

Bolton Sixth Form College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

**THE
FURTHER
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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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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Bolton Sixth Form College

North West Region

Inspected January 2001

This was the first inspection of Bolton Sixth Form College since it was established in 1998 following the merger of North Bolton Sixth Form College and South College, Bolton. The college provides full-time courses, mainly for 16 to 19 year old students. It offers courses from foundation to advanced level in seven of the programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in three programme areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision.

In preparation for inspection the college produced a detailed and thorough self-assessment report. It was prepared using the college's existing quality assurance arrangements and validated by the college's quality standards group. The college has a clear commitment to improving the quality of its provision. Courses are well planned and well managed and most teaching is good. The college has well-organised arrangements for recruiting students and for ensuring that they are placed on appropriate courses. Students receive good levels of support from their teachers. Accommodation is attractive and generally well maintained. However, there is some overcrowding in classrooms on the North campus. Arrangements to assure the quality of students' experiences are comprehensive. Governors use their wide range of expertise to

support the college. They effectively determine the strategic direction of the college and monitor the progress the college makes towards achieving its aims. Staff understand the college's management structure. There are clear lines of responsibility and reporting. Despite some recent improvements, some achievement rates and retention rates on advanced level courses still fall short of national averages for sixth form colleges. The college should improve: the quality of teaching and tutorials; retention and achievement rates where these are below national averages; support for students who need help with basic literacy and numeracy; access for students with restricted mobility; aspects of governance; the setting of recruitment targets; and the consistency with which college policies are implemented in different curriculum areas.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Business studies	2	General resources	3
English and modern languages	2	Quality assurance	3
Geography, history and psychology	2	Governance	3
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Bolton Sixth Form College was established in August 1998 as a result of a merger between the former North Bolton Sixth Form College and South College, Bolton. It operates on two sites, one in the north of the borough and one in the south. The South campus is the only provider of post-16 education in that part of the borough. The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group that typically recruits a high proportion of its students from areas identified as disadvantaged in the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions' Index of Local Conditions. There are five 11 to 18 high schools in the north of the borough and a general further education college in the town centre.

2 The college recruits the majority of its students from within Bolton and a significant proportion from disadvantaged areas. Participation in full-time further education in Bolton is below the national average and some groups, for example white males, are under-represented. In 1999, the percentage of students in the local high schools achieving five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grades A to C was 41.5%. The total number of students from across the borough entering for the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) has declined from 957 in 1998 to 877 in 2000.

3 In January 2001, the college had on roll 1,200 students aged 16 to 19 and 100 students over the age of 19. The college recruits 40% of its students from minority ethnic backgrounds and has taken responsibility for the delivery of GCE A level courses for a small number of students attending Bolton Muslim Girls' School. Specific provision for Muslim girls is available at the South campus. The college is involved in discussions with the local education authority (LEA) to offer intermediate level provision in two high schools in an attempt to increase the

number of white males in the borough who take part in further education.

4 The college offers 32 subjects at GCE A level and GCE advanced subsidiary (AS); seven subjects at advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE), six general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate level, a GCSE course and a foundation level course. In November 2000, 82% of students were following an advanced course. Students are able to choose from courses offered at both college campuses. In addition to their main course of study, students are able to take part in curriculum enrichment activities.

5 A revised management structure was introduced in September 2000 following the retirement of a deputy principal. The college senior management team consists of the principal; a deputy principal who has responsibility for curriculum, student services and quality assurance; the director of finance, administration and estates; and two assistant principals. One assistant principal has responsibility for the North campus, the other for the South campus. Curriculum management is organised into seven departments. Learning services managers oversee student support services on each campus.

6 The college's mission is 'to offer high-quality education and be concerned for the individual needs of all students'. In doing this, it places appropriate emphasis on achievement and on equality of opportunity. The college also seeks to ensure that the needs of a multi-faith, multi-racial student body are met. Its 1998 strategic plan, produced for the new college, highlighted the need to raise retention rates. At the time of the merger the corporation wished to see the creation of a new single site for the college. This has not proved possible to achieve. The college plans to develop its accommodation on both campuses. In particular, it is seeking to address problems of

Context

over crowding and to upgrade the North campus.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 22 January 2001. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data derived from the individualised student record (ISR) for 1998 and 1999 to compile the tables in the curriculum area sections of this report. The college provided data for the year 2000. These data were checked before the inspection against primary sources such as class registers and pass

lists issued by examination bodies, and were found to be largely accurate. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by a team of nine inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 40 days. They observed lessons and tutorials, examined students' work and college documents and held meetings with students, staff, managers, governors and representatives from the local community.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 59 lessons observed 63% were rated good or outstanding and 3% were less than satisfactory, compared with the national average for colleges of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	15	13	0	0	32
GCSE	1	0	1	0	0	2
GNVQ	3	9	3	1	0	16
Tutorials	0	5	3	1	0	9
Total (No)	8	29	20	2	0	59
Total (%)	14	49	34	3	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

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

Note: percentages subject to rounding

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Bolton Sixth Form College	12.4	86
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

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

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in computing and information technology (IT). They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective action to improve curriculum management
- good range of learning materials and computer equipment

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates on GNVQ courses
- some poor assessment and marking of GCE A level students' work

11 GCE A level courses are offered in computing and IT at both campuses. Vocational courses in IT are available at the South campus. Evening courses have recently been introduced for adults. The range of courses enables students to progress from foundation to advanced level in this curriculum area.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that courses are now well managed. The college identified weaknesses in course management in 1999-2000 and these were noted in the self-assessment report. The department has been reorganised and a new head of department was appointed in September 2000. New teachers have been appointed and staff have clearly designated roles and responsibilities. Staff meet regularly to review courses and the progress students make. Action has been taken to improve teaching and learning and the structure of coursework assignments and projects.

13 Inspectors judged teaching to be good or outstanding in six out of the 11 lessons observed. This proportion is below the national average for the curriculum area. In the more effective lessons teachers took account of the differing background knowledge of students and fully engaged them in a range of challenging activities. Students were enthusiastic learners and spoke knowledgeably about their work. Teachers share and make good use of high-quality learning materials and equipment. Handouts are detailed; some include sections to be completed by students, which help them to develop their understanding of topics. In a few lessons, teachers failed to maintain the interest of all students and some instances of inappropriate student behaviour went unchallenged. Students who arrived late disrupted learning for the rest of the class. The assessment and marking of some GCE A level students' work lacks rigour. Teachers do not set clear assessment criteria or give students detailed mark schemes. Students do not receive constructive feedback on their performance to help them to improve their work. Some spelling and grammatical errors were not corrected. Examples of effective assessment and marking included assignment briefs with clear assessment criteria. Well-marked work included guidance to help students improve their assignments. Students' attendance in lessons is monitored rigorously and in the lessons observed by inspectors attendance was good. Students appreciate the high level of support they receive from their teachers. A learning support tutor worked well with a teacher to provide appropriate support for foundation level students in lessons. The college identified some of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning in its self-assessment report.

14 Students' achievements on GNVQ courses are poor. Achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate course have been below national averages since 1998. Achievements at GNVQ advanced level declined from 100% in 1998 to 59% in 2000. However, the proportion of higher

Curriculum Areas

grades achieved at GNVQ foundation and advanced levels is above the national average. Achievement rates in GCE A level computing and IT were above national averages in 1998 and 1999 and in line with national averages in the year 2000. Retention rates on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses are good. However, they are below national averages on GNVQ advanced level and GCE A level IT. The college did not clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' achievements in its self-assessment report.

15 There has been a high turnover of staff in the curriculum area. Several teachers have left

to gain promotion. The current teaching staff are appropriately qualified for the range of courses offered. However, the college's self-assessment report highlights the need for teachers to update their programming skills to meet the demands of the IT sector. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. Technical support is adequate. Students benefit from using good-quality computer resources during lessons. However, at peak times such as lunchtimes and breaks, there is an inadequate level of open access to computers on a 'drop-in' basis. All students have electronic mail addresses and Internet access.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing and information technology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation IT	1	Number of starters	†	†	25
		Retention (%)	†	†	92
		Achievement (%)	†	†	39
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	27	23	37
		Retention (%)	96	91	89
		Achievement (%)	46	43	42
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	15	11	27
		Retention (%)	87	10	63
		Achievement (%)	100	64	59
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	80	60	57
		Retention (%)	71	82	74
		Achievement (%)	89	88	74
GCE A level IT	3	Number of starters	42	64	70
		Retention (%)	69	66	67
		Achievement (%)	97	98	89

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

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering the range of business studies courses. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report and noted that some of the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- well-managed courses
- good teaching
- detailed work schemes and lesson plans
- effective strategy for developing and assessing key skills
- thorough marking of students' work
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- good achievement and retention rates on GNVQ programmes

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates in GCE A level business studies
- insufficient use of information learning technology in lessons

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that courses are well managed. Course teams set targets for retention, attendance and achievement and regularly monitor progress towards meeting them. Teachers use a detailed analysis of achievement and retention rates linked to gender and ethnicity to develop action plans to make improvements to courses. The department holds a regular weekly meeting to discuss curriculum and quality assurance issues and the progress students are making. Staff have clearly identified roles and responsibilities and there is good communication between staff in the department. Internal verification and standards moderation systems are well developed. Inspectors agreed with a recent

external verifiers' report which noted the very good internal verification system that included sampling all students' work, and all assessors' judgements.

18 Most teaching observed was good or outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are detailed schemes of work and lesson plans that clearly identify inclusive learning strategies and opportunities to develop key skills. In the majority of lessons, teachers use a variety of appropriate methods to help students to understand the work. In a GNVQ advanced lesson, pairs of students reviewed websites. Each pair then presented a specific website to the rest of the class using overhead projector, transparencies and handouts they had prepared. The main features and navigational details of the site were discussed and the opportunities to produce evidence to meet assessment criteria were explained. The remainder of the class used a proforma to record the major points. During an effective revision session a jigsaw was used which required students to match keywords to the topic headings to which they belonged. The tutor then questioned students on the keywords and confirmed that they showed good understanding of the subject. Teachers make good use of speakers from industry, visits to local companies, and work experience arrangements to keep staff and students aware of the latest business practices. Although the use of IT as a research tool is being developed, there is insufficient use of information and learning technologies in lessons. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers carefully monitor, and keep students aware of, their progress. There are specific academic support periods, when students who have had difficulties with coursework can receive extra tuition. The relationship between staff and students is very good and a productive working atmosphere is evident. Students speak highly of the support they receive from staff. The standard of most students' work is high.

Curriculum Areas

Assignments, coursework, projects and homework are marked thoroughly and returned promptly. Written feedback is constructive and numerical, spelling and grammatical errors are identified and corrected.

19 Pass rates, the proportion of higher grades, and retention rates on GNVQ advanced and intermediate programmes have been consistently and significantly higher than national averages for three years. GCSE office applications results are outstanding with 100% retention and achievement rates. Retention rates on the GCE A level business studies course are significantly below the national average. This is recognised by the department but was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. The department is taking action to address this weakness and current retention rates show improvement when compared with last year's figures for the same period. Student assessment, monitoring and

reporting procedures are effective and students are well prepared for external examinations. The department has a clearly defined strategy for the development and assessment of key skills. Vocationally relevant key skills assignments have been produced.

20 Some classrooms are too small for the group sizes. Students' work and other appropriate materials are displayed to produce interesting and relevant learning environments. Library bookstocks are adequate and an efficient cross-campus borrowing system ensures that students have access to the full range of titles. Teacher-produced lesson materials are mostly well prepared. In the best instances, handouts included references to Internet websites and library books that could be used for further study. There were, however, a minority of handouts that were simply copies of pages from textbooks.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate business studies	2	Number of starters	50	66	57
		Retention (%)	82	74	84
		Achievement (%)	93	90	90
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	124	114	97
		Retention (%)	69	67	64
		Achievement (%)	74	93	97
GCE A level accounts	3	Number of starters	15	18	20
		Retention (%)	47	72	65
		Achievement (%)	100	92	100
GNVQ advanced business studies	3	Number of starters	63	70	61
		Retention (%)	79	77	77
		Achievement (%)	82	96	94

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

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Languages

Grade 2

21 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering GCE A/AS level and GCSE. They agreed with most of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report and identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- effective leadership and management
- good teaching in English
- excellent marking and assessment procedures
- positive value-added data for the majority of students
- good achievement rates on GCE A level English literature and GCSE English

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GCE A level English courses
- achievement rates below national averages in GCE A level German and Spanish
- poor oral skills of many students of modern languages

22 The department is well led and well managed. Courses offered include GCSE English, a good range of GCE A level English subjects and GCE A levels in Spanish, French and German. Key skills and inclusive learning strategies are well integrated with other aspects of the work. Teachers set realistic targets for students' attendance, retention rates and performance in examinations. Teachers carefully monitor the progress students make towards achieving their target grades. Staff from both campuses work effectively to develop good-quality learning materials and to share good practice. Teachers organise external visits, talks by speakers from other organisations, and opportunities for students to take part in work experience programmes in Europe.

23 All the English lessons observed were good or outstanding. Teachers explain the aims and objectives of each lesson to students and provide useful summaries of each topic. They structure lessons carefully to make efficient use of the time available. In one English lesson on Dickens, the teacher steered students towards a clear understanding of the importance of single-line analysis compared with a broader approach. Students' responses demonstrated that, by the end of the lesson, they could clearly compare the different approaches.

24 Teaching in the modern language lessons observed by inspectors was satisfactory or better. However, in some lessons students were given insufficient opportunities to practise foreign sentence patterns and to rehearse vocabulary in a meaningful context. Teachers of modern languages use the foreign language extensively in class but many students lack confidence in oral work and make basic errors in grammar. These weaknesses were not recorded in the self-assessment report. Marking and assessment procedures are excellent. Coursework assignments have coversheets containing detailed assessment criteria. Teachers mark written work thoroughly and provide students with written, constructive comments against the criteria to help them to improve their work. Students speak highly of the efforts teachers make to help them to develop their language skills. This is reflected in the good attendance rates.

25 Achievement rates in GCSE English language for the high numbers of students who take the examination, are above the national average; 57% of the students achieved grades A to C in 2000. Retention rates on this course in 2000 were 86%, an improvement on the previous year and well above the national average. On GCE A level English courses, over 75% of students achieve or surpass their target grades. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that this represents good added value. Pass rates in GCE A level English literature have improved from 90% in

Curriculum Areas

1998 to 96% in 2000 and are now above the national average for sixth form colleges. Retention on all GCE A level English courses are improving but remain below national averages. Achievement rates in GCE A level German and Spanish are below national averages. In French, results have improved and are now in line with the national average. Retention rates on all modern foreign language courses are in line with national averages.

26 As noted in the self-assessment report, staff are suitably qualified and experienced. Foreign language assistants make a valuable contribution to student learning. English teachers have produced high-quality learning resources to develop students' critical awareness. Although access for students to IT has improved, a relatively small amount of students' work is wordprocessed and none of

the lessons observed by inspectors incorporated the use of computers. Opportunities for study and research utilising websites are often missed. There is a reasonable supply of texts and reference books for class use, but most language library books are located on the South campus where language courses are offered but do not always run. However, the college operates a central cataloguing system and, when requested, books are transferred from one campus to the other within 24 hours. Most classroom accommodation is adequate and the layout of tables facilitates group work. Many classrooms have television and video facilities. However, the two language laboratories have out-of-date equipment.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English language (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	206	205	258
		Retention (%)	97	78	86
		Achievement (%)	56	54	57
GCE A level English language (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	27	34	36
		Retention (%)	67	50	72
		Achievement (%)	94	88	77
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	41	35	37
		Retention (%)	76	71	73
		Achievement (%)	90	92	96
GCE A level language/literature	3	Number of starters	86	88	62
		Retention (%)	77	74	81
		Achievement (%)	74	92	90
GCE A level modern languages	3	Number of starters	72	59	44
		Retention (%)	75	71	77
		Achievement (%)	85	69	74

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

Curriculum Areas

Geography, History and Psychology

Grade 2

27 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE A/AS level and GCSE. They agreed with some judgements in the self-assessment report and found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective course management in psychology and history
- well-planned and well-managed lessons
- much good teaching
- rigorous monitoring of student progress
- effective arrangements for additional subject support
- most students achieve or improve on target grades
- good pass rates on psychology courses

Weaknesses

- below national average achievements in geography
- low retention on most GCE A level courses
- missed opportunities to develop key skills in lessons

28 Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that the curriculum area is effectively managed. A recent restructuring of the department has improved curriculum management procedures. Course documentation in history and psychology is comprehensive and detailed. Work schemes and lesson plans include clearly identified opportunities for teachers to promote equal opportunities. Useful subject handbooks provide detailed course information for students. Psychology teachers share good practice in teaching approaches. Course leaders are

effectively deployed across both college campuses. Subject meetings are frequent, though some part-time teachers of history have difficulties attending. Teachers carefully monitor students' attendance and the progress they make on their courses. However, attempts to improve retention rates on history and geography courses are having little impact.

29 In eight of the 12 lessons observed by inspectors, teaching was good or outstanding. This is above the national average for this programme area. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching is well organised. All lessons have clear, realistic aims. Inclusive learning strategies are built into work schemes and lesson plans. Most teachers made effective use of resources to stimulate learning. In psychology, a video was used to reinforce understanding of the effects of isolation and deprivation. GCSE psychology students enjoyed finding their way through paper-based mazes as part of trial and error experiments on learning and human behaviour. In geography, equal opportunities issues were addressed in a study of the geographical segregation of social groups in Manchester. Teachers regularly check that students are learning and most students enjoy their courses and value the good support provided by teachers. Average attendance in the lessons observed was 91%, well above the benchmark of 77%. In a few lessons, teachers relied too much on photocopied texts and did not encourage students to extend their reading. Some students did not use the college library to support their study. In some lessons teachers' questions were not sufficiently searching. Although key skills development and assessment opportunities are noted in work schemes and lesson plans, there was little evidence of these opportunities being used effectively. In some geography lessons, students are encouraged to develop IT skills.

30 Students' achievement rates in GCSE and GCE A/AS level psychology courses are at or above the national averages for sixth form

Curriculum Areas

colleges. Pass rates in GCE A level geography have improved from 76% in 1999 to 81% in 2000 but remain below the national average. GCE A level history pass rates have improved since 1998 and are now in line with national averages. Of the students who completed their GCE A level history courses in summer 2000, 85% achieved at or above their target grades. Retention rates on GCE A level courses are below national averages. The college understated this weakness in its self-assessment report, in particular the impact on geography courses. Progression to higher education is good. In 1999, approximately 80% of the students progressed to higher education courses; in 2000 there was a decline in the number of geography students who progressed to higher education.

31 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff are well qualified and appropriately experienced. Some have experience as external examiners. There has been insufficient staff development in the application of IT to learning. Classrooms are mostly adequate and appropriately equipped. Library resources at the North campus are inadequate, especially for history and geography. There is a system for transferring stock from the South campus to meet students' or teachers' requests. Students have access to a range of additional learning support. Additional subject support sessions are timetabled for geography and psychology. History teachers provide help to students out of lessons. Students speak highly of the help they are given in the IT areas and the learning resources centres.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in geography, history and psychology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE psychology (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	10	22	16
		Retention (%)	80	68	88
		Achievement (%)	50	60	64
GCE AS psychology (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	10	13	11
		Retention (%)	50	62	82
		Achievement (%)	*	*	78
GCE A level psychology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	117	119	107
		Retention (%)	62	82	71
		Achievement (%)	96	88	93
GCE A level geography (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	66	46	27
		Retention (%)	70	74	59
		Achievement (%)	89	76	81
GCE A level history (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	54	46	33
		Retention (%)	67	76	73
		Achievement (%)	75	83	88

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

*data unreliable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

32 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found some of the strengths to be overstated and identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- well-organised entry and induction procedures
- effective arrangements for careers education and guidance
- good level of participation in work experience programmes
- counselling and welfare support readily available

Weaknesses

- some ineffective tutorials
- underdeveloped literacy and numeracy support service

33 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has well-organised arrangements for pre-enrolment guidance, admissions and induction. Effective promotional activities in 13 partner schools have resulted in an increase in the number of applications for college courses for 2001. College staff and students give talks to school pupils, attend careers and parents events in schools and organise open evenings and 'taster' events in college. Subject teachers offer sample lessons in schools. Careers service staff attend college open evenings and enrolment days and provide impartial advice. There have been recent improvements to publicity materials and the college is using a wide range of methods to promote its courses. Attention is paid to equal opportunities in publicity materials and some material is translated into community languages. Induction programmes help students to settle into college quickly and confirm their choice of courses.

34 There is a strong commitment to supporting students in a welcoming and secure environment. Many students speak highly of the support they receive from their teachers and personal tutors. Achievements are celebrated. Attendance is well monitored and certificates are awarded to those with high attendance. In most subjects there is an academic support session for half an hour at the start of each day. This operates on a referral or a 'drop-in' basis and enables students to catch up with work or gain extra help. Most of these sessions are effective. However, inspectors observed some in which the diverse needs of the students were not all met.

35 All students are allocated a tutor and have two tutorial sessions a week. Tutorials are used to disseminate information, check students' progress and provide careers education. There are good materials on careers and other topics for use in tutorials. However, some aspects of the tutorial system are not effective. Half the tutorials observed by inspectors were not well conducted. Students spent too much time filling in booklets or listening to the tutor. In some tutorials, individual interviews dealing with personal matters were conducted within earshot of the rest of the group and in others the outcomes of the tutorials were not properly recorded. The college's self-assessment report for the autumn term 2000 records the need to review aspects of the tutorial programme.

36 Careers education and guidance is good. All students take part in a careers education programme and have access to individual guidance by qualified staff. Students know how to get information and guidance and are positive about the help they receive. Careers resources are housed in the library at each campus. Students' destinations after they leave college are carefully monitored. The majority of students progress to higher education. There is a well-organised system for dealing with applications to higher education institutions. In 1999-2000, 75% of leavers went to university. The college recognised in its self-assessment the

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need to improve the help it gives to job seekers. Staff have produced a useful booklet and have organised workshops to improve students' job-search and job-application skills. The college holds an annual careers and industry day. All of the GNVQ students and over 90 GCE A level students were involved in a successful work experience programme in 1999-2000. One student shadowed a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons for a week.

37 A specialist teacher provides literacy and numeracy support sessions for individuals or small groups four days a week at South campus and one day at North campus. There is also a full-time support assistant for the foundation course. Screening tests were carried out at the start of the year to identify students' basic and key skills support needs but the outcomes were not reliable. The college has prioritised the 65 students deemed to have the greatest need for learning support but one-third of these do not attend support sessions regularly. Other students identified as having support needs have not yet had initial interviews. The college recognises that it needs more staff who have been trained to teach basic skills. Students with dyslexia receive some help from the learning support teacher and are referred for expert assessment if necessary. The college has a small number of students with disabilities. It makes arrangements to provide specialist equipment where appropriate.

38 Professional counselling is available on both campuses. Welfare support is strong. Advice on housing is available and the college makes good use of access funds to support students in a variety of ways. A large proportion of students are in receipt of educational maintenance allowances and early evidence indicates this is helping to improve retention. A wide enrichment programme is on offer. Some students do not participate in the activities; others speak enthusiastically about their participation in 'millennium volunteers', drama and sports activities. A student council

organises social activities. The college is committed to celebrating cultural diversity. There are prayer rooms at each campus.

General Resources

Grade 3

39 Inspectors generally agreed with the college's self-assessment of its general resources. The college had begun to address some weaknesses by the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- attractive environment
- well-maintained and well-equipped classrooms
- access to good recreational facilities

Weaknesses

- some small and overcrowded classrooms
- inadequate social areas for students
- no access to some areas for people with restricted mobility

40 The college provides an attractive learning and teaching environment for students and staff. The buildings on each college campus are adjacent to shared recreational fields used by the college for sporting activities. Most classrooms are well decorated, suitably furnished and well equipped. Classrooms and facilities for individual curriculum areas are grouped together where possible. Curriculum areas have created their own identity around clusters of specialist rooms. Displays of students' work and other appropriate visual materials brighten classrooms and many of the corridors. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that some of the classrooms on both campuses are too small to accommodate the size of groups and that existing student social areas are inadequate. Students congregate in entrances and corridors and sometimes use the

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study areas in the learning centres and open access IT rooms as social areas.

41 The college has begun to implement its accommodation strategy. This focuses on alleviating problems of overcrowding on the North campus and rationalising, remodelling and upgrading accommodation on both campuses. Several adaptations, and some restructuring and refurbishment of accommodation have recently been completed. Inspectors agreed with the college judgement that this work has led to improvements in accommodation for students and staff. Further improvements are planned but there have been delays in making improvements to some facilities. For example some student toilet facilities are in a poor condition. These weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report.

42 Access to many parts of the college's accommodation is difficult or impossible for people with restricted mobility. At the South campus, wheelchair users can only access ground floor accommodation and the purpose-built learning centre that has a lift. At the North campus, the layout and interlinking of the buildings makes access for wheelchair users even more difficult. Many rooms can only be reached by narrow stairs and corridors. The college acknowledges these difficulties in its disability statement and is seeking to make improvements as part of its accommodation strategy.

43 The college has made significant progress in implementing its information and learning technology strategy. Some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report relating to inadequate access for staff and students to IT equipment, technical support, the Internet and college intranet have been addressed. Significant investment has recently been made to upgrade the IT network on and between both campuses to industrial standards. An external link to the network has been installed. Eight IT teaching rooms and an open access workshop

on each campus are equipped with new computers. There are now 240 networked computers accessible to students, a ratio of approximately one computer to five full-time equivalent students. All of these networked computers have access to the Internet and college intranet. IT facilities and equipment are well used on both college campuses. Students report that access to computers can be difficult during peak periods such as lunchtimes.

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that significant improvements have been made to the quality and suitability of the college's library/learning centres. At the South campus the library/learning centre is located in a purpose-built block constructed in 1995. It includes 56 private study places adjacent to timetabled and open access IT rooms. At the North campus a new library/learning centre was created in 1999 on a mezzanine floor over part of a hall. It provides an attractive environment but has only 12 study places. Sixty additional quiet study places are provided in the hall below when it is not being used for other purposes. The current formal seating arrangements in the learning centre study areas are not suitable for students who wish to undertake private study or group work.

45 Recreational facilities for students and staff have recently been improved. Students have access to a gymnasium on the North campus. The gymnasium and changing rooms have recently been upgraded. The college continues to have user rights to the sports hall owned by Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council, which is adjacent to the South campus. Physical education staff provide a range of recreational and sporting activities for students during the day and at lunchtimes. These activities take place in the gymnasium and sports hall and on the playing fields at each campus that are shared with adjacent schools. Off-site facilities including swimming pools and athletic tracks are also made available to students.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

46 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and found additional weaknesses. By the time of the inspection some of the weaknesses identified by the college had been addressed.

Key strengths

- comprehensive range of quality assurance activities
- good use of value-added data to improve students' achievements
- effective self-assessment
- good staff development arrangements

Weaknesses

- little impact of quality assurance procedures on retention rates
- some poor course reviews
- no appraisal of support staff

47 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that an effective framework for quality assurance and self-assessment has been developed and is now well established. Quality assurance systems are well understood and supported by staff and students. The annual cycle of quality assurance activities is an integrate part of the college planning process. Governors, managers and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement. They set targets, use performance indicators to measure the progress made towards achieving those targets, and compare student retention and achievement rates with national averages. Handbooks produced for staff provide clear and helpful guidance on implementing quality procedures. The quality standards group, which includes governor representation, and a quality team, efficiently monitor the quality of academic provision and student services. Although achievement rates have improved significantly

at level 3 and are now near to the average for sixth form colleges, retention rates on advanced level courses remain below national averages.

48 Departmental and course review procedures are not applied consistently across all curriculum areas. In the more effective reviews, clear reference is made to external verifier reports, lesson observations and the analysis of students' attendance, retention and achievements against college targets and national averages. Minimum target grades are set for each student, based on their qualifications at the start of their courses. Students regularly review their progress against these targets and draw up action plans for improvement. Teachers use them effectively to measure student performance against their predicted grades and assess added value. Some departmental and course reviews lack clear evidence to support judgements, are insufficiently detailed and do not provide a critical evaluation of course or departmental performance. Action plans sometimes fail to address key issues. However, senior managers are thorough in monitoring the quality of reports and take prompt action to deal with poor reports.

49 A comprehensive programme of lesson observations is used to monitor the quality of teaching. Senior managers and heads of department observe lessons and use the outcomes to assess the quality of teaching in curriculum areas. Teachers involved in peer observations welcome the opportunity to share good practice. The arrangements for moderating the grades awarded to lessons are underdeveloped. Lesson observations carried out by college staff resulted in a more favourable grade profile than that resulting from inspection.

50 The college collects and analyses the views of students and parents on the quality of its provision. Students' views are obtained through questionnaires, focus groups and the student council. Students do not always receive

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feedback on the outcomes of surveys or the action taken by the college to address the issues identified. The college charter clearly sets out key standards and students are generally aware of these. Many students are unclear about the complaints' procedure, despite the fact that is published in the students' handbook.

51 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that staff development arrangements are effective. The staff development policy supports the implementation of the strategic plan. The college places a high priority on staff development; each year five days are set aside for staff development. Teachers have received effective training in inclusive learning and using IT. Teachers have opportunities for industrial updating and personal development. New teachers undertake an induction programme that introduces them to the college, their department and key college policies. Teaching staff have an annual appraisal which identifies their training needs. Lesson observation outcomes are not used as part of staff appraisal. Support staff have not been appraised. The college is working towards Investor in People status.

52 The college produced its first self-assessment report since the merger for the inspection. It was clear and self-critical and provided a good basis for planning the inspection. All curriculum teams, cross-college teams and governors were involved in the comprehensive self-assessment process. Service areas also produced self-assessment reports based on performance against quality standards. Departmental reviews were aggregated by curriculum managers and contributed to the departmental self-assessment reports.

Governance

Grade 3

53 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered some of the strengths to be overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- experienced governors who use their expertise to support the college
- effective determination of the strategic direction of the college
- close monitoring of the college's academic performance

Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements for evaluating governors' own performance
- insufficient links between governors and staff
- some non-compliance with statutory requirements and best practice

54 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.

55 The corporation has a determined membership of 19. Two representatives are from the minority ethnic communities and four are women. One vacancy, for a business member, has remained unfilled since the merger. The corporation has not determined the arrangements by which nominations are sought in respect of certain categories of governor. The formation of a search committee, a statutory requirement since 1 August 1999, did not take place until June 2000.

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The committee has undertaken a skills audit of corporation membership. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the governors provide the college with a wide and varied range of experience and expertise. This has been used to benefit the college, for example, in the provision of advice on the new accommodation block. Induction arrangements have recently been formalised and include the provision of a mentor for newly appointed governors. Training consists of in-house presentations and attendance at external events. The corporation committees have reviewed the relevant FEFC training modules. Whilst governors have assessed their own individual training requirements, this has not resulted in a formal, annual training programme.

56 The corporation has met eight times in the last 12 months, including three extraordinary meetings. In addition to the search committee there are finance, audit, personnel, remuneration, and premises and assets committees. The terms of reference of all committees are appropriate. The self-assessment report comments on consistently high attendance at meetings. However, average attendance at all corporation and committee meetings last year was only 76%, against the target of 85%. The clerk to the corporation is one of the college's assistant principals. This is not in accordance with best practice. A detailed job description defines his role. Governors appreciate the timely receipt of agendas and papers. However, the precise nature of the business transacted at meetings is not always clear from the often brief minutes. The clerk is not appraised.

57 The finance committee reviews the most recent management accounts at each of its ordinary meetings and members of the committee receive the accounts between meetings. The accounts are also presented at meetings of the corporation. Membership of the audit committee includes a governor with relevant financial expertise. The committee has

not set any performance criteria for internal or external auditors. It has stepped outside its remit in recommending the approval of the financial regulations and procedures to the corporation.

58 The agendas, minutes and papers of corporation and committee meetings are available for public scrutiny, apart from confidential items. The corporation has not updated its confidentiality criteria in the light of the recommendations of the Nolan committee. All governors and staff with significant financial responsibilities have completed declarations of interest, although the corporation has decided not to extend these to include the interests of spouses, partners and close relatives. The corporation has yet to institute a formal, annual review of its decision-making processes. The code of conduct largely complies with the Nolan recommendations and the corporation has approved a 'whistleblowing' policy.

59 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governors have effective arrangements to set targets for the college and to monitor its strategic performance. Governors receive detailed, wide ranging reports from the principal at each meeting. These reports present up-to-date information on actual performance against agreed targets. The corporation has completed a self-assessment, which acknowledges that the arrangements for monitoring its own performance are inadequate. A subcommittee of the corporation has appraised the principal and set performance targets.

60 Governors display a high level of commitment to the college and its students. Relationships between governors and senior managers are good and they work well together, respecting each other's roles. There are no formal links between corporation members and the curriculum areas or service areas of the college. Some governors attend college committees, including the quality standards committee and the equal opportunities

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committee. The self-assessment report acknowledges that communications between governors and staff need to be improved. Inspectors agreed with this judgement.

61 Since the formation of the new college, policies on equal opportunities and health and safety have been developed. The corporation formally adopted the equal opportunities policy in summer 2000. Implementation of the policy is still at an early stage and governors have not yet received any monitoring reports. The health and safety policy was developed by November 1998, but due to an oversight, the corporation has not formally adopted this, or monitored health and safety issues.

Management

Grade 3

62 Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but they judged that the college had overstated some of these.

Key strengths

- clearly focused agenda for improvement
- effective arrangements for setting targets to improve students' achievements
- clear, well-understood management structure

Weaknesses

- underachievement of recruitment targets for three years
- inconsistencies in the way college policies are implemented
- insufficient monitoring of the effectiveness of key policies

63 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has made progress in establishing an organisation with common goals and values and a single culture. The revised

management structure is clear and well understood by staff. The college management team consists of senior managers plus managers with clearly defined cross-college responsibilities. Senior managers make themselves available to staff by spending some time at both campuses on most days. The senior management team and college management team meet regularly. However, the minutes are often brief and do not indicate clearly whether actions determined at previous meetings have been implemented.

Communication channels are well developed. The principal holds weekly briefings at each campus. There are a half-termly written principal's briefings and weekly college bulletins for both staff and students. The heads of departments meet as a group with the deputy principal; departmental meetings to disseminate information closely follow this meeting.

64 Some carefully considered appointments of staff to cross-college roles have recently been made. A marketing manager has been appointed to address the shortfall in the recruitment of students against targets. A new marketing strategy, which includes the production of attractive promotional material, has resulted in the number of applications being significantly higher than at the same time last year. Annual meetings between managers and heads of department are used to review departmental performance and to plan ahead. However, the links between college strategic objectives and individual departmental objectives are not always clear. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there are some inconsistencies in the way college policies and procedures are implemented in different curriculum areas. There are differences in the detail and quality of schemes of work, the rigour with which student attendance and punctuality are monitored, and the involvement of staff in operational planning. The college recognises these weaknesses and is acting to address them.

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65 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the college has failed to meet its enrolment targets in the two years since merger, resulting in a total clawback of £402,000. It is also likely that the target for 2000-01 will not be met and a further £140,000 has been provided to cover this shortfall. However, despite reduced enrolments, the college management have ensured the robustness of the college's financial position. It has produced operating surpluses of £106,000 and £59,000 in 1998-99 and 1999-2000, respectively, and had a cash balance of £1,489,000 at 31 December 2000. The director of finance has a recognised professional accountancy qualification. Management accounts are produced promptly after the month-end, although they do not include a 12-month rolling cashflow forecast. The omission of such a forecast is not in accordance with best practice.

66 The college has a range of links with schools, employers, the borough and the local training and enterprise (TEC). Through these links the college has identified the need for more provision at level 1 and 2 in the borough. A strategic decision has been made not to increase this provision on the college campus. An application for funding has been made with a local high school for a project to address the training needs of white males.

67 The college welcomes students from different backgrounds and cultures and there is clear evidence of activity to promote equal opportunities within the college. The recently revised equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and includes a range of carefully defined performance indicators. Noticeboards are effectively used to promote role models. Links are made with the local Asian heritage communities. An equal opportunities committee includes governor representation. The college pays attention to health and safety issues.

Incidents are recorded and there are sufficient appropriately trained first aiders. However, there is insufficient monitoring of the effectiveness these key policies across the college.

Conclusions

68 The college produced its first self-assessment report prior to inspection. The report was comprehensive and evaluative. It contained judgements that were generally supported by appropriate evidence. The college makes appropriate use of performance indicators. Service areas have measurable standards against which to judge their performance. Target-setting has resulted in improvements in achievement rates but not in recruitment and retention rates. Lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those awarded by the college. Although these grades were in line with averages for further education colleges the proportion of good and outstanding grades awarded was below average for sixth form colleges. Inspectors agreed with the college's curriculum area grades. They agreed with two of the grades the college awarded for aspects of cross-college provision and awarded three cross-college grades which were lower than those awarded by the college.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (January 2001)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	92
19-24 years	2
25+ years	6
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (January 2001)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	2
Level 2 (intermediate)	17
Level 3 (advanced)	81
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Level not specified	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (January 2001)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	400	20	32
Engineering	9	20	2
Business	200	35	18
Hotel and catering	64	0	5
Health and community care	30	0	2
Art and design	60	0	5
Humanities	437	27	36
Total	1,200	102	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 55% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 2001)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	64	8	4	76
Supporting direct learning contact	6	0	0	6
Other support	27	0	0	27
Total	97	8	4	109

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£4,018,000	£4,125,000	£4,178,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	*	£17.48	£17.36
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	70%	71%
Achievement of funding target	101%**	94%**	95%
Diversity of income	4%	2%	4%
Operating surplus	£22,000	£181,000	£134,000

Sources: Income – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

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

Payroll – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

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

Diversity of income – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

*data unavailable due to college merger

**combined data for merged colleges

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	144	333	33	0	13	37
	Retention (%)	84	80	94	0	100	78
	Achievement (%)	57	80	91	0	50	85
2	Number of starters	944	1,414	870	54	20	66
	Retention (%)	84	76	81	89	85	29
	Achievement (%)	86	57	88	84	100	78
3	Number of starters	2,275	2,516	2,483	58	33	54
	Retention (%)	71	69	58	52	79	52
	Achievement (%)	69	71	82	74	85	78
4 or 5	Number of starters	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	Number of starters	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
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	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

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

FEFC Inspection Report 53/01

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

March 2001

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The print run for this document was 1,450 copies

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Reference INSREP/1223/01