

Cambridge Regional College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

THE
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EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Cambridge Regional College

Eastern Region

Inspected March and May 1998

Cambridge Regional College is a large general further education college located on two sites in Cambridge. It serves the education and training needs of the city of Cambridge, the rural communities of Cambridgeshire and the surrounding counties. The college prepared a thorough and comprehensive self-assessment report. The process of self-assessment was well planned and systematic and built upon existing quality assurance arrangements. Since the report was written the college has taken action to address some of the weaknesses it identified. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements but considered that the significance of some of the strengths and weaknesses had been underestimated.

The college provides courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Seven curriculum areas were inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. Courses offered under the college's arrangements for collaborative provision were also inspected. The college has productive links with a wide range of external partners, including employers, universities, the LEA and the local TEC. It meets the needs of a

wide and dispersed community. The corporation sets a clear strategic direction for the college. There are clear management priorities and responsibilities. Effective communication systems are in place. Courses are well organised. The college's collaborative provision is well managed and makes an effective contribution to widening participation. Standards of teaching and learning are good. Students achieve high pass rates on some courses. Support for students is well managed and effective; there is outstanding careers guidance. The quality assurance system is comprehensive and effectively implemented. The quality of accommodation at the Kings Hedges site is excellent. Libraries and learning resource centres are well equipped. The college should address: low levels of retention and achievement in some subjects; some ineffective teaching; inadequacies in some tutorial provision; the analysis and use of market information; some aspects of operational planning and target-setting; and compliance with some statutory and procedural requirements for governance.

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
Computing and information technology	2	General resources	1
Computing and information technology (collaborative provision)	2	Quality assurance	2
Engineering	3	Governance	3
Business	2	Management	2
Humanities	3		
Modern languages (collaborative provision)	2		
Basic education	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Cambridge Regional College is the largest provider of education and training in the Cambridge area. It draws students from a wide catchment area, including the city of Cambridge and the rural communities of Cambridgeshire, east Bedfordshire, north Hertfordshire, north Essex and west Suffolk. At the time of its establishment in 1988, the college was located on eight different sites within the city of Cambridge. It is now consolidated on to two sites. There is a centrally located city campus at Newmarket Road which houses approximately 20 per cent of provision and a new, purpose-built campus at Kings Hedges on the northern edge of Cambridge.

2 Service industries, research and 'hi-tech' industries are strongly represented in the local economy. The majority of companies in the district employ less than 10 people. Future employment growth is expected to be from the key sectors of financial and business services, public services, distribution and catering. The unemployment rate in Cambridgeshire is 3.2 per cent which is 2 per cent below the national average. People in the area are comparatively well qualified with over 20 per cent having degrees and diplomas. There is a high staying-on rate in education. Almost 80 per cent of 16 year olds in the Cambridge area continue in full-time education.

3 In addition to Cambridge Regional College, there are two sixth form colleges, an agriculture and horticulture campus of another college, three state schools and five independent schools in the immediate Cambridge area, all catering for pupils aged 11 to 18. The college is a member of the Cambridge Collegiate Board, a long-established consortium of local schools and further education sector colleges, which provides information and guidance and a common admissions system for entry into post-16 full-time education.

4 The college offers a wide range of courses, including general national vocational qualification (GNVQ), national vocational qualification (NVQ) and other vocational qualifications, and courses designed to provide access to further and higher education. General certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses are offered in over 30 subjects. The college is an associate college of Anglia Polytechnic University and is part of the university's Regional University Partnership. The college also has plans to extend its own provision of higher education programmes. In 1998, the college offered higher national diplomas in business and finance and sports science and higher national certificates in business and finance and electronics. Through the establishment of the Cambridgeshire Adult Education Consortium, the college has developed an extensive programme of collaborative provision in schools and community colleges. Courses range from entry level to GCE A level and are taught in 22 centres across a wide geographical area of Cambridgeshire. Over 60 per cent of the college's part-time enrolments are accounted for by this provision.

5 In May 1998, the college had over 15,000 enrolments, of which approximately 3,600 were full time. Twenty-two per cent of enrolments are students aged 16 to 18. Sixty-two per cent of the college's total enrolments are female; 4 per cent of students identify themselves as having a disability and 5.4 per cent are of minority ethnic origin. The college employs over 500 full-time equivalent staff of which 268 full-time equivalent are established teaching posts; in addition, a further 105 full-time equivalent teachers are engaged through an employment agency. The college's curriculum is delivered through 10 schools of study and through the 'education liaison sector'.

6 The college's mission states that the college 'values and promotes good teaching which leads to better learning and best achievement for all'.

Context

It also has a vision statement which is: 'to be acknowledged as one of the UK's leading colleges, providing high-quality further education and training which excels regionally and is nationally and internationally renowned'.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected in two periods. During the week beginning 23 March 1998 collaborative provision was inspected. The direct provision of the college was inspected in the week beginning 18 May 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college was asked to submit data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997, but it could only provide data for two years in the format required. The data submitted were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Approximately two months before the inspection, the college was notified of the sample of its provision which was to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 17 inspectors working for 62 days, and by an

auditor working for five days. They observed 103 lessons, and examined students' work and college documents. Inspectors evaluated the extent of consultation which the college has with external bodies such as the Central and South Cambridgeshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local employers, and community groups. Meetings were held with governors, college managers, other staff and students. During the week beginning 18 May 1998, the second week of inspection by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the college's government-funded training schemes were also inspected by the Training Standards Council.

8 Of the lessons inspected, 67 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 5 per cent were less than satisfactory or poor. This compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 70 per cent. This compares with an average of 77 per cent for general further education colleges, according to the same report. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	5	4	1	0	11
GCSE	1	1	2	0	0	4
GNVQ	9	6	8	0	1	24
Higher education including access	3	6	2	1	0	12
Basic education	4	7	3	1	0	15
Other vocational	7	19	10	1	0	37
Total	25	44	29	4	1	103

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering GCE A level in science subjects, BTEC national certificate in sciences and GNVQ advanced and intermediate science. The self-assessment report for the science programme area identified many of the key strengths and weaknesses but did not acknowledge the poor levels of achievement for some science GCE A levels.

Key strengths

- the broad range of courses and a variety of attendance modes
- the effectively planned teaching in vocational lessons
- the high achievement on vocational programmes
- good retention on the GNVQ intermediate and BTEC national certificate courses
- well-presented GNVQ portfolios
- the thorough attention to safety in practical classes
- well-equipped and up-to-date laboratories

Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching in theory lessons
- the low achievement and retention for some GCE A level science subjects
- the failure to implement some course review procedures
- insufficient level of technician support

10 There is a broad range of full-time and part-time courses in science including a BTEC national certificate programme covering physical, biological and pharmaceutical science; access provision; general certificate of secondary

education (GCSE); and GCE A levels in chemistry, physics, biology, human biology and geology. Vocational courses are well organised and planned. Programme files are maintained for all courses. Some course review procedures have not been implemented. BTEC national certificate courses lack an annual programme report and action plan.

11 Much of the teaching in the vocational classes is well organised and makes effective use of learning resources. Students work well in small groups on clearly structured tasks. Teachers use effective question and answer techniques to check learning. In one biology lesson, students worked in small groups using videos and CD-ROMs. Structured worksheets, handouts, a student handbook and effective intervention from the teacher supported their learning. Thorough attention is given to safety in practical classes. Students understand their practical work which is effectively related to theory. In a minority of lessons observed by inspectors, teachers spent too much time talking or writing on the board; they made little use of effective questioning to check students' understanding and did not support their teaching with visual aids or handouts. Some students' notes were disorganised. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Most students' work in GNVQ portfolios is well presented and of an appropriate standard. Much of the portfolio evidence demonstrates effective use of information technology (IT).

12 Laboratories are modern, well maintained and well equipped with a good range of resources, including computers, CD-ROMs, and video players. The laboratories are widely dispersed. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there is ineffective deployment of technician support for the range of classes taking place. Technician support was not available for two practical lessons observed by inspectors.

Curriculum Areas

13 Inspectors agreed with the college that students' achievements on all vocational programmes are very good. The pass rate for GNVQ courses over two years is well above national averages and retention on the intermediate course is good. There are high levels of achievement on the BTEC national certificate programme. However, achievements on some GCE A level programmes are poor. The overall figures for two-year programmes show good results in geology but very poor results in chemistry, physics and human biology. For example, in physics in 1996, none of the students achieved the qualification. In 1997, 50 per cent achieved the qualification but none achieved grades A to C. Retention of GCE A level students is also poor. Although the self-assessment report acknowledges the poor retention it does not identify poor achievement. The college's value-added data emphasise the poor average achievements in relation to GCSE scores of students on some GCE A level courses and show a significant decline in performance for 1997. The college is seeking to address these issues by closely monitoring retention and applying minimum GCSE entry criteria for GCE

A level subjects. Strategies such as the use of value-added data are not co-ordinated across the GCE A level science programme.

Examples of students' achievements in science, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level (two-year courses)+	Retention (%)	*	60	41
	Pass rate (%)	*	41	65
GCE A level (one-year courses)+	Retention (%)	*	71	76
	Pass rate (%)	*	49	65
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	68	57
	Pass rate (%)	*	80	83
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	100	75	80
	Pass rate (%)	73	100	67
BTEC national certificate	Retention (%)	*	90	69
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	92

Source: college data

*accurate data not available

+includes chemistry, biology, physics, human biology, geology

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

14 The inspection covered specialist courses in computing and IT. Twelve lessons were observed by inspectors. Self-assessment reports covered courses in the school of science, mathematics and IT and the school of leisure, tourism and office administration. Many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were necessarily general because of the range of provision covered. Inspectors largely agreed with the college's judgements relating to computing and IT provision. Inspectors identified some additional key strengths and weaknesses specific to individual courses.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and range of appropriate learning activities
- well-organised and managed courses
- good use of relevant work experience
- pass rates on the GNVQ advanced IT course
- good retention on part-time courses
- good computing resources at the Kings Hedges site

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on most courses
- mismatch between some workshop learning materials and course content
- lack of some specialist hardware and software

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is effective. There are well-documented schemes of work which provide clear schedules for the year. Teachers keep up-to-date records of students' progress. In the best lessons, teachers provided a range of

activities and made effective use of questions in practical and theory work to maintain students' interest. When introducing new topics, teachers ensured that they related them to students' experiences and encouraged students to contribute to discussion. Teachers provided an appropriate balance of theory and practical work which took account of students' abilities and attention spans. The standard of work in lessons was appropriate for the level of the courses studied. The feedback to students on GNVQ programmes helped them to improve their work. In a few lessons, teachers failed to provide some of the more able students with sufficiently challenging work and there was some ineffective student activity through lack of guidance. The quality of most learning materials is high. However, a mismatch between some workshop learning materials and course content was not identified in the self-assessment report. While staff have created additional materials, some students still experience considerable difficulties with some topics and are unable to get help readily.

16 Work experience placements on the GNVQ advanced course provide students with relevant experience of the use of computer equipment in industry, support some course assignments and, in some cases, have led to employment. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Students were positive about their work placement experiences, although it is acknowledged there are difficulties in providing all students with this valuable experience.

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that courses in computing and IT are well managed. The range of curriculum provision is effectively reviewed and the introduction of new courses carefully planned. Curriculum development includes support for national initiatives by offering pilot GNVQ syllabuses and RSA Examinations Board (RSA) Integrated Business Technology 3 programmes. Issues identified in the self-assessment report

Curriculum Areas

have been addressed through a clear action plan. There has been appropriate staff development to meet curriculum and course developments. Course team and other meetings are generally productive, although the form in which minutes are produced does not allow for the clear indication of action points. Annual course reviews do not analyse trends in students' achievements, or make comparisons with college and national benchmarks.

18 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the level of general computing resources at the Kings Hedges site is good. Elsewhere, the two-year planned upgrade across the college will bring about some needed improvements. The college acknowledged the lack of some specialist computer hardware and software for aspects of NVQ and GNVQ programmes. The facilities for specialist computing provision at the Newmarket Road site are adequate for current course provision but are not sufficient for some of the planned curriculum developments. The learning centre information resources are appropriate for the

range of provision and the range of periodicals allows students to monitor recent technical developments.

19 Pass rates for GNVQ advanced were similar in 1996 and 1997 at 67 per cent and 69 per cent, respectively, and are better than the national pass rates for this course. However, pass rates on other courses are weaker and in 1997 were below 50 per cent on most courses and below the pass rates achieved for 1996. Retention on the part-time courses is high at over 80 per cent. Standards of work in students' portfolios is appropriate to the level of course and the standards required for distinction, merit, and pass are clearly identifiable from the work.

Examples of students' achievements in computing and information technology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level computing	Retention (%)	*	57	50
	Pass rate (%)	*	75	40
GNVQ advanced IT	Retention (%)	*	79	47
	Pass rate (%)	*	67	69
GNVQ intermediate IT	Retention (%)	*	97	77
	Pass rate (%)	*	72	33
C&G 726	Retention (%)	67	94	90
	Pass rate (%)	0	48	41
Integrated business technology level 2 and computer literacy and information technology	Retention (%)	*	85	84
	Pass rate (%)	*	31	40

Source: college data

*accurate data not available

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology (Collaborative Provision)

Grade 2

20 The inspection covered courses in computing and IT delivered as part of the college's collaborative provision. Inspectors visited eight village and community colleges and observed 10 classes in total. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report produced for collaborative provision.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- high retention and pass rates for all courses
- the detailed monitoring of students' progress by most tutors
- the range of courses supporting progression to advanced levels

Weaknesses

- the failure of some teaching methods to give sufficient support to all students
- few opportunities for subject tutors to share good practice
- the insufficient pre-course guidance given to some students

21 Inspectors confirmed that the college offers a good range of courses from basic to advanced levels in IT. Courses are available during the day, in the evenings and, sometimes, at the weekend. Some are short courses lasting for 10 weeks whilst others operate for the whole year. Courses are provided in most of the 22 centres throughout Cambridgeshire where collaborative provision is offered, giving local study opportunities for students who frequently live in dispersed and isolated communities. The

courses offered are largely determined by individual centres. One centre has devised an entry level course for IT which has been validated by the RSA and is now being operated by 31 colleges nationally. Students in many of the centres progress on to more advanced courses.

22 Pre-course guidance is sometimes lacking and inspectors identified a few students who were not following the most appropriate programme of study. Although students were given copies of the college charter, many remained unaware that they are entitled to use college library and learning facilities, including those for computing. Tutors work individually and there are few opportunities provided for them to give mutual support or share ideas and good practice. This lack of co-ordination at the curriculum level was not identified as an issue in the self-assessment report.

23 The quality of most teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and students receive effective technical support, usually on an individual basis. Teaching methods are chosen carefully to take account of the needs of adult learners. When students within the same class complete work towards different qualifications teachers manage their learning well. However, in some lessons observed by inspectors students had to wait relatively long periods before receiving help from the teacher. Attendance in most classes is good. Inspectors agreed that students are highly motivated, are often helped to work on their own and usually make good progress. Tutors monitor closely each student's progress and keep detailed records of the outcomes of assessments.

24 Students on IT courses have access to high-quality computer hardware and software which is generally up to date and compatible with that used in industry and commerce. In the centres visited by inspectors, teaching rooms were adequately decorated and furnished and many were of good quality. Some teachers had

Curriculum Areas

prepared excellent handouts. In a few lessons, there were insufficient materials for students to use.

25 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students' achievements in IT are a strength. There have been good retention and high pass rates on all courses during the previous two sessions. A high proportion of the students who initially enrol undertake the assessments and are successful. Over the previous two years pass rates ranged from 82 per cent to 96 per cent.

Examples of students' achievements in computing and information technology (collaborative provision), 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Basic IT+	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	94
Computer literacy and information technology	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	83	96
RSA wordprocessing (stages 1, 2 and 3)	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	90	82

Source: college data

**data not available*

+course was not nationally accredited in 1996, but students were awarded a college certificate

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

26 Inspectors observed 14 lessons across a wide range of engineering courses. They agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the high standard of students' practical work
- the effective development of key skills
- well-equipped practical workshops and laboratories

Weaknesses

- failure of some teaching to involve students in learning
- low pass rates for most courses
- poor retention on the majority of courses

27 The college's provision covers most branches of engineering, including motor vehicle and aeronautical engineering. Courses range from NVQ level 2 to higher national certificate. There are some strong links with industry in the form of joint training programmes with local major companies. Inspectors did not agree with the college's claim that the variety of modes of attendance are a strength. Course provision is predominantly for full-time and day-release modes of attendance; there are few evening courses or short refresher courses. Course files contain appropriate documentation, including schemes of work, a student guide, external reports and student evaluations. Some course files contain course reviews or notes of meetings and a few contain action plans.

28 In the best lessons, teachers made effective use of an appropriate variety of teaching methods. For example, in a vehicle body lesson on corrosion protection, the students were shown a video and were then required to

complete a handout. To illustrate the use of a calculator for a mathematical operation, a transparent calculator was projected on to an overhead screen enabling the students to follow the topic clearly. In a significant minority of lessons teachers failed to involve students sufficiently in the work. In one lesson, for example, students copied notes off a transparency, too much time was wasted and students lost interest with the slow overall pace of the lesson. One lecturer dictated notes but made little attempt to explain the topic or to check students' learning.

29 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that practical work is of high quality. Students undertake an impressive programme of skill attainment in supervised workshops. Project work in aeronautics includes the construction of a Stoddard Hamilton kit plane, an aircraft owned by a charity, which when complete will be used to give flight experiences to disabled and life-limited children. In two separate mechanical engineering classes, the high standard of students' skills was demonstrated through the manufacture of a garden sprinkler system and a pipe clamp. Appropriate attention is paid to safe working practices. Key skills are developed effectively in motor vehicle and mechanical engineering. In mechanical engineering, workshop booklets are used to integrate key skills with students' vocational studies. The booklets contain questions to assess students' learning and also examples of component and cutting speed calculations to enable students to complete drawings accurately. IT is utilised to measure the finished component and to calculate tolerances. There are examples of well-presented, wordprocessed assignments.

30 Staff are experienced and well qualified, although few have recent industrial experience. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report. There is a good range of high-quality, well-equipped practical workshops and laboratories. Motor vehicle provision is

Curriculum Areas

contained within a large two-floor workshop. A large workshop provides a hangar for three aircraft. There are two electronics laboratories with dedicated computer workstations. A computer network links the autoCAD workshop to the manufacturing workshop and can be used for CAD/CAM work.

31 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that pass and retention rates are a weakness. In 1996, pass rates on the four principal courses were all below the national average. The position improved in 1997 with two out of the four areas achieving above average pass rates. In five out of eight courses, a significant number of students left their courses early in both 1996 and 1997. The college has recognised the need to improve the monitoring of attendance. A new policy on reporting student absences has been introduced.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced two year part time	Retention (%)	*	61	68
	Pass rate (%)	*	74	67
Intermediate one year full time	Retention (%)	*	72	63
	Pass rate (%)	*	49	68
NVQ and equivalent two year full time	Retention (%)	*	65	67
	Pass rate (%)	*	59	100
NVQ and equivalent two year part time	Retention (%)	*	95	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	68	69

Source: college data

*accurate data not available

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

32 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering business studies, management and professional courses. Business administration courses did not form part of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but they also considered that several strengths and weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- effective curriculum management
- much good teaching
- some students' work of a high standard
- high pass rates on management courses
- good specialist learning resources

Weaknesses

- few opportunities for full-time students to relate their theoretical knowledge to current vocational practice
- the low pass rates on some courses
- the poor retention rates on some courses

33 The college offers a broad range of business and professional courses which meets the needs of students and employers. A particular strength is the development of assessments for NVQs in the workplace. Links with industry are well established. Courses are well organised and effectively managed. Considerable attention is given to course planning. Regular course, team and school meetings have helped the successful introduction of the revised GNVQ intermediate and advanced pilot courses. Students contribute to course and team meetings. This strength was acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report.

34 The quality of most teaching is good. Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods which helps to sustain students' interest. For example, teachers effectively combine presentations with group work to promote student learning. In one GNVQ advanced lesson, the teacher and students made innovative use of the internet to obtain information on the European single currency. Many teachers use their recent commercial and industrial experience to enliven their teaching. Students are encouraged to draw on their own background knowledge and work experience. Most lessons are well planned and learning materials are appropriate. In some lessons, observed by inspectors, teachers failed to take account of the different abilities of students, failed to provide some students with sufficiently challenging work and did not always check that learning was taking place. These weaknesses were not noted in the college's self-assessment report. Work experience for students on vocational courses is underdeveloped. Only second-year GNVQ advanced students undertake a period of planned work experience. There are few opportunities for full-time students to hear visiting speakers or make educational visits. The self-assessment report did not recognise the need to provide more opportunities for students to relate their theoretical knowledge to current vocational practice.

35 Students' written work is often of good quality. Portfolios on the GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses are well presented, and show that students have acquired an appropriate range of skills, including wordprocessing and graphics. Students' work is marked helpfully and returned quickly, but sometimes teachers give insufficiently detailed written feedback to help students to improve. Appropriate attention is given to correcting spelling and grammatical errors. There is effective integration of key skills within vocational units and assignments. Inspectors agreed with the college that regular group and individual tutorials enable full-time students to

Curriculum Areas

monitor and evaluate their progress, but that regular individual tutorials for part-time students are underdeveloped.

36 Teachers have appropriate knowledge and experience, although the work experience of some is dated. All staff have access to relevant staff development. The classrooms for business and management studies are well appointed and appropriately furnished with whiteboards and overhead projectors. Full-time students are able to make full use of the learning resource centre and IT facilities which include a good range of IT equipment and standard business software. There is a good range of up-to-date business and management periodicals. Students have good access to the internet and are provided with internet addresses appropriate to their course of study.

37 The college recognises that students' achievements for management and professional programmes are a strength. For 1996-97, pass rates for the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply Foundation, the Chartered Institute of Marketing Certificate, and Institute for Supervision and Management were above national averages. The college acknowledges the poor pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate programme. Retention rates for GNVQ

advanced and BTEC national certificate courses were below 65 per cent in 1997.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	74	64
	Pass rate (%)	*	64	67
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	77	75	74
	Pass rate (%)	57	78	49
BTEC national certificate	Retention (%)	*	55	64
	Pass rate (%)	*	91	100
Management and professional	Retention (%)	*	87	90
	Pass rate (%)	*	52	72

Source: college data

*accurate data not available

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

38 The inspection covered English and social science subjects in the humanities programme area. Twenty-one lessons were observed on GCE A level and GCSE courses, and on the pre-access and access to higher education programmes. Subjects included English, government and politics, philosophy, psychology and sociology. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but attributed greater significance to some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the wide range of subjects and modes of delivery
- the well-planned lessons including some effective revision strategies
- the quality of students' work on the access courses
- the effective course management and administration

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to the individual learning needs of some students
- retention rates below national and college levels
- low pass rates for GCE A level
- lack of subject leadership for parts of the programme area

39 The college offers a wide range of GCE A level and GCSE humanities subjects. Modes of delivery include full-time, part-time, two-year and one-year courses and day and evening attendance options. The access programme is designed to enable adult students who have not gained formal qualifications to enter higher education; the pre-access course provides appropriate preparation for students to help

them return to learning. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's judgement that course management and administration is effective. GCE A level and some GCSE subjects are managed by the school of advanced and continuing studies through two programme managers. There are strong links with the five other schools who contribute to the programme. However, the college acknowledges that the lack of subject leaders in some parts of the programme area reduces the effectiveness of curriculum development and inhibits the sharing of good practice. The recruitment of full-time students has declined, which has resulted in a number of very small classes. In one subject, only one student remained out of an initial enrolment of six. The small size of classes restricts the opportunities for discussion and interaction between students in lessons.

40 Inspectors agreed with the college that lessons are well planned, have clear aims and objectives and are based on comprehensive and useful schemes of work. The teaching methods used with adult students on the access programmes help to build up their confidence. In an access to higher education lesson, the teacher's enthusiastic reading helped students to annotate and respond personally to two poems. A well-designed worksheet using structured questions enabled students to focus on the text and to interpret the meaning. Students worked with purpose and enthusiasm and were able to make quite sophisticated responses to the poems. Inspectors observed several examples of well-planned revision activities. These included the effective use of group work. Some teachers failed to cater effectively for the range of different abilities within the group, particularly at GCSE level. Inspectors agreed with the college that the lack of formal tutorial support for part-time students is a weakness.

41 The well-equipped teaching rooms are of exceptionally high quality. All have a whiteboard, overhead projector screen and video playback facilities. Noticeboards contain

Curriculum Areas

attractive posters and displays of students' work. The staff workroom has eight computers which provide access to the library catalogue, the internet and electronic mail. The learning resource centre effectively meets the needs of humanities students.

42 The college's self-assessment report recognises that pass rates in GCE A level humanities subjects are poor. In most cases, they are below the national average. Inspectors considered that the college had understated this weakness. Analysis of students' final GCE A level examination results with their attainment at GCSE indicates that many students are underachieving. Retention is below the national average for humanities courses and below targets set by the college. In 1997, only 47 per cent of GCE A level students and 62 per cent of GCSE students completed their studies. The college has taken some action and retention amongst the current first-year GCE A level groups has shown considerable improvement. Students on the access to higher education programme are enthusiastic and confident. They demonstrate good levels of academic achievement in their assignment work. Students who achieve the full award progress to a wide range of courses and higher education institutions.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1996 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Access to higher education	Retention (%)	*	83	74
	Full achievement** (%)	74	59	70
GCE A level in the social sciences and English	Retention (%)	*	55	43
	Pass rate (%)	*	76	67
GCSE English, psychology and sociology	Retention (%)	*	61	62
	Pass rate (%)	*	62	62

Source: college data

*accurate data not available

**some students gain credits towards the full achievement

Curriculum Areas

Modern Languages (Collaborative Provision)

Grade 2

43 The inspection covered courses in modern languages taught as part of the college's collaborative provision. Inspectors visited seven centres and observed nine lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the general strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report for collaborative provision, although there were few specific references to the modern languages curriculum.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons taught by fluent linguists or native speakers
- effective use of a good range of teaching methods
- good achievements in most examinations
- opportunity for progression from elementary to advanced levels in most centres

Weaknesses

- the low number of students entering examinations
- some poor results in Institute of Linguists examinations

44 There is comprehensive provision of language courses across a broad area of south and central Cambridgeshire. French, German, Spanish and Italian are offered at most of the centres at a number of levels ranging from Institute of Linguists (preliminary) to GCE A level. In some centres, there is a range of less usual languages, such as Russian, Greek, Chinese, Japanese and Swahili. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that non-accredited initial courses which do not lead to a national qualification form the first stage of a

clear progression route. However, more advantage could be taken of progression routes using higher level courses offered by the college. Effective consultation with other language providers ensures that the community is well supported by an appropriate range of courses.

45 Lessons are well planned and taught by fluent linguists or native speakers. In the majority of lessons observed, teachers used a good range of teaching methods and involved students in the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers made good use of resources and gave students good insights into the culture of the language studied. Students responded well, expressed themselves confidently and, in the more advanced classes, articulately and accurately making good use of knowledge gained in previous lessons. In one lesson, the tutor confronted students with a barrage of idiomatic German; the students then conducted a problem-solving role-play with much enthusiasm and had good strategies for paraphrasing when they could not immediately recall the right phrase. In about a third of the lessons the teaching methods were not fully effective; for example, teachers made insufficient use of the language being learned and failed to provide opportunities for students to express themselves individually and in pairs or groups. A few classrooms were set out unsuitably for communicative language teaching.

46 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that staff are generally well qualified and experienced. However, inspectors found that not all tutors were trained specifically for working with adults. Good attention is given to the need for staff development. In some centres, there are regular meetings of modern language teachers and positive use has been made of specialist training courses run by the college. Most classrooms used for language teaching are well equipped with audiovisual aids but few contain appropriate display materials.

47 In 1997, less than a third of students enrolled on modern language courses chose to

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enter for an examination. Students who do enter usually achieve good results, although this is not the case for Institute of Linguists examinations which form a major area of the provision. In GCSE examinations and in examinations accredited by London Chamber of Commerce and Industry and RSA, there were 100 per cent pass rates in 1997. The college acknowledges that only 56 per cent of those entered for Institute of Linguist examinations passed. Steps are being taken to develop more appropriate forms of accreditation.

Examples of students' achievements in modern languages (collaborative provision), 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Institute of Linguists (advanced)	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	70
Institute of Linguists (general)	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	88	66
Institute of Linguists (preliminary)	Retention (%)	*	*	*
	Pass rate (%)	*	81	44

Source: college data

**data not available*

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Basic Education

Grade 2

48 The inspection covered the basic skills courses provided in the college, courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Fifteen lessons were observed. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report although they gave greater significance to some weaknesses in teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- the wide range of provision and effective links with external partners
- the well-organised curriculum providing good opportunities for progression
- the well-managed work experience integral to students learning programmes
- the effectively managed learning particularly in basic skills classes
- the high number of students progressing to more advanced courses
- the consistently high levels of support for students

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention in some lessons to students' individual needs
- learning activities not always appropriate for students' abilities
- insufficient opportunities for students to record their own achievements
- some ineffective use of learning support assistants
- inappropriate use of some accommodation

49 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that courses are designed for a wide

range of learners including students under-represented in further education. For example, the college makes provision for those who have experienced mental ill-health and young people with behavioural problems. The curriculum allows students to put together a timetable of options to meet their individual requirements. Students can also take GCSE modules or units from vocational courses. There is the opportunity for students to join ESOL and basic skills classes at any stage and to take linked skills programmes. Access to other curriculum areas is improved by a range of vocational options available at NVQ level 1. Inspectors agreed with the claim that effective links with external organisations support the content and delivery of the curriculum.

50 Where teaching is effective it reflects inclusive learning in practice. In these cases, it differentiates between the needs of students, and uses a good variety of appropriate activities and resources. Learning is effectively managed with well-designed individual learning plans, based on the students' assessed needs and interests. This is particularly evident in basic skills classes and is recognised in the self-assessment report. However, some teaching is poorly planned. For example, links between the different components of students' courses are not explicitly made. In some instances, learning activities do not take account of students' levels of ability or learning needs. Some teaching is too focused on accreditation requirements. The accreditation scheme forms the scheme of work and learning plans are too general and have few clear individual targets or detailed plans to form a basis for appropriate teaching. The college's self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses.

51 Inspectors agreed with the college that work experience is well managed, integral to students' learning programmes and effectively supports progression. Students enjoy and value their work experience. It enables them to make vocational choices and has led directly to

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employment for some students. A high number of students progress to more advanced courses. For example, from eight students on one course, four progressed to vocational programmes, three to youth training and one to employment. Retention on courses designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, and comparable with national averages. The second year of two-year courses offers insufficient development for some students. The college has taken steps to address the poor levels of achievement in basic skills. The number of portfolios submitted for accreditation this year indicates that achievement levels will improve significantly on the low percentage reported for 1996-97. There is a clear system for monitoring basic skills courses, most of which are delivered in the community. Tutors generally keep records and control the process of recognising and recording achievements which prepares students for progression to other courses. Insufficient opportunities are given to students to record their own achievements.

52 Students report how greatly they value the high levels of support, attention and encouragement they receive from all staff. Learning support assistants work in partnership with tutors and students to provide support but, as the college acknowledges, their time is not always used effectively and there are few examples of learning plans which specify the contribution made by learning support assistants.

53 Teachers make good use of appropriate learning materials which match the students' levels of literacy, with symbols and pictures. In contrast, some written work and handouts are inappropriate or poorly produced. Resources such as talking calculators are available and there is some effective use of IT. In general, the use of accommodation and resources is good, although inappropriate use of some accommodation adversely affects learning. For example, some numeracy and mathematics

lessons took place in a classroom where there was poor access to resources.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

54 Inspectors broadly agreed with the main findings of the college's self-assessment report and took account of progress made as a result of the action plan. They considered that some key strengths and some weaknesses had been understated.

Key strengths

- the good pre-course information and guidance
- the well-managed and effective study support
- the effective co-ordination and support for key skills
- the well co-ordinated range of effective support services
- the outstanding careers guidance

Weaknesses

- some ineffective tutorial provision
- lack of knowledge amongst some staff about students' learning difficulties

55 The college considers that clear information and guidance is provided through publications, prospectuses and standardised course leaflets. Inspection evidence supported this assessment. Good use is made of open days, and the college's membership of the Cambridge Collegiate Board. There is good liaison with schools and community education centres. Inspectors also agreed with the college's assessment that the induction of students is effective. An attractive and comprehensive handbook is issued to students. Guidance is given to course tutors on areas to be included in induction and most cover the charter, equal opportunities policy and the complaints procedure. However, in a few curriculum areas students were not well

informed about college services such as counselling.

56 There is a well managed and co-ordinated range of support services for students. This includes careers guidance, counselling, information on money and benefits, medical support and advice to personal tutors on tutorial programmes. Of particular note is the role of the student liaison officer, a qualified youth worker, who has a key role in supporting students. He is accessible to students and assists the students' union in its work. A good range of sports and leisure activity is sponsored by the students' union. Several hundred students participate in the 16 sports clubs with some playing at county and national levels. There is an accessible student services centre on the Newmarket Road site but at Kings Hedges the accommodation for student services is more scattered. Students who use the services find them of good quality. Support for childcare is offered through a 15-place nursery at the Newmarket Road site.

57 The college's two qualified careers advisers work closely with the Cambridgeshire Careers Guidance Company to provide outstanding support to students. This strength was understated in the self-assessment report. There is a high level of involvement at induction, in the tutorial programme and at college events. Students can be referred by personal tutors or drop into the careers centre for advice. Students using the centre are monitored carefully and there is a high level of student satisfaction with the support. Inspectors concurred with the college's judgement that the careers library is well developed, regularly updated and equipped with a good range of software. Action is being taken to analyse more comprehensively why students leave before completing their courses.

58 In some curriculum areas, tutorials are well developed and effective but, in others, they are taken up with administration only, poorly attended and students find them unhelpful. Few

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part-time students have tutorials. A handbook with supporting teaching materials provides some guidance to personal tutors. However, there has been little training for staff and few opportunities are available for sharing good practice in tutorial support. These weaknesses were partly identified in the college's self-assessment. Despite these shortcomings, the majority of students found their personal tutors helpful and approachable.

59 The well-organised and effective study support arrangements were not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. Support staff provide comprehensive assistance to students who are visually impaired, deaf, physically disabled, or have specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Students are frequently contacted in advance of their course and are pleased to find arrangements for their support in place when they arrive at the college. Most support staff provide a very high level of effective teaching and guidance. The college acknowledges that many students do not take advantage of the study support; there is a lack of take-up among part-time students and from some curriculum areas and a few students who remain on a waiting list miss out on study support. A few teachers do not fully understand the nature of students' learning difficulties and how they should change their teaching to help students learn. Action is being taken to record formally the value that support adds to students' achievements.

60 There is effective co-ordination of support for key skills. The development of students' key skills is integrated with their vocational assignment work. Additional support is provided to enable students to improve their key skills where their levels of competence are insufficient to meet the needs of their course. Specialist key skills staff work closely with vocational tutors to identify and support appropriate assessment arrangements for key skills.

61 The support needs of adult students on collaborative provision courses are met and their participation in education and training is encouraged. Although there is good informal support for students at some centres, the quality and extent of pre-course guidance is not always effective and a few students have chosen inappropriate courses. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Appropriate additional support is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students attending centres are not always made aware of the support and resource facilities available to them at the college.

General Resources

Grade 1

62 Inspectors recognised that the college has made significant improvements to its accommodation since the last inspection. They broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but gave greater emphasis to the significance of some strengths.

Key strengths

- excellent accommodation and facilities at the Kings Hedges site
- well-equipped libraries and learning resource centres
- good access to modern personal computers and software
- well-organised transport for students

Weaknesses

- access for students with restricted mobility to a few areas of the college
- a few deficiencies in accommodation and equipment at the city centre site

63 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its accommodation. The Kings

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Hedges site, first opened in 1993 and since extended, provides an attractive learning environment. It has well-sited, welcoming reception areas and attractive walkways which link different sections of the building. Three-quarters of the college's full-time students enjoy the very high standard of classroom and general facilities provided by the site. However, directional signposting is not sufficiently clear at the site. The Newmarket Road site, two miles from Kings Hedges, is based on a carefully refurbished primary school. Four restaurants at Kings Hedges offer a choice of different specialist foods. The refectory at the Newmarket Road site, however, offers a limited variety of food and is poorly regarded by students. Student common rooms cater largely for 16 to 19 year old students. There are well-equipped indoor sports facilities at the Kings Hedges site. The college has no outdoor sports facilities.

64 Classrooms are clean and well furnished throughout the college and all students benefit from a well-maintained environment. Working areas for administrative and support staff are of a high standard. Most teachers' work rooms have access to computers but some are too small and poorly equipped. There is a shortage of storage space on both sites. As a result of the new buildings the college has room for more students, the space utilisation being below that recommended for the sector. The college has recently produced a detailed preventative maintenance programme for the next 10 years.

65 Access for wheelchair users to college's buildings varies considerably as identified in the college's disability statement. At Kings Hedges lifts provide access to all areas. However, at the Newmarket Road site access for people with disabilities is restricted to a part of one building and to the training restaurant. A comprehensive access survey is planned. Travel between sites is provided on a specially designed college shuttle bus with a low floor and manual ramp suitable for a wheelchair.

Inspectors found that an effective transport policy provides bus passes to enable students from rural Cambridgeshire to attend the college.

66 The learning resource centre at Kings Hedges is spacious, provides nearly 450 study places and includes 29 silent study rooms and seven individual carrels. The library has an extensive range of paper-based and electronic learning materials. Significant increases have been made to the bookstock but there are shortages in a few subjects. The college has identified the need for learning resources staff to strengthen their links with teachers in programme areas. There is a good range of CD-ROM databases. In addition, a well-equipped key skills workshop and language laboratory are available to support both teaching and students' individual work. An up-to-date video-conference facility enables students to gain experience of using modern communications technology. The learning resource centres are well used by students in the daytime and their use is effectively monitored and analysed.

67 Inspectors agreed with the college that students have good access to modern personal computer equipment. The college actively promotes the use of learning technology in teaching and learning. It is well equipped with over 600 computers, 420 of which support teaching and learning including 66 giving free access to the internet. Most of the computers are installed in well-planned suites and provide access to up-to-date software. Other computers provide additional facilities for art and design students. IT facilities are well managed and supported by skilled technical staff.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

68 Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made to the arrangements for quality assurance. Inspectors broadly agreed with the

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judgements in the self-assessment report, although not all strengths and weaknesses were stated explicitly.

Key strengths

- clear and well-understood quality assurance arrangements
- robust audit of quality assurance procedures
- comprehensive, well-documented and effective curriculum quality reviews
- the rigorous monitoring of charter commitments
- well-documented and careful monitoring of complaints
- staff appraisal and development linked to strategic objectives
- well-defined procedures to assure quality in collaborative provision

Weaknesses

- lack of formally defined standards in some non-teaching areas
- underdeveloped systematic review of some non-teaching areas
- imprecise targets for improvement of specific courses
- insufficient analysis and assessment of employers' views

69 The college's strong commitment to raise standards continually and improve the quality of its provision reflects its mission and strategic priorities. The college produced its first self-assessment in preparation for the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that there are clear, comprehensive and well-documented quality assurance procedures and a clear strategy for their implementation. The cycle of quality assurance procedures supports school operational planning and the formation of the college's strategic plan. The college did not identify as a strength in its self-assessment

report the comprehensive handbook of college policies and procedures.

70 The well-planned and systematic approach to self-assessment builds on existing quality assurance arrangements. A self-assessment review group with an external adviser was set up to co-ordinate the process and report to the corporation. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and covers all curriculum and cross-college areas. Detailed plans to address weaknesses were compiled. Inspection confirmed that action has been taken on many of the weaknesses and that plans have been updated. All collaborative provision centres completed self-assessment reports but these were not compiled with the same thoroughness as the college's self-assessment report. The self-assessment report recognises the variation in the effectiveness with which course review procedures are applied at individual centres.

71 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the termly cycle of course review is rigorous and has led to improvements. Reports from programme teams identify strengths and weaknesses, proposed actions and target dates for completion. Termly programme meetings have prescribed agendas. College targets are set for enrolment, retention and students' achievements and these are carefully monitored. Inspectors found that insufficient consideration had been given to the setting of more specific targets for the improvement of individual courses. The college acknowledges that the time taken to address some cross-college issues is slow. Quality assurance procedures have not yet been established for all non-teaching areas. Service standards are underdeveloped in most areas and, where they have been introduced, they are not always monitored.

72 Appropriate arrangements have been developed to assess and improve the standards of teaching. As an integral part of programme reviews, lesson observations by peers were

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introduced in 1996. These are used to share good practice and identify staff development needs within teams. To inform the college's self-assessment report college managers observed a sample of 20 per cent of teaching staff in all schools.

73 Procedures for assuring the quality of collaborative provision are clear and monitored regularly. There is strict adherence to an operational manual for collaborative partners. The observation of teaching and an evaluation of the effectiveness of enrolment and induction also form a part of these arrangements.

74 Inspectors concluded that the college underestimated the effectiveness of the quality audits which were introduced in September 1997 to ensure compliance with quality assurance procedures. The audit team, which includes teachers and support staff, has a planned programme of audit activity and reports to the corporation. The evidence on which the judgements in the self-assessment report were based was robustly reviewed. Improvements have resulted from an audit of the programme management files. Good practice has been shared and support and advice provided to programme teams.

75 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a clear link between staff development and appraisal and the college's strategic priorities. Staff are appraised annually and set development targets which are reviewed after six months. Team leaders and managers are also appraised by their staff. Staff development opportunities are available to staff working in collaborative provision centres. Approximately 65 per cent of college staff have been involved in professional development over the last 12 months. There is a thorough system for the evaluation of staff development. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1995 and was informed of its successful reaccreditation during the inspection.

76 The college rigorously assesses its performance against the commitments made in the student charter. Benchmarks have been set to monitor year-on-year improvements and areas gaining a score of 65 per cent or less are considered to be a weakness. The college acknowledges that the employers' charter needs to be updated. Employers' views are gathered from a variety of sources; some curriculum areas have effective consultative groups. The self-assessment report does not identify the absence of systematic summary analysis of employers' views. Collaborative partners have developed charters, based upon the college's charter. These are widely distributed by partner colleges. There is a clear and well-understood procedure for complaints. Complaints and response times are carefully monitored.

Governance

Grade 3

77 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths given in the self-assessment report but considered that others had been overstated. Some significant weaknesses were not identified by the college.

Key strengths

- the clear strategic direction provided by the corporation
- the effective communication between governors and college staff
- the well-informed governors who are trained and supported in their role
- the effective monitoring of performance by corporation committees

Weaknesses

- inappropriate terms of reference and membership of some committees
- corporation decisions made in the absence of written information

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- insufficient monitoring of college finances by the full corporation
- deficiencies in clerking arrangements

78 The membership of the corporation provides access to a broad range of skills including finance, education and marketing. Governors are highly committed to the work of the college and their attendance at the corporation and training sessions has been high, although two committee meetings were inquorate. A skills and training needs analysis has been conducted and, as a result, a programme of training and development seminars provided for corporation members. One means of practical training has been to co-opt potential new governors onto committees as external members of these committees. New governors are provided with induction training and the support of a mentor. All governors are encouraged to attend externally provided training events. The clerk to the corporation provides regular briefing notes for governors to enable them to be fully informed of local and national developments.

79 Inspectors confirmed that the corporation is committed to an open style of communication with college staff. Members of staff are invited to informal gatherings with governors after corporation meetings and these are well attended. Twice-yearly corporation seminars provide an opportunity for some managers to work with governors in key areas such as the definition of respective roles, performance indicators and leadership style. Governors and staff worked together to produce a new vision and mission for the college. The college newsletter, *Cameo*, regularly includes items relating to the governors and corporation matters.

80 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the processes for strategic planning and self-assessment have been clearly defined and supported by the corporation. The

corporation and its committees devise work plans based upon the strategic priorities to guide their programme of activities and to enable them to monitor their own performance.

81 Corporation committees have been established to consider finance and resources, quality and audit, curriculum, marketing, remuneration and nominations and governor development. They provide an effective opportunity for governors to discuss a broad range of items with relevant college managers. Governors effectively monitor performance and quality through the use of performance indicators and written reports.

82 The limits of the authority delegated by the corporation to its committees are not well defined. The terms of reference of the committees were ratified by the corporation without sight of them at a corporation meeting. The terms of reference are not always appropriate or do not cover all activities of the committees in practice. For example, the finance and resources committee considers employment matters but this has not been remitted to it. The quality and audit committee has terms of reference in relation to quality that limit its independence and ability to act as an effective audit committee. The staff governor who is a member of the quality and audit committee also presents reports to that committee. The finance committee has an external co-opted member who is not a governor and this is not as stated by the articles of government.

83 Reporting of the business of committees to recent meetings of the corporation has been limited to oral reports by committee chairs. Committee minutes are received by all governors. Some matters recommended by committees to the corporation were approved by the corporation on the basis of oral briefings and without sight of written reports. Major papers for discussion by the corporation and the finance and resources committee have sometimes been tabled at meetings, limiting the

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opportunities for prior consideration by governors. Three people have served as clerk to the corporation over the last 18 months. The current postholder has received limited training. The job description for the clerk is in draft, and reporting lines to the principal and the corporation are unclear. The governors handbook serves as the standing orders for the conduct of corporation and committee business and as a code of conduct for governors. The handbook has been recently adopted but some procedures are inconsistent with the instrument and articles of government. A register of interests has been established but has not yet been completed by all external members of committees.

84 The finance and resources committee considers the college's management accounts at its termly meetings and also receives the management accounts for the other months in which it does not meet. The full corporation does not receive the management accounts but is given an oral report by the chair of the finance and resources committee. Receipt of written financial information by the corporation is limited to consideration of the college's three-year financial forecast and annual financial statements. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government, although the corporation substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

Management

Grade 2

85 Inspectors were in general agreement with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection the college had made progress in addressing some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the comprehensive strategic planning process
- the clear management priorities and responsibilities
- the effective communication systems
- the effective management of collaborative partnerships

Weaknesses

- inconsistent operational planning and target-setting
- lack of written detail to support key financial assumptions
- insufficient analysis and use of market information

86 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the strategic planning cycle is comprehensive and is understood and supported by staff. There is wide consultation, both internally and externally, on the formulation of the plan. There are clear strategic priorities, annual targets and performance measures. Staff across the college are aware of these overall targets. However, the quality of some operational plans is poor, with a lack of measurable targets, timescales and costings.

87 The college has a clear management structure. Managers and other staff are aware of lines of accountability, management priorities and responsibilities. There are some weaknesses in the co-ordination of activities across schools. Some middle managers have insufficient training in budget management. Many assistant managers are also adapting to new roles. The college has recognised that the further development and training of middle managers is necessary.

88 Inspection evidence supported the college's claim that there is effective communication within the college. The consultative style of management adopted by the senior

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management team contributes to this strength. The college newsletter, staff meetings and conferences ensure that staff are kept informed. 'Surgeries' held by the principal and senior managers enable staff to raise issues of concern. Action taken is reported back to individuals and published, where appropriate, in the college newsletter. There is a meetings calendar and a common meetings time for the whole college. Procedures and policies are contained in a handbook and are also available on the college computer network.

89 The recent introduction of new employment contracts has resulted in more effective use of full-time teaching staff. There have been some problems in securing the most appropriately qualified and experienced staff for some curriculum areas, for example IT and digital design. This situation has improved but there are still instances of difficulties in recruitment.

90 The college recognises that management information is not used effectively and consistently at all levels. Since writing the self-assessment report there have been improvements in the reliability and availability of management information data. Some managers do not use these data effectively to support operational planning. Some staff believe that data held manually in schools can be more reliable than centrally held computer data.

91 Productive links exist with a range of external partners. There are good working relations with the TEC. There are partnerships and links with schools, higher education institutions, community colleges, the voluntary sector and employers. European and international links are developing. The college has entered into collaborative partnerships to deliver a significant proportion of its work with adults. There is a clear rationale for these partnerships to achieve widening participation and they are managed effectively. There are

regular meetings with South Cambridgeshire Adult Education consortium managers.

92 A strategic marketing plan has been developed and an operational plan is in preparation. Some background research has been undertaken, but inspectors confirmed that further good-quality market intelligence is necessary to develop the marketing strategy, particularly in relation to part-time and short courses. An employer database exists but needs updating and co-ordinating to ensure that information from all contacts with employers and other sources is available. A course costing model is being developed, but is in need of further refinement. The college acknowledges that there is a lack of comprehensive market analysis to inform programme development in collaborative provision. The college also recognises the need for better monitoring of students' destinations and progression within and between centres.

93 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that staff take seriously the promotion and implementation of equal opportunities policies and procedures. These have recently been reviewed in order to include recent legislation. A code of practice contains guidelines for good practice.

94 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Monthly management accounts are produced including income and expenditure and balance sheet information. Cashflow is forecast to the end of the current financial year, but not beyond. There are no statements of expenditure on capital compared with budget. The management accounts are produced inefficiently as they are not directly generated from the accounting system. Budget holders receive monthly budget reports and the college provides them with appropriate advice and support. Key assumptions to support the projections contained in the college's three-year financial

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forecast, which was revised in February 1998, are not supported by written commentaries showing their derivation.

Conclusions

95 The college produced a comprehensive and detailed self-assessment report. Strengths and weaknesses were specifically evaluated against the quality statements in the Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The inspection team found that the report provided a useful basis for carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths and weaknesses had been underestimated by the college. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected and with the majority of grades for cross-college provision.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (May 1998)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	15
25+ years	57
Not known	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (May 1998)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	18
Intermediate	53
Advanced	25
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	3
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	404	3,098	22
Agriculture	0	34	1
Construction	185	189	2
Engineering	326	477	5
Business	473	2,266	17
Hotel and catering	439	330	5
Health and community care	649	1,556	14
Art and design	732	780	10
Humanities	361	2,739	20
Basic education	93	550	4
Total	3,662	12,019	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (May 1998)

	<i>Perman-ent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	163	0	105	268
Supporting direct learning contact	44	3	0	47
Other support	191	5	21	217
Total	398	8	126	532

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£15,755,000	£15,136,000	£16,998,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.38	£19.04	£18.85*
Payroll as a proportion of income	64%	63%	54%
Achievement of funding target	93%	96%	104%
Diversity of income	20%	20%	16%
Operating surplus	£153,000	-£922,000	£53,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

*not yet finalised

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	202	200	200
	Average point score per entry	3.2	3.4	3.1
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	bottom third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	451	429	489
	Percentage achieving qualification	76%	72%	71%
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	260	229
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	52%	40%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	bottom 10%

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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