

Boston College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

**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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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

Boston College

East Midlands Region

Inspected January 2001

Boston College is a medium-sized general further education college and the largest provider of post-16 education and training in east and south Lincolnshire. The college produced its fourth self-assessment report for this inspection. All staff and governors took part in the self-assessment process. External consultants assisted with the production and evaluation of the self-assessment report. The report was comprehensive and supported by extensive evidence. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They agreed with all the curriculum grades awarded by the college and three of the five cross-college grades.

The college offers a range of courses in all of the programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in five programme areas was inspected together with basic skills and aspects of cross-college provision. The college has effective links with local communities. In some it has established centres in collaboration with other further education colleges. Most teaching and learning is good and no lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory. Arrangements to observe teaching and learning are well established and effective. Teaching is well planned and there is

good individual support for students. Training for key skills has been successfully integrated with GCE AS courses. Strategies for improving the rate of retention are effective, and thorough monitoring has resulted in high levels of attendance. During the inspection attendance rates were significantly above the national average for the sector. Pass rates have improved on many courses. Accommodation is attractive and well maintained, and there is a wide range of appropriate specialist resources. There are good IT facilities for students in the learning centres and specialist computer suites in vocational areas. Governors have been resolute in their stewardship of public funds. Communications throughout the college are good. The purchase of a new centralised system has improved the accuracy and use of management information since the previous inspection. The college is well managed. Managers plan, monitor and review operations effectively. The college should address: retention rates on some courses; the thoroughness of review and target-setting at course level; the identification of support needs for advanced students; library resources in some areas; scheduling of corporation meetings; and the approach to some equal opportunities issues.

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 | 3 | General resources | 2 |
| Hotel and catering | 2 | Quality assurance | 2 |
| Health and social care | 2 | Governance | 3 |
| English, sociology and psychology | 3 | Management | 2 |
| Basic skills | 3 | | |

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Boston College is a general further education college located on three campuses in Boston. The Rochford campus was purpose built between 1964 and 1984 and includes residential accommodation for 134 students added in 1993. In 1992, the college acquired a secondary school and has since remodelled the main buildings, creating the De Montfort campus. The conversion of three former riverside warehouses in Boston into the Sam Newsom Centre provides facilities for music and the performing arts. During the session 1999-2000 the college opened the Boston Conference and Management Centre within the Rochford campus to provide management training and conference facilities for local industrial and commercial clients.

2 The college serves the area of east and south Lincolnshire, a population of approximately 250,000. The area includes several small towns, for example Boston, Sleaford, Skegness and Spalding, and a large number of small widely dispersed communities. The nearest further education colleges are over 30 miles away. The secondary education system in the region is selective, comprising grammar schools for 11 to 18 year olds and secondary high schools which are mainly for 11 to 16 year olds. The number of school-leavers in the region has been stable for the last few years and is expected to remain so in the medium term. The local low wage economy, coupled with almost full employment, has promoted a tradition where many young people do not progress to post-16 education. Many students live at a considerable distance from the college and public transport offers restricted opportunities for them. Transport for 16 to 19 year old students is funded by the local education authority (LEA). The college also recruits some students from overseas, notably from Hong Kong, China and Greece.

3 The college provides courses in all programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and at all levels from foundation to higher education. It offers a variety of general national vocational qualification (GNVQ), national vocational qualification (NVQ) and other vocational programmes. It also offers subjects for the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) as well as subjects for the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). Higher education courses are primarily offered in association with De Montfort University; these courses serve local needs and also attract students from outside the college's normal catchment area. The college works in collaboration with the adult education service to provide education and training opportunities in some 20 towns and villages. To further meet its community responsibilities the college runs two buses which are equipped with information technology (IT) facilities and follow designated bus routes in the area. A substantial number of courses is available in centres in Sleaford and Spalding. At Sleaford, the college works in partnership with Grantham College and the North Kesteven District Council. At Spalding, Stamford College is one of the collaborative partners. The college has embarked on a further collaborative project in Skegness with East Lindsey Training Services and East Lindsey ITeC.

4 In 1999-2000 the college enrolled 9,031 students of whom 1,580 were full-time. There are 15 academic sections organised within three faculties. A fourth faculty manages education and training in the centres away from college and in the community. The college has 128 full-time equivalent teachers and 88 full-time equivalent support staff. It also employs over 100 agency staff.

5 The college in its mission statement declares itself to be 'committed to providing the best opportunities for learning and personal development for all, within a caring, supportive and open environment'.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in January 2001. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1998 and 1999 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 2000, which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. These data were found to be accurate and reliable. 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 12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 55 days. They observed 75 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated a variety of college documents. Meetings were

held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 75 lessons inspected, 68% were judged to be good or outstanding and none were judged to be less than satisfactory. This profile compares favourably with the national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programme | Grade | | | | | Totals |
|--|-------|----|----|---|---|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| GCE A/AS level | 1 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| GCSE | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| GNVQ | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| NVQ | 3 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Other vocational | 3 | 19 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 31 |
| Other | 0 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Total (No.) | 7 | 44 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 75 |
| Total (%) | 9 | 59 | 32 | 0 | 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

Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. During the period of the inspection examinations were taking place for GCE A/AS level.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

| | Average number of students | Average attendance (%) |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Boston College | 10.2 | 80 |
| 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

9 Inspectors observed 16 lessons including some in centres in the community. They broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that some weaknesses were not given sufficient emphasis.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- imaginative and effective assignments
- high achievement rates on computer literacy courses
- effective courses in the community

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate teaching methods for theory work
- a low retention rate across the range of provision
- ineffective course reviews

10 The college has a wide range of computing and IT courses which provide good opportunities for progression from foundation to higher education level. The growing range of introductory and short courses and the extensive provision at centres in the community enable students to attend at locations and times convenient to them. There are two buses with IT equipment which reach small rural communities. The college also runs a higher national diploma with De Montfort University and, in conjunction with Sunderland University, a final year taking students to degree level.

11 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment that courses are

effectively managed. Timetabling is efficient. Record-keeping and scheduling of students assignments are appropriate. Course teams have regular minuted meetings with subsequent actions clearly identified. Feedback from students is given thorough consideration. Community provision is thoroughly co-ordinated across the various centres. There is excellent administrative support to assist the tracking and monitoring of student attendance. Information from course teams is fed to the section manager who monitors performance against targets. The use of targets and other information by course teams is underdeveloped. Course reviews at team level are not used effectively to disseminate best practice. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses.

12 Teaching is well planned. Lessons have clear objectives, which are usually shared with students. The standard of teaching and learning in lessons provided at centres in the community is good. Teachers provide effective support for individual students. In particular, adult learners returning to study quickly become sufficiently confident to help each other. Full-time courses include some well-designed practical modules devised by the college. Practical assignments are imaginative and reflect techniques used in industry. In one lesson, students developed their skills with a programming language by creating a simple railway timetable enquiry system. The lesson was well supported by the use of teaching materials that required thorough use of design techniques. Full-time students also obtain experience of professional and industrial practice through work placements. However, in theory lessons, or in those parts of practical lessons where theory was covered, teachers often used too narrow a range of teaching methods some of which were not always appropriate.

13 Teachers are well qualified. Inspectors agreed with the college that specialist resources are good. Specialist teaching rooms have

Curriculum Areas

up-to-date hardware and software comparable with what is used in industry and commerce. There are overhead projectors and screens and two computer-driven projectors for software demonstrations. Stocks of appropriate learning materials in the specialist areas and in the resource centre are adequate.

14 Students' written work and portfolios of practical work are of a good standard and contain helpful feedback from teachers. Attendance of 87% at lessons during the inspection was high. Many students completing full-time level 3 courses progress to higher education or employment. On the computer literacy courses most students complete their studies and achieve their qualifications. Achievement rates for these courses are consistently above the national average for the sector. Many of these students then progress to level 2 IT courses. The self-assessment report

identified the low rate of student retention as a weakness but did not recognise its full extent. Across most courses retention rates are below national averages and in some cases they are poor. For example, there are satisfactory pass rates on the national diploma for students who complete their course, but in 2000 only about half the students who initially started finished the course. Action has been taken by the college in various ways to address this weakness. For example, provision has been more closely matched to need and policies adopted to improve attendance. The retention of students currently on courses has improved, often to above national averages.

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 |
| Computer literacy and information technology | 1 | Number of starters | 936 | 884 | 1,495 |
| | | Retention (%) | 87 | 79 | 80 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 67 | 86 | 91 |
| C&G IT certificate | 1 | Number of starters | 489 | 459 | 167 |
| | | Retention (%) | 29 | 34 | 49 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 47 | 67 | 90 |
| First diploma IT applications | 2 | Number of starters | 17 | 28 | 46 |
| | | Retention (%) | 82 | 61 | 63 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 64 | 76 | 66 |
| National diploma computer studies | 3 | Number of starters | * | 45 | 44 |
| | | Retention (%) | * | 64 | 48 |
| | | Achievement (%) | * | 85 | 78 |
| GCE A level computing | 3 | Number of starters | 25 | 34 | 14 |
| | | Retention (%) | 80 | 53 | 50 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 50 | 67 | 67 |

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

*fewer than 10 students

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

15 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-managed provision
- well-structured lessons
- good support for individuals
- the effective monitoring of opportunities for practical experience
- high achievement on integrated business technology short course

Weaknesses

- a poor retention rate on some courses
- poor achievement on some courses
- underdeveloped analysis of students' attainment levels

16 The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time business courses, including GNVQs at intermediate and advanced level, NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3, and GCE A level business studies. A good range of qualifications in secretarial skills supports NVQs. Such qualifications can also be obtained through standalone courses. A large number of students takes the integrated business technology short course. Several short courses are offered at off-site centres in the small towns that are some distance from the college.

17 The programme area is effectively managed. Courses are well planned and are supported by appropriately detailed schemes of work. All students are provided with a useful course handbook. Teachers meet regularly in their teams to deal with individual students as

well as course issues. Student surveys and course reviews are effectively used to review and improve provision. When courses are failing, action is taken and more suitable courses introduced. Arrangements for timetables are imaginative. In one instance, students were finding travel arrangements difficult and the retention rate was poor. The course was re-arranged and retention rates improved substantially. Training in key skills is well integrated with the business administration programmes. Internal verification procedures are reliable. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the use of value-added analysis in setting students' achievements targets is underdeveloped. Although the college subscribes to a system for comparing students' final GCE A level examination results with their attainment at GCSE, it is not used effectively at course level.

18 Lessons are well structured. They have clear aims and objectives. In most lessons teachers take care to check that students are understanding the work. There is much evidence of sensitive support for individual students. In one lesson, while other students were working on more demanding tasks, a student lacking in numeracy skills was taken step by step through very basic skills to gain confidence in dealing with simple interest calculations. Some lessons did not contain up-to-date illustrative examples that might increase students' interest in the work.

19 Inspectors agreed with the college that there are good opportunities for students to gain practical experience. Students' part-time work, work placements and simulated work experience in college are tracked and monitored effectively. The training office is particularly well organised for administration programmes. Clear records are kept of attendance and the progress made by students. There is an effective system for monitoring attendance. Action-planning is used effectively by both teachers and students. Appropriate

Curriculum Areas

assignments are set and most tutor comment is both constructive and comprehensive.

Assessments are usually sound, although there was overgenerous marking on one course.

20 Teachers are well qualified, although some lack recent relevant commercial and industrial experience. The section benefits from good accommodation and equipment. The college IT resources are well used. Access to industry standard computers and software is good. The resources centre stock is adequate for the college's provision. Internet access is widely available both in the resources centre and in specialist areas and is well used by some students.

21 As recognised in the self-assessment report there are high levels of student satisfaction on all courses. Students speak positively about their studies and work effectively on their own. Most portfolios are well organised and well presented. IT is used appropriately in the presentation of coursework. Pass rates in GNVQ intermediate and GCE A level business studies have been consistently below the national average for the sector for the past three years. There is good achievement on the integrated business technology short course. Integrated business technology and GCE A level business studies have had retention rates below the national average over the last three years. There have been poor retention rates in all NVQ business courses until the recent improvement in 2000. GNVQ advanced has had declining retention over the last three years. The self-assessment report identified poor retention rates as a significant weakness. However, weaknesses in achievement were not recognised.

Curriculum Areas

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
| GNVQ intermediate business | 2 | Number of starters | 12 | 17 | † |
| | | Retention (%) | 53 | 82 | † |
| | | Achievement (%) | 22 | 22 | † |
| NVQ business administration | 2 | Number of starters | 36 | 55 | 10 |
| | | Retention (%) | 72 | 64 | 90 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 55 | 71 | 75 |
| Integrated business technology | 2 | Number of starters | 159 | 229 | 643 |
| | | Retention (%) | 87 | 84 | 80 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 57 | 80 | 84 |
| GCE A level business studies | 3 | Number of starters | 55 | 52 | 34 |
| | | Retention (%) | 53 | 56 | 56 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 44 | 37 | 59 |
| GNVQ advanced business | 3 | Number of starters | 24 | 28 | 20 |
| | | Retention (%) | 83 | 74 | 55 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 61 | 65 | 82 |
| NVQ business administration | 3 | Number of starters | 25 | 11 | 10 |
| | | Retention (%) | 32 | 55 | 90 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 43 | 50 | 80 |

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

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective course management
- well-planned teaching
- effective student teamwork during practical lessons
- high levels of support for students
- good rates of retention and achievement on most courses

Weaknesses

- poor achievement on GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering
- insufficient financial analysis of the catering operation
- some poorly decorated and planned kitchen space

23 The college offers courses in hospitality and catering leading to GNVQ and NVQ qualifications. The range of courses meets the needs of 16 to 19 year old students, adult students and some sections of the industry. NVQ level 1 provision is designed to provide training opportunities for students and a level of entry for those school-leavers who possess few entry qualifications. A wide range of complementary qualifications is available, including vegetarian cookery and the pastry cooks certificate.

24 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the management of hospitality and catering courses is effective. Lines of communication and responsibility are

clearly understood and work well. Course documents are comprehensive, well designed and appropriate for students' use. Course teams meet regularly and maintain clear records of meetings. Progress made on action points arising from meetings is carefully monitored. There is good teamwork for curriculum planning and for monitoring students' progress. Results of lesson observations help to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

25 Lessons are well planned and involve students in a wide range of learning activities. Lesson plans are appropriately detailed and include achievable objectives. Students are encouraged to organise their own learning and to produce action plans to meet those gaps which they are aware of in their knowledge. During practical lessons students work well in mixed teams. In activity in a simulated work environment NVQ level 3 students act in turn as the kitchen supervisor while the NVQ level 2 and 1 students act as first and second assistant chefs, respectively. Students are attentive to their professional roles and responsibilities. Teachers set interesting assignments that are clearly written and are related to the different sectors of the hospitality and catering industry. Procedures for internal verification are thorough. Most students receive appropriately detailed feedback on assignments and other work from teachers. Inspectors agreed with the college that students develop sound skills within a good work environment. There are excellent opportunities for assessment in all simulated work experience activity in the college.

26 Tutorial support is effective. Tutorials are well planned. They provide opportunities for students to further develop action plans which are subsequently monitored. There are effective arrangements to support students with learning difficulties. Teachers devote large amounts of their own time to helping students across a wide range of activity. This support is valued highly by the students but is not identified in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

27 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teachers are well qualified and most have up-to-date industrial experience. The catering classroom is well equipped with a television, video recorder and overhead projectors. There are no specialist videos or materials for students to work with on their own in the resource centre. Some kitchens are poorly decorated and poorly laid out and some basic catering equipment is outdated. Management information systems do not provide regular financial information to enable managers to analyse the catering operation. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

28 Most students' portfolios of work are well organised. Many display good use of IT. Levels of student attendance are excellent. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there are good rates of retention and achievement on most courses. For example, rates on both NVQ level 2 food preparation courses were significantly above the national average for the sector in 1999-2000. However, achievement rates on GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering have been below the national average for the past two years.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|--|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
| Pastry cooks | 1 | Number of starters | † | 26 | 13 |
| | | Retention (%) | † | 92 | 77 |
| | | Achievement (%) | † | 71 | 80 |
| NVQ food preparation (two-year course) | 2 | Number of starters | 13 | 29 | 18 |
| | | Retention (%) | 62 | 58 | 83 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 83 | 82 | 100 |
| NVQ food preparation (one-year fast-track course) | 2 | Number of starters | 30 | 1 | 16 |
| | | Retention (%) | 100 | 100 | 94 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 83 | 100 | 87 |
| East Midlands Further Education Council vegetarian cookery | 2 | Number of starters | 19 | † | 13 |
| | | Retention (%) | 95 | † | 100 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 78 | † | 92 |
| GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering | 3 | Number of starters | 12 | 11 | 11 |
| | | Retention (%) | 100 | 73 | 82 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 83 | 62 | 67 |

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

29 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with the judgements identified in the self-assessment report. They also identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- excellent achievement on full-time courses
- good rates of retention on most full-time courses
- well-organised and effective work experience
- effective tracking of students' progress

Weaknesses

- a low retention rate on the national diploma in social care
- slow completion rates for course units on NVQ programmes

30 Since the previous inspection the college has introduced many new courses in health and social care. There is extensive provision from level 2 to level 4 qualifications. Inspectors agreed with the college that the provision allows appropriate internal progression for many students. Full-time students have good opportunities to gain additional qualifications, including one on baby massage. Staff work well together as a team. The introduction of key skills training into the full-time curriculum has been planned carefully. There is effective internal verification. The section acknowledges the need to pay attention to its part-time provision which has been ineffectively managed in recent years. An increase in links with external agencies has already led to a growth in NVQ enrolments.

31 Inspectors agreed with the college that teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and objectives are shared with students. These objectives often relate to the demands of professional practice, and are accompanied by well-produced handouts. Students respond positively to the way in which teachers organise lessons. Learning activities include group work, simulation and role-play. Teachers' effective use of directed questions ensures that all students are involved in most of the lessons. Students are attentive and keen; they attend regularly and are punctual. One outstanding lesson focused on speaking and listening skills. The teacher successfully engaged students in thinking about what it was like for children when they had to undertake a new task. The teacher then distributed a handout containing a series of pictures with strict instructions to the students not to look at it until told to do so. Rules and instructions for the completion of the exercise were then explained. These were quite complicated and required good listening skills. At the end of the exercise the teacher explored with students what it was like for them to be on the receiving end of a sequence of instructions which they did not fully understand and to cope with rapid speech and an unfamiliar vocabulary and anxiety. The teacher then skilfully related this experience to their work with children. In a few lessons the time allowed for students to complete tasks was excessive and the work itself was insufficiently demanding. As a consequence students lost interest and concentration. IT was used in lessons at too elementary a level. These weaknesses in teaching and learning were not recognised by the college. Inspectors agreed with the college that work experience placements are well organised and make a significant contribution to students' learning and development, including their career aspirations. Students have a well-planned tutorial programme, which includes action-planning and regular progress reviews. They find these processes helpful in meeting the demands of their courses.

Curriculum Areas

32 Teachers are appropriately qualified. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the professional experience of full-time teachers is good and regularly updated. Students' experience is further enhanced by part-time teachers who are engaged in professional practice. There is an appropriate level of specialist bookstock in the resource centre. Good displays of students' work in their base rooms create a stimulating environment.

33 Students' work is well presented. Inspectors agreed that the achievements of full-time students are exceptional. All five full-time courses registered rates of achievements at 100% in 1999-2000. Four courses have sustained this profile over two years and one over three years. Many students achieve merit passes but few attain distinctions

in their work apart from students on the national diploma in childhood studies. The rate of retention on most full-time courses has improved and now exceeds the national average for the sector. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. The most dramatic improvement occurred when the GNVQ intermediate level course was replaced with the first diploma in caring. Rates of achievement and retention on the GNVQ course were below the national average; on the new diploma course they exceed them. The rate of retention on the national diploma in social care course is consistently low. Slow completion of units on NVQ courses leads to delays in candidates achieving the full qualification. The section has taken action to address both these issues.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|--|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
| GNVQ intermediate health and social care and first diploma in caring | 2 | Number of starters | 26 | 28 | 18* |
| | | Retention (%) | 62 | 64 | 82 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 62 | 61 | 100 |
| CACHE certificate in childcare and education | 2 | Number of starters | 28 | 19 | 26 |
| | | Retention (%) | 68 | 72 | 92 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 58 | 100 | 100 |
| National diploma in social care | 3 | Number of starters | 26 | 19 | 17 |
| | | Retention (%) | 69 | 68 | 71 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 89 | 100 | 100 |
| National diploma in childhood studies | 3 | Number of starters | 23 | 18 | 16 |
| | | Retention (%) | 96 | 83 | 94 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 78 | 100 | 100 |
| CACHE diploma in nursery nursing | 3 | Number of starters | 14 | 4 | 10 |
| | | Retention (%) | 93 | 75 | 90 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 100 | 100 | 100 |

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

*first year of replacement for GNVQ

Curriculum Areas

English, Sociology and Psychology

Grade 3

34 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- effective integration of key skills on GCE AS courses
- effective monitoring of students' learning

Weaknesses

- a poor retention rate on GCE A level courses
- poor achievement on some GCSE courses
- insufficient analysis of data on students' levels of attainment
- inadequate provision of feedback on students' work

35 Most provision in English and the social sciences attracts full-time students. For part-time students, inappropriate timetabling of social science subjects restricts their choice. Subject teams meet regularly to monitor students' rates of retention and achievement. Analysis of these rates has led to the reduction in GCSE provision. However, insufficient use is made of value-added measurements to monitor subject performance and students' attainment. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

36 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is good. Lessons are well planned, have clear objectives and involve a range of activities which hold students' interest. In an English literature lesson, students

contrasted versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seen on video with a reading of the text. This comparison increased their appreciation of the dramatic possibilities of the play. In many lessons, teachers stimulate discussion through appropriate questioning and make good use of students' experience. In a lively debate on the ethics of animal research, psychology students saw the importance of arguments based on research evidence rather than emotive appeal. Teachers pay close attention to checking that students are understanding the work, a strength overlooked in the college's self-assessment. When fresh subject matter is being introduced in a lesson, they establish the link with previous learning. In social science subjects, there are short but imaginative written tests. Psychology students are given a useful handbook with exercises on research methods. Opportunities for GCE AS students to develop their competence in key skills have been effectively integrated with their main programme of study. For example, sociology students used the Internet to compare contemporary social trend data with predictions based on earlier data. In some lessons, however, teachers missed opportunities to provide for students with different levels of ability. The self-assessment report did not identify shortcomings in the marking of students' work. Insufficient advice is given on how students can improve their performance. In most cases, there is no cover page to identify assessment criteria which makes it difficult for students to understand how their marks have been awarded.

37 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. They benefit from good opportunities for professional development. Teaching takes place in attractive and well-decorated classrooms. Insufficient blinds make it difficult to use television or overhead projections in bright conditions. In the resource centre, the specialist bookstock is adequate but some is out of date. A further supply is held

Curriculum Areas

separately in subject base rooms. Students make good use of the Internet for research.

38 Students respond well to their teachers in lessons. Many express themselves fluently. Their files are well presented and well organised. The college overlooked both strengths and weaknesses in its assessment of GCSE and GCE A level achievements in English and the social sciences. On GCE A level courses in sociology, psychology and English language and literature, pass rates improved from 1998 to 2000 when they matched or exceeded national averages in the sector. There was a corresponding improvement in the proportion of students who obtained high grades (A to C) in these subjects. In sociology, for example, 50% of students obtained high grades in 2000 compared with 16% in 1998. Pass rates

declined, however, in GCE A level English literature. Achievements in GCSE subjects are uneven. Pass rates at grade C or above in GCSE English language have been mostly just above the national average. During the period 1998 to 2000, pass rates at the same level in GCSE psychology have been consistently below the national average. The retention rate at GCE A level has been consistently low over the same period, and in GCE A level psychology it declined significantly. By contrast, on GCSE courses retention rates in 2000 improved significantly compared with 1999. This improvement followed action taken by the college in response to poor retention rates. While the self-assessment report made an accurate assessment of retention on GCSE courses, it underestimated weaknesses in retention at GCE A level.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|---|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
| GCSE English language (grade C or above) | 2 | Number of starters | 124 | 146 | 122 |
| | | Retention (%) | 73 | 55 | 71 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 57 | 59 | 51 |
| GCSE psychology (grade C or above) | 2 | Number of starters | 67 | 68 | 31 |
| | | Retention (%) | 55 | 60 | 74 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 33 | 44 | 43 |
| GCE A level psychology | 3 | Number of starters | 50* | 41 | 36 |
| | | Retention (%) | 58* | 49 | 39 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 70* | 63 | 100 |
| GCE A level sociology | 3 | Number of starters | 46* | 44 | 16 |
| | | Retention (%) | 43* | 59 | 56 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 67 | 69 | 75 |
| GCE A level English literature | 3 | Number of starters | 64 | 55 | 43 |
| | | Retention (%) | 58* | 67 | 63 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 86* | 70 | 73 |
| GCE A level English language and literature (1998 and 1999) and English language (2000) | 3 | Number of starters | 25 | 48 | 33 |
| | | Retention (%) | 64 | 69 | 55 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 50 | 87 | 83 |

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

*college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

39 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements made in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- well-motivated students
- effective individual learning support

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT
- insufficient development of learning materials
- underdeveloped provision of basic skills for adults

40 The scope of the inspection included: basic skills provision in literacy and numeracy; basic skills learning support; integrated key skills below level 2; and a limited amount of discrete adult basic education. To develop its co-ordination strategy for basic skills the college has appointed a basic skills co-ordinator and established a basic skills task group. There has been little response as yet to the national drive to extend basic skills provision. There is no community-based or daytime provision for adults, no family literacy or numeracy activity, or programmes aimed specifically at rural communities. This lack of activity is not consistent with the college's clear commitment in its mission to widening participation. There is little use of strategic market research or competitor analysis to plan or extend provision in partnership with other providers.

41 Students are offered a range of support options in basic skills. These include: one-to-one support; literacy and numeracy

provision for foundation level students; support integrated within the key skills provision; and some provision in adult basic skills. All full-time students at level 2 or below are screened at entry to assess their literacy and numeracy needs. Students identified as requiring additional learning support are offered support sessions. This provision which is well received by students has grown from 118 students receiving individual learning support in 1999-2000 to 221 students in 2000-01. Significant attention has been paid to ensuring that students identified as needing additional learning support are matched with suitable tutors. This effective individual support was not highlighted in the self-assessment report. Students' attendance is carefully monitored to ensure that they make the best possible progress.

42 Teaching is well planned and appropriately managed. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Annual schemes of work and clear aims and objectives are shared with students. Lesson plans are suitably detailed and well organised. Most teaching is effective, which confirms the judgement made in the self-assessment report. The proportion of good or outstanding lessons observed by inspectors was slightly above the national average for basic skills. In most lessons, students are attentive and motivated; staff have a good working relationship with them. The most effective lessons are carefully planned and take into account the needs of individual students. In these lessons students are actively involved and benefit from an appropriate variety of teaching styles. Students follow individual learning plans which have been negotiated between teacher and student and reviewed and modified at regular intervals. In less effective lessons, teachers fail to set sufficiently demanding tasks, and learning materials have not been developed to allow for the different levels of ability within the group. The college has acknowledged in its self-assessment that the

Curriculum Areas

lack of 'drop-in' facilities or a resource centre for basic skills has resulted in insufficient opportunities for students to work on their own. The college failed to recognise that the inadequate use of IT to develop learning and increase motivation in numeracy and literacy was a weakness.

43 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that rates of retention and achievement have improved over the past two years. This is particularly evident in City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) Wordpower and Numberpower. The achievement in Numberpower, for example, has risen from 27% in 1999 to 54% in 2000, against a national benchmark figure of 33%. The college has effectively implemented a range of measures to improve levels of retention and monitor attendance. The data on students' achievements do not accurately reflect students' progress or the achievement of qualifications. Therefore a table of students' achievements has not been included at the end of this section of the report. In basic skills, the attendance rate during the inspection period was 74%, which compares favourably with a national average of 66%.

44 A team of committed full-time and part-time staff teach basic and key skills. Working relationships between staff and students are good and foster learning. Good practice has been developed in the hairdressing and beauty therapy section where vocational staff undertake a significant part of the additional learning support. Staff in hairdressing have gained the initial basic skills teaching qualification. Across the college, relatively few staff, however, have specialist basic skills qualifications, although they welcome the chance to participate in in-service and external staff development opportunities.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

45 Inspectors agreed with the overall judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective tutorials
- thorough monitoring of attendance
- comprehensive and effective careers education and guidance
- good personal support for students

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory practice in identifying learning support needs for advanced students
- inadequate arrangements to support students with sensory impairments

46 An attractive range of prospectuses provides information on learning opportunities that are available at the college. There is good liaison with most local schools. Each July, over 700 year 9 pupils from 12 schools attend one-day practical ‘taster’ sessions as an introduction to vocational subjects. During November, year 11 students attend college to explore a subject of their choice in greater depth. Open evenings, regular school visits by the college’s school liaison officer and curriculum specific presentations in schools help year 11 pupils to make informed decisions about their opportunities in post-16 education.

47 As recognised by the college, admissions procedures are well managed. Applications are processed through a central office, which deals with all interview arrangements, acceptance letters and enrolment information. Interviews follow college-wide guidelines and recording

formats. Pre-entry guidance at faculty level is not always thorough. This shortcoming was overlooked in the self-assessment report.

48 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that college tutors deliver a comprehensive induction programme to full-time students. Opportunities exist for transfer between courses following advice and guidance from staff at student services. Part-time students follow a shorter induction programme which has a greater emphasis on subject specific matters. An induction pack has been designed for part-time IT students, many of whom study at centres located in the community. Students only start their IT training after attending a two-hour induction session which is arranged fortnightly. Students, many of whom are returning to learning after a break of some years, find these sessions very helpful.

49 The effective tutorial arrangements are highly regarded by students. This strength was not recognised in the self-assessment report. There is a comprehensive cross-college framework and an appropriately detailed tutor handbook on procedures. Each tutor draws up a scheme of work for the tutorial sessions which is checked centrally to ensure college guidelines are met. Three senior tutors monitor delivery of and attendance at tutorials as well as providing support for individual tutors. Attendance at tutorials matches the high attendance in other classes. All students set themselves targets, plan their work and have regular one-to-one reviews with their tutors. A few tutors do not use these sessions effectively. Course co-ordinators undertake the role of tutor for part-time students well.

50 All full-time students, other than those on advanced programmes, are screened to establish their competence in basic skills. After assessment by a central team, effective learning support is arranged. Most advanced level students are not routinely screened. Identification of learning support needs depends

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on either the judgement of the tutor or self-referral. Although level 3 students can follow level 2 key skill programmes in communication, application of number and IT, diagnostic assessments only take place in IT. The college did not identify the unsatisfactory practice in identifying the learning support needs of advanced students.

51 Arrangements are inadequate to support students with sensory impairments. Although the college responds to individual need, the lack of resources and experienced staff lead to delays in providing the required support. No visually impaired students attend the Rochford or De Montfort campuses. There has been no systematic awareness training on disability for staff. College prospectuses fail to state that support for sensory impaired students is available. Recent literature from the college for adults who are planning to return to study specifically welcomes students with disabilities. However, this publication is not widely available, a weakness not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

52 Very effective and comprehensive careers education which is highly regarded by students is integrated with the core tutorial curriculum. There are good learning materials and tutors give appropriate instructions on how they should be used. Qualified careers advisers employed by the college visit each tutorial group to give specialist advice and raise awareness of the availability of individual guidance sessions. Over 500 students received individual interviews in 2000. There are strong and effective links with the Lincolnshire Careers and Guidance Service. Students receive good support throughout the process of making applications for a place in higher education.

53 There is an imaginative and effective system for monitoring and supporting the attendance of full-time students. Attendance officers visit each group twice weekly, recording and following up unexplained absences. Officers

telephone the student's home on the first day of absence to make initial enquiries. Procedures are clearly documented and can lead to a staged disciplinary process. Students fully acknowledge the benefits of the monitoring. Significant increases in class attendance are directly attributable to this initiative. Rates of retention increased at all levels during 1999-2000; at level 2 the increase was 12%. Attendance in lessons inspected averaged 80%, 5% above the average for the sector. Students receive excellent personal support. The access fund is used imaginatively to support student recruitment, attendance and retention. Acceptance letters sent to students following interview specifically mention the availability of financial support. Arrangements are made for funds to be available immediately on enrolment. Allocations are paid monthly and are dependent upon good attendance. A professional counselling service based at the college can be called upon at short notice. The on-site childcare facility is greatly valued by students. The college nurse is available for consultation and advice twice weekly.

General Resources

Grade 2

54 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- attractive and well-maintained buildings
- a wide range of good general and specialist accommodation
- good IT facilities for students
- effective estate management

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Weaknesses

- insufficient library resources in some curriculum areas
- few social areas for students

55 The college occupies three campuses in Boston which are about half a mile apart. The Rochford campus includes the main administration area, and workshop and practical teaching facilities for engineering, catering, hairdressing and beauty, and construction. The De Montfort campus is a former school which has been completely refurbished and transformed into a striking modern building. It houses arts, humanities and most GCE A level courses and has specialist facilities for arts, media, fashion and photography. The Sam Newsom Centre is a group of former quayside warehouses, which has been imaginatively converted into a centre for music, containing performance spaces, recording studios and teaching areas. The college has attractive and well-equipped centres in Sleaford and Spalding, and a cybercentre in the centre of Boston.

56 The college recognises that the condition of general accommodation is good. The standard of décor is high in nearly all areas. Reception areas are welcoming. There are enquiry desks at the Rochford and De Montfort campuses. Key facilities such as student services and the resource centres are well signposted. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the colleges' self-assessment that there is a significant amount of good accommodation for general and specialist use. Classrooms are furnished and decorated to a high standard, and are well equipped. Curriculum base rooms are clustered where possible to concentrate appropriate resources in particular areas of the college. Classroom and corridor walls carry lively and varied displays of students' work. The well-established procedure for reporting defects

ensures that repairs to buildings and equipment are carried out promptly. Following a major survey of the estate, estate maintenance follows a five-year plan. As a consequence there is a systematic approach to the improvement of facilities.

57 Almost all areas of the college have been made accessible to wheelchair users, although independent access to some areas is limited for those with restricted mobility. At the De Montfort campus a few classrooms in one block are not accessible, but arrangements are made when necessary to avoid using these rooms. In the main building access for people with disabilities to the upper floor, including the learning centre, is through a stair-lift which presents problems for wheelchair users. The college is investigating the provision of a lift to resolve this issue. There is no access for wheelchair users to some teaching rooms at the Sleaford centre.

58 Resource centres are available on the Rochford and De Montfort campuses. These centres are open from 08.30 to 20.30 hours on four days a week, and to 16.30 hours on Fridays. Bookstock in some curriculum areas is poor. This shortcoming was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Learning resource staff make use of inter-library loans, and link with other libraries to provide journal articles on request. There is no formal link, such as a users group, with academic sections of the college. Each centre has a suite of 25 personal computers which have Internet connection and electronic mail. One computer is set aside for use with CD-ROM learning materials. Booking systems in the resource centres enable managers to monitor demand and maximise access.

59 Inspectors agreed with the college that students have good access to computers. The college network spans the Rochford and De Montfort campuses and supplies all students with industry standard software, Internet

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access, and electronic mail accounts. Realistic plans have been developed for further improvements to the network as part of the college's information strategy. There are specialist computer suites in areas such as electronics, music technology and engineering. Staff access to the network was improved in 1999. Computers are available in almost all staff offices and most staff have received training in the use of electronic mail.

60 Accommodation for student services on the Rochford and De Montfort campuses is welcoming and conveniently situated close to the main entrances. Rooms on the Rochford campus are let to a playgroup organiser who provides childcare places for 36 children between the ages of two-and-a-half and five years. Students and staff of the college have priority in the allocation of these places and receive financial assistance where appropriate. There are few social areas for students. Students have been critical about the lack of common rooms or meeting areas. However, the college changed the use of some of the original common room areas but improved the standard and supervision of alternative facilities. The college promotes participation in sport; Wednesday afternoons are set aside for such activities. Facilities are limited to a football pitch, a gymnasium and a hall at the De Montfort campus. However, students can use the town's sports centre and swimming pool which are situated on the Rochford campus. Many students regularly take part in sporting activities, and college teams compete in football, basketball, volleyball, and netball competitions.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

61 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found additional strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- comprehensive and systematic quality assurance procedures
- the thorough validation of the annual self-assessment report
- an effective programme of classroom observation
- good validation of courses

Weaknesses

- the inadequate review of performance against charter commitments
- the uneven standard of course reviews

62 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college has successfully developed and implemented comprehensive and systematic quality assurance procedures which lead to improvements. Procedures are determined by an extensive set of policies which are reviewed regularly. A useful quality assurance handbook provides guidelines for staff and all documents are also available on the college intranet. All staff understand their roles in quality assurance and self-assessment activities. Review procedures have developed since the last inspection and are well established. Section meetings are held twice each term to consider issues raised by course reviews and to monitor progress against resulting action plans. Most twice-yearly course reviews are undertaken conscientiously but, as the college recognised, there is some variation in the thoroughness with which they are completed. Some course reviews lack sufficiently clear judgements which are supported by quantifiable evidence. The reviews are used in section and faculty reviews and self-assessment reports. At these levels appropriately detailed analysis of data against benchmarks is undertaken. This analysis contributes effectively to self-assessment and

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action-planning for improvement. Senior managers use a detailed checklist to monitor progress against faculty action plans and confirm achievement of objectives. There are appropriate arrangements for the quality assurance of franchised provision. Target-setting for improving rates of retention and achievement and the analysis of performance against national benchmarks were still developing at course level at the time of the inspection.

63 A strength of the self-assessment process is the thorough and effective validation of the annual self-assessment report. This is undertaken by the standards subcommittee of the corporation which also oversees the implementation of self-assessment action plans. Staff have been trained to undertake validation. Subgroups of three panel members meet with college managers to examine the evidence presented. The college also involves external consultants in the validation process. Each report is discussed in detail and grades are considered and agreed. Inspection showed most self-assessment judgements to be realistic and accurate.

64 An established programme of classroom observation makes an effective contribution to self-assessment and staff development. The college did not highlight this strength. Observers have been suitably trained and their judgements continue to be moderated by an external consultant. All staff including those employed from an agency are observed as part of a rolling programme. The college's internal observation grading profile for 1999-2000 is similar to the profile for all lessons observed in *Quality and Standards in Further Education 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report* and the grade profile awarded by inspectors during the inspection. Grade profiles are discussed at section meetings and where appropriate remedial measures included in action plans. All observations at grade 4 are followed up with staff development opportunities and then

re-observation. Improvements in teaching practice have resulted. Good practice is shared by deploying staff who receive consistently high grades in lesson observation to run workshops on 'teaching craft' during staff development events.

65 The college has thorough and well-established course validation procedures. This strength was not highlighted in the self-assessment report. The validation subcommittee of the academic board scrutinises proposals for new courses carefully against a 14-point checklist. Proposals are publicised in the staff newsletter to allow for observations or objections from staff. The same process is applied to franchised and community-based provision. Effective internal verification procedures are applied across vocational areas.

66 The college charter is a clear and useful document. It is reviewed and updated regularly. However, insufficient measurable targets are defined. Individual elements of student services are reviewed against service level agreements but these are not drawn together to evaluate overall performance against commitments made in the charter. Some other business and support services, and groups or departments, such as caretaking and administrative support services, also evaluate their performance against service level agreements. However, some of these reviews contain insufficient evidence and few clear judgements about the standard of provision. Catering services undertake no formal evaluation. There is no systematic college-wide review of performance against charter commitments and no report to the senior management team or the corporation. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

67 The college has clear procedures for identifying individual staff development needs. A staff development officer plans and co-ordinates activity. All staff participate in an established system for personal target-setting

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and review. Needs are also identified through self-assessment and course review procedures. Strategic planning processes identify the college's strategic priorities. National initiatives such as key skills development are also considered. The staff development committee allocates the funding by establishing clear priorities for activity related to the curriculum. The committee also reviews such activity and a biannual report is sent to the corporation. In-depth evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme is not undertaken. Inspectors agreed with the college that staff development processes were sound but they did not agree that that they were a significant strength as had been claimed by the college. The college achieved the status of Investor in People in 1996; this status was reconfirmed in 1999.

Governance

Grade 3

68 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements made in the self-assessment report. They found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough procedures for the evaluation of corporation performance
- good working relationships between the corporation and senior management
- sound stewardship of college funds

Weaknesses

- some inadequacies in monitoring academic performance
- inappropriate scheduling of corporation meetings

69 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 substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

70 The corporation has re-determined its composition in accordance with the requirements of the instrument and articles of government and had no vacancies at the time of the inspection. Governors have a wide range of expertise. Results of skills audits have helped to influence decisions on the appointment of new governors. Re-appointment of long-serving governors was not preceded by detailed consideration of their potential contribution, especially where re-appointment was for a third or fourth term. There are staff and student governors. Two of the 18 governors are women. Overall attendance of governors is satisfactory but includes some instances of poor attendance by individual governors at corporation meetings. The corporation has reviewed its code of conduct and updated its register of interests.

71 New governors undertake a comprehensive induction programme but there have been no specialist training courses for staff and student governors. On-going training is provided through an annual event and through presentations from senior managers prior to corporation meetings. Governor training materials provided by the FEFC have been distributed.

72 Clerking arrangements are satisfactory. Corporation meeting agendas and papers are well prepared and are circulated in good time for meetings. The clerk also has primary responsibility in the college for finance and estates. The corporation identified this dual role as having potential weaknesses in its self-assessment report in 1998-99, and took action to address these issues. New procedures have been introduced to ensure that the independence of the clerk is not compromised. There are alternative clerking arrangements for

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finance items and the college accountant is present for discussion of these items. An assistant clerk services the audit committee. The clerk is appraised in her role as clerk by the chair of the corporation.

73 The corporation has an appropriate range of committees and reviews its own performance annually through use of governor questionnaires. Performance targets were set for the corporation and its two principal committees in 1999-2000 and these have been effectively monitored. The process has now been extended to all committees. This strength was not recognised in the self-assessment report. There is a good working relationship between corporation members and senior college managers based on a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. The chair and vice-chair of the corporation have regular meetings with the principal and clerk. Corporation members are knowledgeable about, and committed to the well-being of the community served by the college. Each governor is linked to a curriculum or support area of the college. Governors attend section meetings of 'link areas', receive reports and attend student events. The 'link role' is valued by staff and provides governors with a fuller understanding of college activities.

74 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the corporation has exercised sound stewardship of college funds. There is a high level of solvency. Governors have provided effective oversight of a long and protracted legal dispute with third parties, which required resolute action to protect public funds. They exercised good judgement in the successful pursuit of a substantial financial claim to cover the cost of remedial work to the De Montfort building.

75 The scheduling of corporation meetings does not enable the corporation to consider the approval of key items of business. This

weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The main business of the corporation is conducted at three meetings each year. As a consequence, final approval of the three-year financial forecast is delegated to the finance and general purposes committee. The corporation does not receive a report on the college's financial position during the autumn term. The management accounts provide insufficient information for governors. Financial performance targets are included in the strategic and operating plans but are not reported to governors in the management accounts.

76 The corporation provides strategic direction to the college. Strategic issues are considered at each meeting. Formal review of progress made against the objectives in the operational plan is undertaken twice yearly. Governors then review the strategic objectives and make changes that they consider to be necessary to the three-year objectives. The executive summary of the strategic plan is clear and succinct.

77 The corporation receives regular reports on student recruitment, quality assurance issues and student performance. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that its oversight of some aspects of the college's academic performance is insufficiently thorough. The setting and monitoring of performance targets are underdeveloped. Until recently, a governor representative on an academic board subcommittee reported to the corporation on aspects of standards and self-assessment. This arrangement has been replaced by a standards committee reporting directly to the corporation. The committee has been required to recommend appropriate targets for levels of student retention and achievement for adoption by the corporation in future years.

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Management

Grade 2

78 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. One weakness had been successfully addressed. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective external links
- effective planning, monitoring and review of operations
- timely and accurate management information
- good internal communications
- effective action to address poor retention

Weaknesses

- insufficient measurable targets in annual operating statements
- insufficient progress in addressing some issues on equality of opportunity

79 The college is well managed. As identified in the self-assessment report, there is a well-established and effective management structure for college operations. Some changes have been made to encourage a widening of participation in further education and business development. Roles and responsibilities of staff are clearly defined and the cycle of meetings ensures appropriate co-ordination between managers responsible for resources and curriculum. In spite of several unavoidable lengthy absences of senior managers over the last two years, the college has continued to plan, monitor and review its operations effectively.

80 There is a clear and published schedule of regular college meetings with fixed agenda items that cover planning, monitoring and quality assurance. Key management topics are

regularly monitored at all management levels. There is careful monitoring of income and expenditure to course level including reconciliation of student numbers with central data and analysis of any changes that are revealed. Senior managers analyse the information monthly. The college achieves its FEFC funding income targets.

81 In order to meet the needs of clients across the whole of the county of Lincolnshire, the college works effectively with a wide range of partners. Successful developments include: the establishment of centres in the community in collaboration with other further education colleges; franchise arrangements with an existing provider; and close co-operation with De Montfort University. Initiatives with the Boston Borough Council have included the provision of a good management conference and training centre on the college campus. Other partnerships, such as those with the adult education service, have enabled the college to provide more courses in small rural communities. Comprehensive market research accompanies many of the large initiatives. The need to further develop market research activities was identified in the annual objectives.

82 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has strong solvency indicators. Operating surpluses are forecast for the next three years. The budget control process is documented in financial regulations. There is close monitoring of expenditure against income. The annual estimates approved by the corporation are not prepared on an accruals basis and are not consistent with the three-year financial forecast. Financial information is not presented sufficiently early in the financial year to meet corporation needs and the same report format is not used for senior management and governors. Neither the internal or external auditors have raised significant matters of control. Financial and data returns to the FEFC are sent on time.

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83 An annual college conference provides an opportunity for staff to contribute to the development of the strategic and operational plans. Progress made against the strategic objectives for the previous year are reviewed as a part of this event and through the annual cycle of business. All cross-college managers develop plans and operating statements. The operating statements do not contain sufficiently precise targets to facilitate monitoring and define completion. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

84 Communications are good throughout the college as identified in the self-assessment report. Team meetings of managers provide for the dissemination of information across the college. All team meetings at faculty and section level provide information on college developments. Staff surveys indicate wide satisfaction with the regular newsletter and the approachability of line managers.

85 The college moved to a new management information system about 18 months ago. On-line access to student information and reports is available to an increasing number of staff and is used extensively to support the monitoring of enrolments and progress against college unit targets. Central college data are regularly checked for accuracy. Some management information developments, such as value-added analysis, have not yet been completed.

86 Effective action has been taken to deal with poor rates of retention as identified in the self-assessment report. Retention issues are a high priority for all staff. Senior managers carefully monitor student retention data, courses deemed to be at risk and lack of student commitment as evidenced by below standard work or attendance. Significant improvement in rates of retention in many courses in 1999-2000 have been accompanied by improvements in achievement in some areas. Attendance monitoring has been tightened and significant

improvements in rates of attendance and retention were noted by inspectors.

87 The college has a clear equal opportunities policy and disability statement, both of which are regularly reviewed and updated. There is an equal opportunities committee but there is little student involvement in its work. Equal opportunities arrangements within personnel policies and procedures are monitored. There is some monitoring and analysis of student data. A recent audit of equality of opportunity in the college identified the need for action in a number of areas. Progress against the identified action points such as awareness raising sessions with staff has been slow. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There is no separate formal report on equal opportunities to the corporation.

Conclusions

88 The college produced its fourth self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The report was compiled using the framework specified in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* and the guidance in Council Circular 97/13, *Self-assessment and Inspection*. The document was comprehensive and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with all the curriculum grades and three of the cross-college grades. In one cross-college area they found the college had overestimated the grade. In one other, inspectors found the college had not recognised the significance of some strengths.

89 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 (December 2000)

| Age | % |
|-------------|-----|
| Under 16 | 0 |
| 16-18 years | 37 |
| 19-24 years | 12 |
| 25+ years | 51 |
| Not known | 0 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (December 2000)

| Level of study | % |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Level 1 (foundation) and entry level | 23 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 32 |
| Level 3 (advanced) | 36 |
| Level 4/5 (higher) | 1 |
| Level not specified | 2 |
| Non-schedule 2 | 6 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: college data

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

| Programme area | Full-time | Part-time | Total provision (%) |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| Science | 337 | 1,544 | 21 |
| Agriculture | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Construction | 115 | 768 | 10 |
| Engineering | 99 | 341 | 5 |
| Business | 117 | 1,626 | 19 |
| Hotel and catering | 151 | 798 | 10 |
| Health and community care | 267 | 1,147 | 16 |
| Art and design | 229 | 760 | 11 |
| Humanities | 189 | 297 | 5 |
| Basic education | 76 | 164 | 3 |
| Total | 1,580 | 7,451 | 100 |

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 8% 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 (October 1999)

| | Perm- anent | Fixed term | Casual | Total |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|--------|-------|
| Direct learning contact | 95 | 12 | 21 | 128 |
| Supporting direct learning contact | 13 | 0 | 1 | 14 |
| Other support | 69 | 0 | 5 | 74 |
| Total | 177 | 12 | 27 | 216 |

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Income | £7,737,000 | £7,474,000 | £8,759,000 |
| Average level of funding (ALF) | £17.85* | £17.30* | £17.33 |
| Payroll as a proportion of income | 53% | 54% | 49% |
| Achievement of funding target | 103% | 99% | 98% |
| Diversity of income | 35% | 32% | 44% |
| Operating surplus | £331,000 | -£197,000 | £277,000 |

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

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

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

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

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

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

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

| Level | Retention and pass | Students aged 16 to 18 | | | Students aged 19 or over | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------|-------|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| | | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
| 1 | Number of starters | 790 | 405 | 723 | 914 | 750 | 1,467 |
| | Retention (%) | 83 | 73 | 76 | 54 | 50 | 71 |
| | Achievement (%) | 44 | 60 | 65 | 61 | 74 | 85 |
| 2 | Number of starters | 1,217 | 1,387 | 1,293 | 470 | 811 | 1,183 |
| | Retention (%) | 68 | 60 | 72 | 73 | 64 | 74 |
| | Achievement (%) | 71 | 70 | 80 | 69 | 76 | 81 |
| 3 | Number of starters | 672 | 822 | 1,101 | 368 | 599 | 711 |
| | Retention (%) | * | 68 | 70 | * | 63 | 77 |
| | Achievement (%) | * | 75 | 82 | * | 77 | 83 |
| 4 or 5 | Number of starters | – | – | – | 54 | 54 | 32 |
| | Retention (%) | – | – | – | 91 | 81 | 88 |
| | Achievement (%) | – | – | – | 51 | 59 | 64 |
| Short courses | Number of starters | 542 | 499 | 405 | 1,964 | 1,977 | 1,714 |
| | Retention (%) | 96 | 86 | 89 | 97 | 86 | 83 |
| | Achievement (%) | 78 | 62 | 75 | 81 | 83 | 79 |
| Unknown/unclassified | Number of starters | 187 | 182 | 490 | 266 | 164 | 233 |
| | Retention (%) | 76 | 80 | 82 | 84 | 82 | 78 |
| | Achievement (%) | 42 | 86 | 77 | 55 | 89 | 87 |

Source: college

– data not collected

*data may not be reliable

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