nursery. A further 60 students benefit from other childcare support, although this assistance is available to full-time students only.

59 Learning support is given a high priority within the college. The arrangements and facilities for learning support have improved since the last inspection. Full-time and some part-time students are given initial tests in order to ascertain their need for help with literacy and numeracy. Learning support sessions are a timetabled part of all full-time courses. Adult students can receive learning support at 'drop-in' sessions on all sites. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that many students who have been identified as needing learning support, do not attend learning support sessions regularly, and some cease attending them altogether. Teachers receive reports on students' attendance at learning support sessions but they are not kept fully informed of the progress students make in improving their levels of literacy and numeracy.

60 Students receive good tutorial support. All full-time students have a one-hour tutorial each week and many part-time students have a 30-minute tutorial session. There are standardised tutorial procedures but tutors

Cross-college Provision

have scope to tailor tutorial sessions to suit their students' needs. All students are entitled to three progress reviews each year. These provide an opportunity for the students to review their progress and prepare an action plan for improving their work. Although students identify necessary actions, deadlines by which these must be carried out are rarely specified and some key issues identified within the reviews are not addressed. Target-setting for students is inadequate.

61 As recognised in the self-assessment report, students receive good careers education and advice. The college has achieved accreditation as an Investor in Careers. The local careers service provides advice and guidance sessions at the Tower Road and St Joseph's sites and at other sites by appointment. A well-stocked careers library, containing information on higher education and employment has been developed at the Tower Road site and students also have access to on-line careers information. Close links are developing between the careers service and individual tutors. Tutors have enthusiastically welcomed and promoted a programme of careers workshops on occupational areas. Students value the help they receive in preparing applications for higher education.

62 The college's counselling service is improving through a partnership arrangement with the local youth service. Currently, only a small number of students use the service but the numbers who do so are growing. The college provides a broad range of support services and has developed policies for them. The effectiveness of the support provided for individual students is closely monitored. There is, however, a lack of overall co-ordination of student support services. Policies and procedures for the provision of support for students are not evaluated rigorously and systematically.

General Resources

Grade 3

63 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in its self-assessment report, but found that some strengths were overstated and that some weaknesses were not acknowledged.

Key strengths

- significant improvements to Erith Road accommodation
- improvements to accommodation at Tower Road and St Joseph's sites
- good general teaching accommodation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped resource centres
- insufficient open access IT provision
- inadequate social facilities for students

64 The college occupies four main sites within the London Borough of Bexley. The buildings on the largest, in Tower Road, Belvedere, accommodate most of the provision offered by nine of the college's 13 schools. The Erith Road sites houses the school of construction and a part of the engineering school. The St Joseph's site is used by art and design, care and GCSE students. In the south of the borough, in Sidcup, the college provides a range of professional management courses and other courses, mainly for adults.

65 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that some significant improvements have been made to the accommodation since the last inspection. Most of the buildings used for construction craft courses that were in a poor state of repair have now been demolished and replaced by purpose-built workshops. This work cost around £1.4 million and has allowed the college to concentrate all its construction courses on one site. Workshops at Tower Road have been converted into a dance

Cross-college Provision

studio, a fitness studio and new offices for the college company. Car parking facilities at Tower Road have been extended. In addition to these projects, the college has spent about £20,000 on improvements to security. The college has an effectively planned maintenance programme. Classrooms and corridor areas at Tower Road and at St Joseph's have been redecorated. Most of the general teaching areas are satisfactory. However, some accommodation in the centres away from the main college is unsatisfactory.

66 There are libraries on three of the sites, Tower Road, Erith Road and St Joseph's. At the time of the last inspection, inspectors identified a shortage of study spaces. This deficiency has not been rectified, nor is it referred to in the self-assessment report. In 1995, inspectors criticised the age and quantity of library stock in a number of curriculum areas. Steps have been taken to improve the stock. Liaison between library staff and course teams has improved. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the library is not open at times when many part-time students can use it.

67 Since the last inspection, the college has acquired more, and better, IT equipment. Hardware and software have been standardised. The network has been improved. Links between the various sites have been developed. There are now 482 computer workstations available for students, making the ratio of computer terminals to full-time equivalent students 1:9. About half the computers are networked and provide access to the Internet. There is some access to the Internet in the resources centres at Tower Road and St Joseph's, but none at Erith. Although the college is committed to improving its IT provision, there is no clear strategy on how it will do this. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that students have insufficient access to computing facilities outside their timetabled hours. Access to computers for teachers has improved since the last inspection. However, not all teachers have access to electronic mail.

68 Across the college, there are few social and recreational facilities for students. There are cafeterias on the three largest sites and vending machines at Sidcup. The cafeteria at St Joseph's has been attractively refurbished since the last inspection. At Tower Road there is a small common room for adult students. There are some indoor sports facilities at Tower Road and St Joseph's. Although some minor improvements have been made to buildings since the last inspection, the college acknowledges that much of the accommodation is not easily accessible to staff or students using wheelchairs.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

69 Inspectors agreed with the strengths stated in the self-assessment report. They found, however, several weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to improving the quality of provision
- increasing focus on the quality of teaching and learning
- well-managed programme of staff development

Weaknesses

- lack of analysis of the college's overall performance
- lack of thoroughness and action-planning in some annual course reviews
- insufficient use of arrangements for obtaining students' views on the quality of provision

70 The self-assessment report identified as a strength, the clear commitment by the college in its strategic objectives to improve the quality of its provision. The policy on quality assurance

Cross-college Provision

sets out the principles of the college's approach to quality assurance and the range of activities related to this. There is a schedule of meetings at all levels of the organisation which give managers and staff opportunities to monitor progress in implementing operational plans. However, there is no system for drawing together the overall findings from the quality assurance process and reporting on them to the academic board, the college management group or the corporation. These bodies are given some information, such as the numbers of lesson observations or of staff who have received training. They do not receive any analysis of the college's overall performance against agreed performance indicators. The self-assessment report does not acknowledge this weakness.

71 Student retention and achievement rates have improved in some areas. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that data on students' retention and achievements held centrally by the college are often unreliable. This makes it difficult for managers to arrive at an accurate evaluation of the college's overall performance.

72 The self-assessment report acknowledged the introduction of lesson observations as a strength. It recognised that the lesson observation process has given teachers more opportunity to develop self-assessment skills and discuss good practice in teaching. The lesson grades awarded by observers are carefully monitored against national benchmarks, to ensure that they are not overgenerous. Information about the quality of teaching derived from lesson observations is used in the process of course review. Observation of teaching is also being carried out through a staff development project.

73 The quality assurance process is based on annual reports produced by course teams and these lead to an action plan, the implementation of which is monitored by managers. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that the quality of some annual reports is poor. A number do not identify the students' poor retention and

achievement rates. The reports do not include action plans for rectifying weaknesses. Action points are identified through discussion between course teams and heads of schools, but are not always recorded. The self-assessment report identifies as a strength the process of canvassing students' views on the quality of provision through questionnaires. It does not acknowledge, however, that students on only a low proportion of courses are currently given questionnaires. Schools are taking action to address this weakness.

74 Targets for enrolments and student retention and achievement rates are set for all courses. The college is seeking ways of improving student retention and achievement rates. Staff are reviewing the appropriateness of course entry criteria and the structure of courses, and they are taking steps to improve the monitoring of students' progress and attendance. The college has a well-developed and effective system for calculating the value added to the achievements of students on GCE A level courses, by comparing students' final GCE A level grades with their GCSE grades on entry. Students' achievements on GCE A level courses have improved.

75 There are cross-college co-ordinators for particular aspects of provision such as GNVQ and NVQ courses, and inclusive learning. The co-ordinators have helped to standardise paperwork and procedures and develop new and effective approaches to course planning and development. There are effective procedures for auditing the quality of internal verification of assessments, and for monitoring the effectiveness of action on issues raised by external verifiers.

76 There is a well-managed programme of staff development, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. The programme addresses the college's strategic objectives and the training needs of staff identified through the well-established staff appraisal process. There are good opportunities for staff to undertake short secondments to industry and staff draw on their experience from these when carrying out

Cross-college Provision

curriculum development. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1996. Standards for cross-college services have recently been set and arrangements for checking that these are attained are being developed. Monitoring to ensure that the college fulfils its charter commitments is identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Inspectors did not agree with this judgement. The college has no specific process for checking that it meets the standards to which it is committed by its charter. Procedures for dealing with students' complaints have recently been improved.

77 The self-assessment report was the first one produced by the college. Staff at all levels of the organisation were involved in its production and were fully aware of issues that need to be addressed. Inspectors considered that some strengths had been overstated and they found a number of weaknesses the college had not identified.

Governance

Grade 3

78 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, some judgements were unclear and inspectors found weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- the range of experience of governors
- good relationships between governors and managers
- governors' knowledge and understanding of the work of the college

Weaknesses

- lack of rigour in monitoring students' achievements
- inadequate procedures for monitoring the implementation of the strategic plan
- incomplete register of interests

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

80 The governing body has a membership of 19. There are seven business members, three governors with local community interests, three co-opted governors, two nominated by the local education authority (LEA), two staff governors, a student governor and the principal. Three of the governors are women and three are from minority ethnic groups. At the time of the inspection, there were two vacancies on the governing body and governors have decided that at least one of the new governors should have particular expertise in finance. Governors have a wide range of experience and inspectors agreed that this is a notable strength.

81 Governors demonstrate a commitment to the work of the college and some have established effective links with particular schools. Some governors sit on programme area advisory panels. Staff welcome the fact that governors observe some middle management meetings or attend college events. One newly appointed governor recently ran an effective team building event for a group of staff.

82 The corporation is supported by audit, remuneration, resources, services and operations, ethics and search committees, respectively. Attendance at the full board of governors is good. However, some committee meetings are not well attended, and a recent meeting of the audit committee was inquorate. Corporation papers, with the exception of confidential items, are available for public inspection. Some governors' discussions at informal meetings, including those convened to validate the college's self-assessment report, and to agree targets, are not formally reported to the

Cross-college Provision

full board. It is not always clear from papers presented to the corporation whether governors have to take action on a particular paper or receive it for their information. Recent governor appointments are not clearly shown as such in the minutes. Governors value highly the advice and support given by the clerk to the governors. The clerk is also the college's director of finance. The governors recently considered whether to appoint a clerk who did not have financial responsibilities in the college but decided to continue with the present arrangement.

83 The corporation has established a register of interests to be completed by governors and by college staff who have significant financial responsibilities. At the time of the inspection, eight governors had not completed the register. Their failure to do so was not recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Governors have good relationships with managers and staff in the college. There are regular briefing meetings between the principal and members of the corporation. A system of short briefings for members by college managers, before full board meetings, has been introduced recently. The corporation fulfils its responsibility to appraise the principal. Recently other senior managers have been designated as senior postholders and appropriate arrangements have been made for their appraisal by the corporation.

84 Formal monitoring by the corporation of the work of the college is underdeveloped. This weakness is not recognised in the self-assessment report. The corporation has not ensured that members receive regular reports on students' achievements and retention. Termly college reports to the corporation by senior managers contain insufficient information on the college's overall performance.

85 Governors have not systematically reviewed progress in meeting the targets arising out of the strategic plan since 1998. They made a positive contribution to the formulation of the

plan. For three years, they received at a special day event, a report by an external consultant on the progress made in achieving the objectives set out in the plan. No formal record was kept, however, of discussions or of any decisions taken.

86 The corporation had not carried out any self-assessment of its work until the summer of 1999. Members then discussed a draft self-assessment of their performance prepared by senior managers and made a number of amendments to it. Recently the corporation has taken steps to be more rigorous in monitoring its work, improve induction arrangements for new members and to make a more formal assessment of members' training needs. It is too early to assess the impact of these initiatives.

Management

Grade 3

87 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some strengths had been overstated and they found some weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- clear management structure
- good lines of communication
- well-managed courses
- productive collaboration with a range of external organisations

Weaknesses

- a lack of systematic analysis of students' performance against national benchmarks
- underdeveloped management accounts
- inadequate systems for collecting and evaluating students' destinations

Cross-college Provision

88 The college has a clear management structure that staff understand and support. The senior management team, which meets fortnightly, comprises the principal, director of finance and administration, two directors of teaching, the director of quality and the director of estates. There are 13 schools, organised into two faculties. All staff have job descriptions, which are updated as part of an annual staff appraisal system. Staff regard managers as responsive and speak appreciatively of their open and consultative style. Lines of communications within the college are good. Team meetings provide appropriate opportunities for staff at all levels to participate in decision-making. Staff receive an informative newsletter every month.

89 A feature of the senior management team, noted in the previous inspection report, is the attendance of two middle managers at senior management meetings. These individuals participate fully in the meetings which give them useful experience of working as a senior manager. The arrangement enables middle managers to raise issues directly with the senior management team. The needs of students in different vocational areas vary and middle managers are given some degree of autonomy in the way they manage their schools. There is, however, a lack of co-ordination of some curricular and student support initiatives across the schools.

90 The day-to-day management of courses and support services is good. Curriculum managers have direct access to management information. Data on student retention rates and achievement, however, are not always reliable and, in some curriculum areas it is difficult for curriculum managers to make informed judgements on students' performance. Managers ensure that staff are effectively and efficiently deployed. In general, annual operating plans for curriculum areas are related to the strategic plan. There are, however, no operational plans for most cross-college functions.

91 Targets set for student enrolments and class sizes are considered at some management team meetings. However, there is a lack of systematic and rigorous analysis of students' performance by the college management team. There is also little evaluation of the effectiveness of policies aiming to improve student retention and achievement rates or of action to improve them. The collection and analysis of information on students' destinations are not carried out systematically, a weakness noted in the previous inspection.

92 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has staff with appropriate financial qualifications and experience. In its most recent strategic plan, the college set a number of financial objectives, but governors have not received reports of progress towards meeting these. In 1998, the college replaced its accounting system. Financial information is produced on a spreadsheet. However, such information is not presented in a consistent format. Some difficulties are encountered in ensuring the accurate monitoring of monthly out-turn against the approved budget and financial forecast. Monthly management accounts do not include a cashflow statement and balance sheet. Management accounts are presented to governors each term with a brief commentary on budget variances. Over the past two financial years, the college has incurred a small deficit both in accruals and cash terms. The internal auditors are currently advising the college on the production of balance sheet and cashflow information for budgeting and reporting purposes. Financial regulations have not been updated since 1995.

93 The college has productive partnerships with external organisations. Representatives of the latter speak highly of the college's responsiveness. There are good relationships with some local schools and school link programmes are much appreciated by the

Cross-college Provision

school pupils who attend the college. Most vocational areas have established effective employer advisory groups, which further strengthen links with local commerce and industry. The college is a major provider of training for the local training and enterprise council (TEC). Partnerships between the college and local community centres are effective and help the college to achieve its aim of widening participation. The college is an associate college of the University of Greenwich and many of the college's students progress to higher education. The college's strategic development is appropriately informed by market research. The self-assessment notes that the college could obtain more information about local needs by making an analysis of the categories and characteristics of people who make enquiries to the college.

94 Equality of opportunity is given a high priority by the college. Managers analyse enrolments and achievements in terms of students' gender and ethnicity. Curriculum initiatives have been implemented which aim to increase the participation of women and persons from minority ethnic groups in the college's courses. Links with institutions in a number of European countries are well established, and these include student exchange visits.

Conclusions

95 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first one produced by the college. The report was the outcome of a process of assessment involving all staff and corporation members. It contained useful commentary and evidence. The college had difficulty in producing reliable data on students' achievements and retention and in making clear judgements on some aspects of students' performance. Strengths in teaching and learning were sometimes overstated and weaknesses with data on students' retention and

achievements were not given sufficient emphasis. Inspectors also found weaknesses which the college had failed to identify. Inspection grades matched the college's grades for four of the seven curriculum areas and for two aspects of cross-college provision.

96 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 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	4
16-18 years	28
19-24 years	16
25+ years	52
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	30
Level 2 (intermediate)	36
Level 3 (advanced)	25
Level 4/5 (higher)	7
Non-schedule 2	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1999)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	563	798	18
Agriculture	14	23	1
Construction	258	932	16
Engineering	62	378	6
Business	328	902	16
Hotel and catering	93	28	2
Health and community care	368	626	13
Art and design	177	150	4
Humanities	440	882	17
Basic education	54	493	7
Total	2,357	5,212	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 30% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	116	45	52	213
Supporting direct learning contact	31	3	0	34
Other support	70	13	2	85
Total	217	61	54	332

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£11,534,000	£10,920,000	£11,334,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.38	£16.86	£16.54
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	69%	68%
Achievement of funding target	101%	100%	95%
Diversity of income	29%	29%	29%
Operating surplus	£87,000	£456,000	£263,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

Payroll – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	541	678	842	761	719	714
	Retention (%)	94	82	84	92	88	87
	Achievement (%)	59	55	73	58	39	69
2	Number of starters	1,448	1,138	1,538	1,162	997	1,272
	Retention (%)	75	75	81	86	77	79
	Achievement (%)	38	54	65	51	59	81
3	Number of starters	841	650	946	666	626	799
	Retention (%)	85	79	79	84	74	82
	Achievement (%)	55	70	69	51	65	71
4 or 5	Number of starters	3	3	1	94	159	134
	Retention (%)	100	100	100	86	82	80
	Achievement (%)	33	100	100	54	36	85
Short courses	Number of starters	333	489	784	2,288	3,388	4,897
	Retention (%)	95	96	95	98	96	97
	Achievement (%)	41	45	51	37	47	87
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	359	315	305	587	876	690
	Retention (%)	89	76	82	89	76	79
	Achievement (%)	47	58	76	55	50	72

Source: ISR

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