

Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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

© FEFC 1999 You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	6

Curriculum areas

Science	10
Art, photography and media	17
Modern foreign languages	22
History, psychology and sociology	27

Cross-college provision

Support for students	34
General resources	40
Quality assurance	46
Governance	53
Management	60
Conclusions	68

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College

South East Region

Inspected April 1999

Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College is situated in Hove, on the border with Brighton. The college provides mainly full-time courses for students aged 16 to 18. Many of its students come from outside the immediate area. The college produced its first full self-assessment report for the inspection. Although the report was comprehensive, action plans arising from it contained few measurable targets and did not include dates for reviewing progress in implementing improvements. All staff and governors were involved in the self-assessment process. The curriculum area reports were validated through the college's internal validation process but the reports for the cross-college areas were not. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the report had not acknowledged some of the college's strengths and that it had not attached enough significance to some of the college's weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, many weaknesses were being addressed.

Four curriculum areas were inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. There is much good teaching; the profile of grades awarded to lessons observed is better than the

national average. The examination pass rates on many courses are above the national average for sixth form colleges. The careers and education guidance provision is particularly effective. Since the last inspection, a number of improvements have been made to the accommodation. The management of the college's staff development activities is exemplary. The college enjoys good working relationships with a variety of organisations. It is well managed and its financial controls are good. The college should improve: the development of learning materials for students of different abilities; student retention rates on some courses; the screening of students to identify learning needs; the co-ordination of procedures for self-assessment, strategic planning and quality assurance; the setting of improvement targets, action-planning and arrangements for monitoring progress; its accommodation strategy; its strategic planning process; and governors' understanding of curricular matters.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	2	Support for students	2
Art, photography and media	2	General resources	3
Modern foreign languages	2	Quality assurance	3
History, psychology and sociology	1	Governance	3
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College occupies a single site in Hove. There are six comprehensive schools, of which four have sixth forms, another sixth form college and a college of general further education within the local authority boundary. At the time of the inspection, almost 50% of the college's students had been recruited from schools within Brighton and Hove.

2 Brighton and Hove is a unitary authority, formed in 1997, with a population of about 250,000. It is a lively cosmopolitan town which contains some areas of acute social deprivation. There is an Education Action Zone in the east part of Brighton.

3 The college has productive links with a wide range of local and regional organisations. These include working arrangements with the two other colleges in Brighton and Hove, the local strategic partnership for post-16 education and training, the Sussex sixth form colleges consortium, the Sussex strategy group which includes all the colleges of further education in Sussex, and the local training and enterprise council (TEC). The college created a business network group of local small and medium-sized businesses in 1997, to establish work experience opportunities for students and pursue other common interests, including the provision of training.

4 The college offers a wide range of mainly full-time courses. Over 90% of its students are on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses. General national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) are offered at intermediate level in business and at advanced level in health and social care, business, and leisure and tourism, as well as national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in French and Spanish.

5 The college's mission is to 'bring out the best in students by providing a high-quality learning experience in a supportive and

stimulating environment' and to 'work for equality of opportunity and strive to meet the needs of students by offering a broad and flexible curriculum'.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in April 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1996 and 1997. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1998. These were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and were found to be accurate. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 36 days. Fifty-one lessons were observed. Inspectors held meetings with college governors, managers, staff and students; observed a sample of tutorials; and examined college documents. They consulted representatives of the local education authority (LEA) and the local TEC.

7 This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

Context

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons observed, 78% were judged to be good or outstanding and none less than satisfactory. This compares favourably with the national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	17	17	8	0	0	42
GCSE	2	3	3	0	0	8
NVQ	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total (No.)	19	21	11	0	0	51
Total (%)	37	41	22	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College	14.3	87
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 2

10 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering human biology, physics, chemistry, biology and science in the environment. Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the self-assessment report but concluded that the college had overlooked some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- the proportion of high grade passes in GCE A levels
- students' successes in national science competitions
- well-managed departments

Weaknesses

- lack of materials to suit students of different abilities
- too little scope for students to exercise individual initiative in lessons

11 The three science departments are well managed. Each provides clear course literature containing, for example, the departments' policies on homework and information on the process used for assessing students' work. There are particularly good documents for biology courses. Most of the science provision is at GCE A level and the introduction of a modular GCE A level physics syllabus has widened students' choices. A GCE AS course in science in the environment has proved highly successful and students from the college have won the national best student award for two successive years. Physics students are involved in the Women Into Science and Engineering initiative, the Great Egg Race, and they enter competitions. In a recent essay competition a student from the college won the first prize of a visit to Florence University. Three chemistry students were invited by the national publication

Chemistry Review to interview the Nobel Prize winner Sir Harry Kroto at Sussex University.

12 Most of the teaching in science is good. Teachers plan and manage their lessons well and students carry out practical investigations confidently and safely. Students are well prepared for external examinations through carefully organised revision programmes, as the college's self-assessment report recognised. Students show their understanding both in their written work and in practical sessions. Teachers mark students' work carefully and provide helpful comments on ways of improving it. In many lessons, however, teachers do not give students enough scope to exercise individual initiative in their learning and express and develop their own ideas. All too often, lessons were dominated by the teacher's contribution.

13 The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that students' information technology (IT) skills are underdeveloped and students only use IT in their work when it is a course requirement. Some teachers fail to recognise, and make allowances for, students' different levels of ability and there are insufficient differentiated learning materials to suit students' varying capabilities. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

14 Where computers are available, they are used to good effect. For example, in physics, computer simulated experiments were used to extend students' understanding of scientific principles. In a chemistry lesson, a computer was used to take the temperature at regular intervals of a liquid boiling under reduced pressure and display the readings graphically on a screen.

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that most examination pass rates are good. Pass rates in GCE A level subjects at grades A to E are slightly above the national average for sixth form colleges and the proportions of students gaining grades A to C

Curriculum Areas

are well above the national average. In the recent past, pass rates in GCE A level physics have been poor but in 1998, they improved to reach the national average and in the current year, modular tests results suggest that this improvement is being maintained. Value-added data calculated by comparing students' GCE A level grades with their GCSE grades on entry, indicate that students achieve better grades than expected. Students' retention rates are mainly in line with national average figures for sixth form colleges. There are procedures for reviewing the extent of students' progress but

these do not necessarily identify those students who fail to work to the best of their ability. The review procedures do not include rigorous follow-up action to help students improve their performance and achieve their full potential.

16 As indicated in the self-assessment report, staff are well qualified and experienced. There is an appropriate level of specialist equipment and other resources to support teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed that there are good working relationships between teachers and students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE human biology*	2	Expected completions	46	37	29
		Retention (%)	83	76	67
		Achievement (%)	60	39	72
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	43	54	58
		Retention (%)	84	83	85
		Achievement (%)	90	87	91
GCE A level human biology	3	Expected completions	32	35	42
		Retention (%)	82	78	72
		Achievement (%)	74	80	67
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	51	63	75
		Retention (%)	74	82	85
		Achievement (%)	88	86	92
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	67	61	44
		Retention (%)	80	84	78
		Achievement (%)	61	63	82
GCE AS science in the environment	3	Expected completions	**	20	37
		Retention (%)	**	91	84
		Achievement (%)	**	84	92

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

*GCSE human biology replaced GCSE integrated science in September 1996

**course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Art, Photography and Media

Grade 2

17 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering GCE A level art, photography and media, and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) textiles and photography. Inspectors mainly agreed with the college's self-assessment report but found that some weaknesses were either understated or overlooked. Some elements of the action plan had been implemented by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- effectively-planned teaching and learning
- students' well-developed work ethic
- the high standard of most students' work
- very good pass rates
- well-equipped rooms with extensive specialist resources
- particularly well-qualified teachers

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on GCE A level courses
- no specialist IT resources for art and photography
- no resources for students to pursue three-dimensional design or craft studies

18 The college offers GCE A level courses in art, photography and media and GCSE courses in textiles and photography. As identified in the self-assessment report, courses are well planned and effectively managed. Staff work well in teams and they conduct course reviews and evaluations effectively. There are regular team meetings which include discussion of operational objectives. However, objectives and

targets are not expressed in terms of expected outcomes, and progress against them is difficult to measure. Most students attend regularly. Course information for students is clear and easy to understand. Documentation contains useful information on the way courses are taught, details of the assessment process and the expected workloads for students. Schemes of work and lesson plans are clear. Projects, assignments and other work set for students are well structured.

19 Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Teachers are particularly skilled in encouraging and motivating students to take part in classroom activities with enthusiasm. They tell them the aims and objectives of the lessons. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and to use their initiative. They are urged to be creative and imaginative in their exploration of issues and topics under consideration. They demonstrate a strong work ethic which enables them to work on their own. Many students make good use of art rooms, darkrooms and video-editing suites when they are not in lessons and often work in them during their lunch breaks. In the few less successful lessons activities were not well managed. For example, the teacher failed to notice that some students were inattentive. During timetabled subject 'extension periods', individual students receive help from teachers to review their progress. Assessment is fair and understood by students. The written comments which teachers make on students' work help the students to improve their performance.

20 For the last three years, examination pass rates in GCE A level photography were 100%. Pass rates in GCE A level media studies over the same period were at or above 96%, and the proportion of students who gained grade C or above in GCSE textiles and photography reached 100% in 1998. The self-assessment report acknowledged that although pass rates in GCE A level art have been high, the proportion of passes at grades A to C has been below the

Curriculum Areas

national average for sixth form colleges. Poor student retention rates in all GCE A level subjects were also acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Action has been taken to remedy this weakness and early indications are that this is beginning to prove successful.

21 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that specialist resources for art subjects are of a high standard. The art studios have been relocated in a well-lit and spacious area. They are in close proximity to one another and their distinctive and effective layout gives them a strong sense of subject identity. The darkroom has recently been relocated to a larger space. The three edit suites available for media students provide digital as well as traditional editing facilities. However, there is insufficient storage space for teaching materials and students' work in

progress. Some excellent books, slides and videos are available. Bookstocks in the library are adequate and library staff work closely with teachers to ensure appropriate texts are available. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the lack of specialist IT equipment is a weakness. The college has recently acquired appropriate IT facilities but, until associated building works have been completed, these are not yet available for use. The self-assessment report failed to identify that the lack of three-dimension design, craft or ceramic provision is a major deficiency which significantly reduces the scope of the art and design curriculum for full-time students. Teachers are very well qualified. All have a first degree and a teaching qualification; 50% have a higher degree and one has a doctorate.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art, photography and media, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE textiles and photography	2	Expected completions	*	52	50
		Retention (%)	*	77	88
		Achievement (%)	*	98	100
GCE A level art	3	Expected completions	59	53	62
		Retention (%)	76	74	53
		Achievement (%)	86	95	100
GCE A level media studies	3	Expected completions	96	88	105
		Retention (%)	70	66	70
		Achievement (%)	96	98	99
GCE A level photography	3	Expected completions	16	17	25
		Retention (%)	69	47	72
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100

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

*course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering French, German and Spanish. They agreed with many of the key strengths in the college's self-assessment report but they found some weaknesses in students' achievements which the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- good use of a variety of appropriate teaching methods
- exemplary use of the target language in lessons
- students' achievements in recently-introduced NVQ courses
- support from the 'open language centre'

Weaknesses

- some poor pass and retention rates
- inadequate action-planning
- insufficient target-setting

23 The college offers courses at GCE A level in French, German and Spanish, one GCSE course in Spanish and three NVQ courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. There are regular visits to, and exchange programmes with, France, Germany and Spain. The college also provides special programmes for students who visit other countries as part of their studies. This special tuition includes Finnish for music students, Czech for students on media studies courses, Polish for economics students, German for history students, and French for students on geography and biology courses. The department of modern languages is managed effectively. There are detailed schemes of work for each language course, as identified in the self-assessment report. The review and evaluation of courses need further

development. There is insufficient setting of targets and inadequate action-planning.

24 Students are attentive, participate readily in lessons, and use the target language with confidence. Overall, students' attendance is good. All lessons are thoroughly planned and are often conducted entirely in the language being taught. Teaching materials, including newspaper and journal articles, are varied and of high quality. A range of appropriate teaching methods is used to ensure that students' attention is captured and held throughout the lesson. Group work is extensively used. In the better lessons, the pace is lively and teachers' expectations of students are high. For example, in a GCE A level French lesson on the theme of health, students prepared a discussion on smoking. The lesson was conducted entirely in French. A vocabulary list was handed out, students were divided into groups, presented with questions and left to discuss the topic for a few minutes. A general debate then followed, led by the teacher, and the students noted and learnt significant new vocabulary. Finally, students were given an article on the topic to read and a questionnaire for homework. Students were highly motivated throughout the lesson.

25 The college's self-assessment report identified good examination pass rates and student retention rates on NVQ courses and some high pass rates in GCE A level Spanish and German. Results in GCE A level French have been below or at the national average for sixth form colleges for three years, but are improving each year. The students' retention rate in GCE A level French is poor. This was adversely affected in 1998 by seven students transferring from the GCE A level to the GCE AS programme two-thirds of the way through the course. These students all achieved the GCE AS qualification. The impact of the late transfer on the retention rate was not recognised by the college in its self-assessment report. In order to reduce the number of students making a late

Curriculum Areas

transfer from courses, the college introduced a more rigorous induction programme in September 1998. So far this year, only one student has withdrawn from the first year of the GCE A level course in French. The self-assessment did not identify the low proportions of students who gained grade C and above in GCSE Spanish, in 1996 and 1997, nor did it explain the improvement in 1998.

26 Staff are well qualified. Students' written work is marked carefully and returned with helpful comments. The college's 'subject extension period' system is used effectively to give individual students help with their written work. Inspectors agreed that specialist resources are good and these include a purpose-

built language centre with 20 audio booths, three interactive CD-ROMs and laser disc workstations, and two video workstations. Language students are required to spend 45 minutes in the centre each week on each language they study, and their attendance is checked meticulously. The centre also makes available to all students a flexibly-arranged programme of a dozen languages at different levels. These programmes are also offered to the local community on payment of a subscription. Students receive additional tuition from foreign language assistants. There is a cost for this tuition so that not all students can take advantage of it.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in modern foreign languages, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE Spanish	2	Expected completions	19	20	21
		Retention (%)	74	75	81
		Achievement (%)	50	57	76
GCE A level French	3	Expected completions	55	62	54
		Retention (%)	75	68	59
		Achievement (%)	73	79	81
GCE A level German	3	Expected completions	18	17	22
		Retention (%)	72	76	82
		Achievement (%)	85	75	100
GCE A level Spanish	3	Expected completions	9	14	14
		Retention (%)	89	79	86
		Achievement (%)	50	100	50
GCE AS French	3	Expected completions	8	9	11
		Retention (%)	75	56	100
		Achievement (%)	83	100	45
NVQ French and Spanish	1 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	37
		Retention (%)	*	*	86
		Achievement (%)	*	*	94

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

*course did not run

Curriculum Areas

History, Psychology and Sociology

Grade 1

27 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering GCE A level courses in history, psychology and sociology, and GCSE courses in humanities and psychology. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified a weakness in student retention rates which was overlooked by the college.

Key strengths

- effective curriculum and good classroom management
- exemplary lesson planning in sociology
- innovative and imaginative teaching
- teachers' high expectations of students
- good learning and well-prepared revision materials
- high pass rates in GCE A level subjects at grades A to C

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GCE A level

28 The college offers a wide range of subjects in humanities, and recently added a GCSE course in psychology. There are strong links with the University of Sussex. Students studying psychology spend a day in the cognitive psychology department of the university and third-year students from the university have worked with college staff to produce learning materials in sociology.

29 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching and learning represent a key strength. All courses are well managed. Teachers work particularly well in teams and seek constant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers

set themselves targets to improve students' achievements. There are detailed schemes of work which place emphasis on helping students to acquire appropriate skills as well as knowledge. In sociology, weekly lesson plans clearly identify course context, opportunities for students to explore issues, the skills to be developed and a clear assessment programme. These plans are supported by highly effective learning packages. The work of individual students is closely monitored. Teachers use a wide variety of appropriate materials to meet students' individual learning needs, and to help students to develop the skills of learning on their own. They moderate each other's marking of students' work to ensure consistency of standards. Students regularly mark their own and each other's work before handing it in to teachers, using examination board marking schemes.

30 Only a very small minority of the lessons observed were not considered good or outstanding, and GCSE lessons in particular were of high quality. For example, in a GCSE psychology lesson students developed an understanding of convergent and divergent thinking by working through a series of short extracts from IQ and lateral thinking tests. The teacher managed the lesson well and removed students' anxieties about using tests. In most lessons, students carry out exacting tasks which require them to be demanding on themselves and use all their knowledge and skills to the full. Specialist terms are explained carefully and students are confident using them. In sociology lessons, students make posters displaying important phrases and difficult specialist spellings. In all subjects, students are encouraged to explore contemporary issues, including those related to ethics and equal opportunities. A lesson on psycho-dynamic theories of gender development was handled openly but sensitively and any potential embarrassment was avoided. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that classroom management, the emphasis on developing

Curriculum Areas

students' skills, and individual support for students are strengths.

31 There are excellent revision packages to help students prepare for examinations. For example, in history song books and tapes have been produced containing key facts for each topic. The combination of rhymes and catchy tunes and the opportunity to sing along with gusto enable students to memorise facts easily. In history, mnemonics are used to promote retention of key facts. These imaginative teaching methods were justifiably acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

32 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that many examination pass rates are good. Pass rates in GCE A level subjects at grades A to E are in line with, or exceed, national averages for sixth form colleges. Pass rates at grades A to C are above the national average. Value-added data indicate that in most years students exceed their expected grades. In 1997, the proportion of students who gained grade C or above in GCSE humanities was slightly below the national average for sixth form colleges but they improved in 1998. In history, poor student retention rates were identified in the previous inspection and effective measures have been taken to improve these. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to identify as a weakness low retention rates in other subjects where these have been below the national average in two out of the last three years. For the past five years, students in sociology have won prizes for projects in the Collins Educational Awards.

33 Most accommodation is fit for its purpose, though some rooms are rather small. In all subjects, there are specialist learning resources and books available for students. However, these are kept in classrooms and staff needing them have to interrupt classes to get them. Staff are well qualified and some have experience in research and have written specialist books.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE humanities	2	Expected completions	*	23	33
		Retention (%)	*	87	79
		Achievement (%)	*	68	76
GCE A level psychology	3	Expected completions	92	115	123
		Retention (%)	72	78	72
		Achievement (%)	95	87	94
GCE A level history	3	Expected completions	87	81	63
		Retention (%)	75	73	92
		Achievement (%)	84	90	95
GCE A level sociology (two year)	3	Expected completions	54	44	44
		Retention (%)	69	80	68
		Achievement (%)	95	71	86
GCE A level sociology (one year)	3	Expected completions	15	12	*
		Retention (%)	73	75	*
		Achievement (%)	89	78	*

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

*course did not run

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

34 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but found one weakness that had been overlooked by the college. The college has taken action to address some of the weaknesses it found.

Key strengths

- excellent careers education and guidance for students
- comprehensive impartial advice and good college induction for students
- effective senior tutor system
- commitment of staff to supporting students
- effective additional support for students with specified learning difficulties
- well-organised and well-managed student union

Weaknesses

- no systematic identification of learning support needs
- no formalised system for students' action-planning and monitoring of students' progress

35 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that students receive comprehensive guidance about courses and good induction to the college. The college has productive links with its six partner schools and with other schools in Sussex. There is a series of events to help students make choices about their studies and these include presentations to year 10 and 11 pupils, open evenings, and 'taster' days to introduce potential students to college life. The redesigned college prospectus is attractive and clear. It is supplemented by a comprehensive range of leaflets which provide further details on courses and college services. The prospectus is

available in Braille and on audio tape for students with visual impairments. Students' induction to the college is effective. The college induction programme is complemented by induction to specific courses.

36 Tutors are committed to meeting the needs of their students. Students have daily timetabled tutorial sessions during which group or individual activities take place. Students' progress and career aspirations are reviewed. The self-assessment report acknowledged, however, that there is no formalised tutorial activity which helps students to set themselves targets and plan action to attain these. The college intends to offer all students a programme for achieving the key skills unit 'improving own learning and performance' from September 1999 as part of its inclusive learning policy. This is intended to formalise the process of setting targets and producing action plans for students. An effective team of senior tutors monitors students' progress, oversees the effective policy on students' attendance and provides support to tutors. The college's liaison with parents is good. Students are well supported in their academic studies through timetabled 'subject extensions' which are used mainly for individual and small group work. A comprehensive range of short accredited courses is available to supplement students' main studies. The college has a strong sports tradition and students have been notably successful at county and national level in a range of sports including football, badminton, swimming, netball and rugby.

37 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report, that the careers and higher education guidance at the college is excellent. The college and Sussex Career Services work very well together. The careers centre is well managed, well resourced and spacious. A study area forms part of it and students who work there are made aware of careers information. However, there is no access for students with restricted mobility. Students are introduced to the careers centre

Cross-college Provision

early in their studies and are encouraged to make use of its services. They receive help and guidance when making application to higher education. The college is committed to ensuring that students progress appropriately to another course or to employment when their college studies end. Careers interviews were of a high quality. There is good communication between tutors and the careers adviser. The college holds an annual 'progression day' which allows students to talk to employers, training agencies and other further education colleges. Former college students are invited back to the college to discuss careers and employment options with current students. Comprehensive opportunities for work experience and for accreditation of work-related skills are available to all students.

38 Students are not systematically tested to determine their learning support needs. Teachers come to know students' additional support needs as these reveal themselves through the students' work. In some instances, however, their needs do not become apparent until the students are well into their courses. Students with already identified specific learning difficulties are well supported by the college. They are assessed before induction and an additional support profile is drawn up for each individual. Support sessions take place in the additional support centre. However, access to the additional support centre is difficult for students with mobility problems. Support is also available in classrooms. Materials used in the support centre have been produced using course-specific materials and there is good communication between tutors and learning support staff.

39 Senior tutors are able to provide advice and support for students on financial, personal and accommodation issues. Support for overseas students is good. There is an active student union which liaises effectively with college staff through a student union liaison officer. The student union communicates effectively with the principal and is represented

on the governing body. As a result of student union lobbying, the college has recently appointed a counsellor and changes have been made to the catering arrangements for students.

General Resources

Grade 3

40 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that some strengths and some weaknesses had been overstated. At the time of the inspection, the college had begun to take action on some of the weaknesses it had identified.

Key strengths

- good IT facilities
- improvements in accommodation
- impressive display of students' art and photographic work

Weaknesses

- inaccessibility of much of the college to students with restricted mobility
- poor internal and external signposting
- inadequate accommodation strategy

41 The college is located on a single site in a residential area of Hove, within a short walk of Brighton town centre. It was built between 1911 and 1914 as a boys' grammar school. A second building, 'College House', originally dormitory accommodation for boys and teachers, is used for teaching. The college has a gymnasium, and a sports field and pavilion separated from the college by a public footpath. There is a joint user agreement for the sports field, part of which is owned by the college and part by the local authority. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that most of the college's accommodation is fit for purpose and that access to sporting facilities is good.

Cross-college Provision

42 Since the last inspection, the college's reception area has been improved and the main entrance can now be used by students as well as staff. The college has an ornate wood-panelled hall containing impressive murals painted by a former student depicting the history of Sussex. 'College House' has rooms of many shapes and sizes, narrow corridors and several mezzanine floors. Much of the college is inaccessible to students with restricted mobility. They can only use a small number of classrooms and the new open learning centre. Apart from a few rooms and corridors, which need redecorating, internal decoration is good throughout the college. Most corridors have displays of students' photography and artwork, and some areas have subject specific displays. External and internal signposting was identified as a weakness at the last inspection and has not improved. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that workrooms for teachers and support staff have improved since the last inspection.

43 A building programme is nearing completion. The college library is being modified and made larger. Additional teaching space is being built into a roof space and a biology laboratory is being remodelled. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it has responded to the need for improved and changed use of its accommodation. Since the last inspection, the teaching of art and design, photography and physics has been relocated to larger, well-lit rooms that provide a better learning environment for these subjects. The college does not have a planned maintenance schedule. The accommodation strategy is mainly descriptive of the current state of the buildings and is insufficiently detailed. Much of the college's accommodation is old and there has been a lack of buildings maintenance. A large number of maintenance tasks need to be tackled. Four maintenance staff are working through these tasks as well as carrying out emergency and grounds maintenance. Social areas for students have been improved since the

self-assessment report was written. In addition to using the student union area, students are able to socialise and work in the college hall and in the new self-service refectory.

44 The library and its resources, which were identified as a weakness during the last inspection, have not improved significantly. The budget of £12,000 a year represents expenditure of about £11.50 for each student and has not increased for three years. There are approximately 9,000 books in the library including multiple copies of the most popular books. Many books are old and out of date. Inspectors did not agree with the finding in the self-assessment report that library staff liaise effectively with teachers to ensure that the library meets students' needs. During the inspection, the existing library was temporarily located in a partitioned section of the hall. The new library, renamed the open learning centre, is nearing completion and will be in use by the end of the summer term. It is intended that this will have more shelf space for books, quiet study areas and good IT facilities. All students are provided with textbooks for their courses and most departments have their own additional collections of specialist books and journals for students' use. Some of these collections are not catalogued and the number and quality of the resources available cannot be readily identified.

45 Since the last inspection, the college has increased the number and improved the quality of its computers. There are 136 computers for students' use, 24 of which are new and of the latest specification. The ratio of computers to students is 1:7.7. Most computers provide access to the internet and the college intranet. The college has recently purchased 120 new computers and during the inspection was installing a new high capacity IT network cable to which these and most of the existing computers will be connected. The college aims to have outstanding IT resources and ensure that the ratio of computers to students falls to at least 1:5.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

46 Inspectors agreed with college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance arrangements. They considered, however, that the weakness relating to inadequate monitoring of progress in implementing improvements had not been sufficiently emphasised.

Key strengths

- good use of students' views to inform planning and action
- the college's commitment to continuous improvement
- identifiable improvements in some courses
- exemplary management of staff development

Weaknesses

- undeveloped framework for evaluating the college's performance
- significant variation in the quality of departmental self-assessment reports
- poor monitoring of progress against action plans
- no staff appraisal

47 The college's recently introduced self-assessment process replaced its previous quality assurance system which was based on course reviews and did not involve support functions. The self-assessment report used for inspection was the first one arising from the newly-developed process. The college's lack of an overall quality assurance framework which includes performance indicators and targets was acknowledged in the self-assessment report as a weakness. There are plans to remedy this but procedures for monitoring progress against action plans and for standardising the degree of rigour of these have not been co-ordinated. It is

unclear where responsibilities for various roles in the self-assessment and quality assurance processes lie. The college plans to link the processes for self-assessment, strategic planning and quality assurance. It has made progress in developing its procedures for validating self-assessment findings. Contributory reports from curriculum departments were examined by a team of staff, consisting of heads of division and the student services manager, and grades moderated. A self-assessment review group, made up of members of college staff, the corporation and the local TEC, examined a sample of contributory reports from the support functions. Governors reviewed their own performance, but did not do so with sufficient rigour. The reports on aspects of cross-college provision were not subject to internal validation.

48 The college had difficulty in arriving at a format for the self-assessment report and staff said they were confused initially about what was required of them. Staff received exemplars and helpful guidelines on departmental reports. The self-assessment report did not fully acknowledge, however, that the departmental reports varied significantly in quality and rigour. Contributory reports prepared by support functions were satisfactory. Staff said that the collaboration and sharing of good practice which take place within and between teams had increased as a result of self-assessment. Divisional meetings and training days have been used to address issues such as poor retention of students and teaching styles. Senior managers have worked hard to create a culture of continuous improvement and this is now reflected in the positive attitude of staff across the college. Most staff consider the new process an improvement on previous arrangements for quality assurance.

49 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment finding that there are well-established procedures for gathering students' opinions about the college and the quality of its provision. Students' views along with student retention and achievement rates, and value-added data are

Cross-college Provision

taken into account when making judgements. Some of the actions arising from self-assessment are leading to identifiable improvements. After concerted efforts, student retention rates in art are improving. Physics teachers changed the order in which the mathematics components of the course are taught and developed subject-related learning materials. There has since been a dramatic improvement in students' performance in module assessments. Business studies staff have introduced a compulsory mentoring programme for GCE A level students who are not achieving their target minimum grades. At the time of the inspection the self-assessment process had not been in operation for a full year and it was too soon to gauge the extent of its impact on the college's overall performance.

50 Action plans contain few measurable targets for improvements and do not include dates for reviewing progress in reaching these. The mechanisms for reviewing progress against plans are underdeveloped at all levels throughout the organisation. Practice for reviewing progress varies across curriculum areas. It is not formalised. In some instances it is poor, and the responsibilities of heads of division in reporting the performance of their teams are unclear. Similarly, procedures for recording progress in implementing improvements vary across the college and some are ineffective. These weaknesses were acknowledged in the self-assessment report but the college has taken no action to remedy them. The college acknowledges that it does not monitor effectively its performance against the commitments in the college charter.

51 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment finding that the college's lesson observation scheme provides insufficient quantifiable data on the quality of teaching and learning such as lesson grades. The scheme was run for a trial period. Outcomes and staff reaction to the scheme were carefully recorded. The scheme was revised and teachers are now observed by

fellow teachers instead of line managers. Lessons are not graded. Both managers and teachers have found outcomes from the scheme useful in their planning of staff development.

52 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment of the particularly good management of staff development as a strength. The staff development policy links the objectives for staff training to the college's priorities expressed through the corporate objectives. There are clear procedures whereby staff can obtain the necessary support for their professional development. Managers are provided with appropriate information to enable them to plan ways of meeting the future needs of their teams. Expenditure on training and development is planned and monitored. The college aims to achieve Investor in People status by June 2000. The self-assessment report acknowledged the absence of a current staff appraisal scheme as a weakness. The college's staff appraisal scheme has been in abeyance since 1997. A new scheme based largely on self-assessment has been devised, but it is not yet operational.

Governance

Grade 3

53 Inspectors mainly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but they considered that the weaknesses had been given insufficient emphasis and that the strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- close monitoring of the college's finances
- the corporation's openness and demonstration of accountability
- governors' expertise in property and finance

Cross-college Provision

Weaknesses

- failure of governors to give sufficient attention to curricular matters
- poor monitoring of operational and strategic plans
- no system for appraisal of the principal or senior postholders

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 membership of 16, comprising seven independent, two co-opted, two parent, one student and two staff governors, a TEC nominee and the principal. Inspectors agreed that governors have a broad range of business skills and experience and have used them effectively in conducting corporation business in finance, personnel and premises. Their skills have been of particular use in overseeing the design and management of the college's new open learning centre. The corporation does not formally conduct a skills audit of its members and lacks an external member with recent educational experience.

56 The corporation has recently revised its committee structure and now has committees for finance and general purposes, remuneration, personnel, search and audit. All committees have terms of reference which clearly identify their responsibilities and relationship to the corporation. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that its financial reporting is regular and helpful. The finance and general purposes committee effectively oversees the college's finances, and governors use their technical expertise to challenge and improve the college's financial reporting arrangements. The committee has been active in developing the

format for the management accounts, which it receives and monitors at its termly meetings.

57 Governors use a comprehensive set of standing orders to guide the conduct of their business. They have recently increased their openness and accountability by revising the register of interests and code of conduct to reflect the recommendations of the Nolan committee's report on standards in public life. They have also recently approved a 'whistleblowers' charter. The corporation has yet to agree criteria for determining confidentiality of corporation business, or approve a process for responding to requests for information and complaints.

58 During the recent reorganisation of its committee structure, the corporation chose not to establish a curriculum committee. It resolved instead to deal with curriculum issues as a standing item on corporation agendas. In subsequent corporation meetings, however, there has been little opportunity for substantial debate on these issues. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that governors are not familiar with the curriculum areas and are not sufficiently well known to the staff and students in them. Governors' understanding of student and curriculum issues is inadequate. The last review of students' examination results was spread over two corporation meetings and only the chairman received the information in advance of the first meeting. The monitoring of student retention and achievement rates by the corporation is not adequate, and this weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

59 Governors have identified that they do not have enough involvement in strategic planning. They have sometimes not been sufficiently involved in discussions about broad strategic issues. The new principal has reacted swiftly to this weakness by involving governors in the next annual planning cycle. Governors have not carried out a sufficiently analytical and systematic review of the strategic plan or annual operating statement other than through

Cross-college Provision

receiving brief reports from senior managers. The plan contained few measurable targets, however, and it was difficult for the governors to determine its effectiveness in any detail. In his report to the corporation this year, the principal has included a review of both the strategic plan and operating statement. Governors do not have arrangements for appraising the principal and other senior postholders. This deficiency was identified in the self-assessment report but appraisals have not yet taken place.

Management

Grade 2

60 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection, significant progress had been made in addressing some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective divisional and departmental organisation
- well-managed support services
- effective financial management
- procedures for ensuring value for money
- extensive links with external organisations

Weaknesses

- deficiencies in the strategic planning process
- insufficient use of target-setting and performance indicators

61 Since the last inspection, the college has been reorganised. In 1997, financial constraints necessitated a review of the number of staff and salaries and reward points. This resulted in a pay reduction for the majority of staff and many accepted new roles and responsibilities. Staff

salaries as a percentage of income have been reduced from 79% in 1997 to 71% in 1998. This process was managed well but some residual issues remain to be resolved. The new principal took up post in September 1998. The reduced senior management team now consists of the principal, the director of student provision and the director of finance and premises.

62 The academic and pastoral work of the college is organised in four divisions, each led by a division manager. Divisions consist of six or seven curriculum areas, each of which has a head of department. A senior tutor is attached to each division. Senior tutors work well with the division managers and provide support to tutors and students in their divisions. Roles and responsibilities are clear. Departments are managed well and the divisional organisation facilitates good communication and sharing of good practice. The divisional managers, the student services manager and the director of student provision meet regularly as the student provision team. Within this team, each divisional manager has a significant cross-college responsibility. The student provision team enables the effective integration of all academic and pastoral matters at divisional level and works on the development of policy for the senior management team. Support areas report to the director of finance and premises. Support functions are well managed. Support staff work well together in teams and some have become multi-skilled. Some additional reorganisation is planned to improve support for the management of premises and technical support for the curriculum.

63 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there are inadequacies in the process of strategic planning. Improvements in the process were initiated through the review of the college's mission which involved wide consultation among staff. A more coherent planning process has been introduced. This is intended to ensure that the outcomes of quality assurance and self-assessment clearly inform

Cross-college Provision

planning, but the effectiveness of this process has yet to be demonstrated. The strategic plan focuses on the financial and academic aims of the college, but many of its strategic objectives are imprecise. With the notable exception of key financial indicators, the plan does not contain measurable targets for individual years. The college is aware that the lack of such targets will make effective review of the plan difficult and it is determining precise targets for the next round of planning.

64 A review of communication was carried out at the end of the academic year 1997-98. Communication was cited as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Since then, efforts have been made to remedy many of the shortcomings. For example, the college is making better use of the weekly staff bulletin, holding fewer large staff meetings, improving communication with support staff, and establishing more direct contact between the senior management team and most staff. Staff report that communication has improved significantly over the last six months.

65 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance team is led by a suitably-qualified and experienced accountant. Budget preparation is timely. The process is documented clearly and is well understood by budget holders. Detailed financial objectives have been set as part of the three-year financial forecasts, and progress towards reaching them is monitored regularly. Management accounts are prepared monthly and are accompanied by a well-written commentary. They include an income and expenditure account, balance sheet and cashflow statement. However, the cashflow statement is not prepared on a rolling 12-month basis. As acknowledged by the college, the financial regulations need to be revised. The college has effective procedures for ensuring value for money, including recent reviews of its energy supplies, banking arrangements and

payroll services. The college's internal and external auditors have not identified in their reports any significant weaknesses in internal controls.

66 The college is able to produce good-quality management information which is used effectively in the making of management decisions. Returns to the FEFC are accurate and timely. The college has extensive and purposeful links with a range of external organisations. Many of these contacts provide the college with good market research data for use in its strategic planning.

67 The equal opportunities policy is being rewritten. The college has appointed a new equal opportunities co-ordinator, an audit of activities has been carried out and an equal opportunities committee is being set up.

Conclusions

68 The college wrote its first full self-assessment report for the inspection. Self-assessment findings were reported under the headings in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating self-assessment* and the report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. It contained actions to address weaknesses and deadlines for their completion. However, the report contained insufficient detail, few measurable targets against which to monitor progress, and no progress review dates. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the report. However, they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses, and considered that some of the weaknesses identified by the college had not been given sufficient emphasis. In the time between the production of the report and the inspection, the college had made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses. Inspectors considered that the college had given too high a grade to one aspect of cross-college provision and too low a grade to another.

Cross-college Provision

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 (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	98
19-24 years	1
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	0
Intermediate	19
Advanced	81
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	264	3	24
Business	120	1	11
Hotel and catering	32	0	3
Health and community care	21	0	2
Art and design	143	1	13
Humanities	502	6	47
Basic education	1	0	0
Total	1,083	11	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 21% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	63	2	1	66
Supporting direct learning contact	11	0	0	11
Other support	24	0	0	24
Total	98	2	1	101

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,124,000	£3,323,000	£3,291,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£17.97	£17.32	£17.13
Payroll as a proportion of income	79%	79%	71%
Achievement of funding target	119%	122%	102%
Diversity of income	7%	10%	14%
Operating surplus	-£51,000	-£71,000	£84,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	29	61	7	13	23	14
	Retention (%)	72	77	43	46	57	43
	Achievement (%)	48	86	n/a	50	80	100
2	Expected completions	495	601	2,289	16	36	59
	Retention (%)	74	79	84	63	61	61
	Achievement (%)	89	70	74	70	73	53
3	Expected completions	–	1,579	1,847	–	48	43
	Retention (%)	–	76	77	–	63	70
	Achievement (%)	85	85	88	81	84	96
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	0	0	–	0	0
	Retention (%)	–	n/a	n/a	–	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Expected completions	7	1,134	125	8	16	26
	Retention (%)	100	96	97	100	63	85
	Achievement (%)	43	100	100*	13	100	n/a
Unknown/ unclassified	Expected completions	796	779	58	21	33	2
	Retention (%)	87	88	83	71	70	50
	Achievement (%)	94	99	100*	93	92	n/a

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

FEFC Inspection Report 82/99

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council**

Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>

© FEFC July 1999