

Cirencester College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
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

Cirencester College

South West Region

Inspected March 1998

Cirencester College is a tertiary college in Gloucestershire. The college produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The report is clearly structured and is linked to the annual round of operational planning. Action plans address most of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Lesson observation formed part of the self-assessment process and there is a close correlation between the overall profile of lesson grades awarded by the college and by inspectors. The report was generally well supported by evidence. A few strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspection were omitted or understated in the report. The self-assessment process involved college staff and governors but not external organisations.

The college offers a wide range of courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Provision in four of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college offers a wide range of GCE A/AS level courses and an increasing number of vocational courses. Students receive very good support with a strong emphasis on individual care. There is much good teaching. Students' attendance is well monitored and levels of attendance are generally good. Students' achievements on GCE

A/AS level courses are good. Performance on vocational courses is improving, but sometimes from a low base. Governors' experience and skills are used effectively. The college is well managed. Staff are involved in strategic planning and understand the direction the college is taking. Communication across the college is effective. There are clear procedures for quality assurance. Staff development is well managed and effective. The college should: improve the quality of teaching on GNVQ courses: raise achievement and retention rates on some vocational courses: ensure that quantitative data are used systematically in reviewing the quality of provision: improve the quality of some course reviews: address procedural weaknesses in governance; develop more systematic use of market research and give students easier access to computers with tutor support.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	2	Support for students	1
Business and management	2	General resources	2
Health and care	3	Quality assurance	2
Humanities: social sciences	1	Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Cirencester College in Gloucestershire is a tertiary college serving the town of Cirencester and the predominantly rural area of the south-east Cotswolds. Nearly all of its work is based at the Fosse Way Campus, approximately three-quarters of a mile from the town centre. The college shares this attractive site with Cirencester Deer Park School, one of its partner schools for pupils aged 11 to 16. A small amount of teaching takes place at the Victoria Road site close to the town centre. The Royal Agricultural College is based nearby and serves the locally important industries of agriculture and horticulture. Other employment opportunities are primarily in retail and distribution, tourism, catering, finance, light manufacturing, public administration and health and social care. There are few large employers in Cirencester. The town has a population of approximately 18,000. In January 1998, unemployment in the travel-to-work area was low at 1.9 per cent. Approximately 31 per cent of the population of the south-east Cotswolds region are over retirement age.

2 In 1996-97, 846 full-time and 1,668 part-time students enrolled on college programmes. Sixty-five per cent were aged 19 years or over. The college recruits students from its two partner schools, Cirencester Deer Park and Cirencester Kingshill, and many others in the surrounding area. Many students travel long distances to the college. Most full-time students study for general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) qualifications. The college has steadily extended the range of vocational qualifications it offers. Approximately 30 per cent of successful students in 1997 had completed a vocational qualification. Part-time students are enrolled on a range of academic, vocational and recreational courses. The college provides higher education courses for a small number of students. It has an agreement with Cheltenham and Gloucester

College of Higher Education which aims to ease and encourage access to higher education for students. There are schools for pupils aged 11 to 18 in Tetbury, 10 miles to the south west, Fairford, 10 miles to the east and Stroud, 12 miles to the west of Cirencester. The nearest college of further education is in Stroud. In 1996-97, the participation rate of students over the age of 16 was 78 per cent.

3 The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, deputy principal and directors of finance and human resources. Courses are delivered by five faculties. Student support and guidance and a number of other key cross-college functions are the responsibility of directors of studies. The college employs 131 full-time equivalent staff of whom 86 are teachers or directly support teaching.

4 The college's mission is 'to ensure access to a comprehensive range of study opportunities; employ sensitive, innovative and flexible methods, systems and services; to be recognised as a centre of achievement and excellence; and to use its resources effectively and efficiently'.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 2 March 1998. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report. Data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor from the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) audit service working for a total of 34 days. Inspectors observed 51 lessons, examined students' work and college documents, and held meetings with governors, managers, college staff and students.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 71 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 4 per cent were less than satisfactory. This is better than the average of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all lessons observed during 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 83 per cent compared with 77 per cent for the sector in 1996-97 recorded in the same report. The quality of teaching on GCE A/AS level courses was high; most lessons were rated as

good or outstanding. This contrasts with the quality of teaching on the sample of general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses inspected, where less than half the lessons were rated as good or outstanding. 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	8	10	5	0	0	23
GCSE	0	4	0	0	0	4
GNVQ	1	5	6	2	0	14
NVQ	1	1	1	0	0	3
Other	2	4	1	0	0	7
Total	12	24	13	2	0	51

Curriculum Areas

Science and Mathematics

Grade 2

7 The inspection covered all aspects of science and mathematics. Fifteen lessons were inspected. The self-assessment report identifies strengths and weaknesses which were generally confirmed by the inspection. The report lacks comments on the quality of teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- most teaching and learning of high quality
- high standards of students' work
- good students' achievements in GCE A level and GNVQs
- clear and helpful materials to support learning

Weaknesses

- failure to hold students' attention in a minority of lessons
- poor retention rates on a few courses
- poor pass rates for some general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) human biology groups

8 A wide range of GCE A level subjects are offered in science and mathematics. GNVQs in science are offered at intermediate and advanced level. A small number of GCSE subjects are offered.

9 The quality of most teaching in science is good. Eleven out of the 15 lessons inspected were rated as good, although none were outstanding. This profile reflects closely that awarded by the college in its self-assessment report. Aims and objectives of lessons are made clear to students. Particularly good use is made of videos and classroom demonstrations to illustrate topics. However, teachers' use of

visual aids in some lessons was not always effective. Supporting materials used by teachers are clear and useful. In most lessons, teachers encourage feedback from students by effective use of questioning, but in a few lessons this was not well done and students' attention was not fully sustained. Teachers set well-designed assignments on a regular basis. These are marked with helpful comments. Students' attendance is closely monitored. In the lessons inspected the average attendance was 85 per cent. In a few practical lessons, students were not wearing appropriate safety clothing.

10 Students work well together in groups during practical lessons. They organise their work carefully and show appropriate levels of competence in their subject. A few electronics and biology students are anxious about the adequacy of their numeracy skills. The faculty offers a course on mathematics for scientists which students find useful. Students' written skills are generally good. GNVQ students who have taken part in work placements found their experience very useful. GCE A level pass rates for 16 to 18 year olds in most subjects are above the national rate for further education colleges. In 1997, excellent pass rates, noted in the college's self-assessment report, were achieved in biology, physics, further mathematics, electronics and chemistry by students completing their course. Pass rates in GNVQ courses are also above the national pass rate. Pass rates for GCSE mathematics and human physiology are usually above the national rate, although there were poor results from adult students in 1997 in GCSE human biology. Retention rates in GCE A level further mathematics, some GCSE courses and GNVQ intermediate in 1996 were poor.

11 Inspectors agreed with the college that teaching and technical staff work well as a team. Courses are well managed. Schemes of work are closely linked to examination syllabuses and students' textbooks. The views of students are obtained by the use of student questionnaires

Curriculum Areas

and by feedback through the tutorial system. Meetings between staff and student representatives are held on a regular basis. The faculty has good links with local schools, both primary and secondary, and technical staff are involved in the development of a local technicians' network.

12 Teachers are well qualified in their subjects and all hold teaching qualifications. The self-assessment report identifies teachers' lack of industrial experience as a weakness. Some staff placements in industry have been undertaken and more are proposed. Technical staff offer an effective service to both teaching staff and students. Laboratories are suitably equipped and in good decorative order.

There is good use of display materials. A few specialist laboratories are too small for current class sizes, but laboratories are generally well laid out and provide an appropriate setting for teaching and learning. There is adequate specialist equipment to enable appropriate practical work to be undertaken by students. Students are provided with appropriate textbooks by the faculty. The library has a good range of resources and journals to support the programme area, but few other resources such as compact discs or videos for students to use on their own are available.

Examples of students' achievements in science and mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level biology	Retention (%)	94	67	71
	Pass rate (%)	96	100	100
GCE A level chemistry	Retention (%)	88	65	65
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	94
GCE A level physics	Retention (%)	91	68	69
	Pass rate (%)	83	95	100
GCE A level mathematics	Retention (%)	98	79	83
	Pass rate (%)	80	70	83
GCE A level further mathematics	Retention (%)	100	38	33
	Pass rate (%)	83	100	100
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	*	86
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	83
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	*	50	67
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	83
GCSE mathematics (students 16 to 18)	Retention (%)	*	55	68
	Pass rate (%)	13	32	39
GCSE mathematics (students 19 or over)	Retention (%)	79	65	81
	Pass rate (%)	45	64	57

Source: college data

*data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Business and Management

Grade 2

13 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in business and management. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but considered that some strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning were omitted. The significance of low pass rates on some courses was understated.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- effective use of current business materials to give relevance to learning
- good pass rates for GCE A level and professional courses
- the development of students' key skills in a vocational context
- effective group work to solve business problems
- well-developed use of work experience and international exchanges
- developing links with the local business community

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to the needs of all students in some mixed ability groups
- poor retention and low pass rates in GCSE accounting
- low pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses
- late return to students of some marked work

14 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the range of business courses offered is extensive. In addition to GCE A level and GNVQ programmes, mainly studied by full-time 16 to 18 year old students, the college offers

certificates and diplomas in management, supervisory management, accounting, human resource management, and marketing. Courses range from foundation level to postgraduate diplomas.

15 There is much good teaching and some inspiring and lively lessons. Case studies and management videos are often used to add realism and relevance to business topics. Teachers regularly use the management experience of mature students to illustrate business concepts. Students work well together to solve problems. Displays of students' work are a feature in most classrooms. Students develop key skills in the context of their vocational studies through assignments, additional qualifications and workshops. Assignments are set at an appropriate standard although, as recognised in the self-assessment report, some marked work is returned late to students. GNVQ students undertake periods of work experience. Some participate in international exchanges with Danish students. Inspectors observed some less effective teaching which failed to involve all students. In some lessons, some students were unable to complete the class work set in time while others finished early and were not given additional work to do. The strengths as well as the weaknesses in teaching and learning were insufficiently emphasised in the self-assessment report.

16 Students achieve good results on many courses. Pass rates on GCE A level business studies courses for students aged 16 to 18 are usually above the national pass rate for further education colleges. Pass rates for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in accounting are also above the national rate. All entrants for the National Examination Board for Supervisory Management certificate passed in 1997. Pass rates for BTEC certificates in management studies have risen steadily over the last three years to well above the national average. However, the pass rate for GNVQ advanced business was below the national rate in 1996.

Curriculum Areas

Pass rates for GNVQ intermediate business have been poor for the past three years, but improved in 1997. Pass rates in GCSE accounting were above the national average in 1996, but below it in 1995 and 1997 and retention has been poor. Retention is consistently high in GCE A level groups and for NVQs in accounting, but has been less satisfactory on the GNVQ advanced course over the past two years. These areas of weakness are not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. Students' written work is often of a good standard. Many portfolios of work show the results of good planning and careful presentation. Students regularly use information technology (IT) to present assignments to professional standards. GCE A level students frequently progress to higher education. Other students go on to other further education courses within the college or are successful in obtaining employment.

17 Courses are effectively planned and managed. Schemes of work are thorough and cover the requirements of awarding bodies. Staff work well as a team to develop and

improve the learning experience of students. Computerised records are used to monitor students' progress. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a need to improve consistency in the scheduling and content of team meetings. Meeting schedules and standard agendas have now been agreed. Courses are regularly reviewed, taking into account the views of students and employers. Changes have been introduced to meet the views of students. The system of internal verification for vocational courses is thorough and is implemented rigorously.

18 Most staff have relevant degrees or professional qualifications for the subjects they teach. Many have suitable commercial experience, although not all is recent. Staff teaching vocational courses hold appropriate assessor and verifier awards. Business and management students have good access to networked computers in the business training centre. Students have access to adequate books and other learning materials which reflect current business practice.

Examples of students' achievements in business and management, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level business studies	Retention (%)	94	71	84
	Pass rate (%)	80	97	83
GNVQ advanced business	Retention (%)	93	68	66
	Pass rate (%)	73	58	72
Association of Accounting Technicians/NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 accounting	Retention (%)	100	100	95
	Pass rate (%)	*	54	61
BTEC certificate management studies	Retention (%)	100	87	100
	Pass rate (%)	52	53	86
GNVQ intermediate business	Retention (%)	70	77	76
	Pass rate (%)	43	20	54
GCSE accounting	Retention (%)	76	56	28
	Pass rate (%)	16	47	32

Source: college data

*data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 3

19 The inspection covered all aspects of the college's work in health and care. Ten lessons were observed. The self-assessment report identified strengths rather more fully than weaknesses. Little systematic use was made of retention and achievement data to inform the judgements made. Inspectors considered students' achievements to be weaker than described in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the use of work experience
- good progression for GNVQ students on to higher level courses
- effective learning support
- the quality of students' work used for classroom display

Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching
- poor retention on some courses
- poor attendance in a few classes
- a significant percentage of students not achieving their qualification in the planned timescale

20 The range of courses in health and care is developing well. The college offers GNVQ health and social care courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, NVQs in childcare and a county recognised certificate in childcare and education.

21 The quality of teaching and learning varies widely. In the best lessons, students are fully engaged and challenged by the work. In some lessons, however, little effective learning takes place and students spend some time talking to one another. Weaknesses in teaching were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

Teachers generally use well-designed schemes of work. Students' work placements are used effectively to extend their experiences.

For example, some teachers encourage students to reflect on their work experience to illustrate or question theoretical ideas. When marking students' work, teachers give encouraging and helpful feedback to students which helps them to improve their performance.

22 On many courses, retention and achievement rates vary significantly from one year to the next. For example, although retention and pass rates for GNVQ advanced students who completed in 1997 are above the national rate, 50 per cent of the students who began this course in September 1997 have already left. Retention rates for the GNVQ intermediate course declined from 1995 to 1997. Pass rates on this course have improved since 1995 and are now above the national rate. Students sometimes take significantly longer than planned to achieve their qualification. For example, six GNVQ intermediate students in the 1995-96 cohort achieved their qualification six months after the course completion date. NVQ and foundation level GNVQ courses recruit small numbers and show wide variation in their completion rates. The college's assessment of students' achievements on some of these courses was overgenerous. Retention rates are high on the Gloucestershire Parents and Toddlers Association course. Students enjoy their work experience, and this is reflected in the generally good standard of the coursework and displays they produce related to this aspect of their course. Students' written and number skills were generally at an appropriate level for their courses. A small number of students progress from the Gloucestershire Parents and Toddlers Association course to NVQ courses. Students generally progress from GNVQ intermediate to advanced courses.

23 Team meetings at faculty and course level take place regularly and include students for course reviews. Set agenda items are addressed

Curriculum Areas

and notes taken. Courses are well managed, but the significant level of staff turnover recently has made it difficult to ensure continuity of teaching. Individual staff have developed links with many local employers and work experience placements are found for students. Little systematic use is made of quantitative data to plan improvement. Accommodation is generally of appropriate size and layout, and all rooms have overhead projectors and whiteboards; videos are available through a booking system. Displays of students' work in classrooms effectively improve the learning environment.

Examples of students' achievements in health and care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	*	77
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	94
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	86	79	42
	Pass rate (%)	37	91	60

Source: college data

*data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Humanities: Social Sciences

Grade 1

24 The inspection covered social science subjects. Thirteen lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Lesson observations carried out by the college as part of the self-assessment process resulted in judgements which were confirmed by inspection. There is an appropriate action plan to address weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the wide range of provision
- the high standard of teaching
- effective support for students
- effective teamwork amongst staff
- good achievements in GCE A level examinations
- high-quality resources and accommodation

Weaknesses

- some poor GCSE results for the small numbers of students taking these courses
- low retention in GCE A level sociology
- insufficient attention to key skills development

25 The college offers mainly full-time programmes in social science subjects. Students can choose from a wide range of GCE A levels which include psychology, history, geography, sociology, politics, law, religious studies and archaeology. Many of these are also available as GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects. GCSE subjects include archaeology, law and psychology. Some students undertake substantial work experience in local schools as part of a specific course to prepare them for a

career in teaching. An increasing number of students benefit from short courses which help them to develop aspects of thinking and argument appropriate to the social sciences. The proportion of part-time students is small, but increasing. Students can gain credit from studying units from the Open College Network linked to the examination syllabuses of most humanities subjects.

26 Most teaching is of high quality. Almost half the lessons observed were rated as outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the high quality of its teaching and learning. Teachers are committed to the well-being and progress of their students. Lessons are well structured. Teachers involve students in a variety of appropriate and often imaginative activities using resources which stimulate interest. There are good opportunities for students to extend their learning by talks from outside speakers, study visits, work placements and fieldwork. Students receive good preparation in examination techniques. There are examples of good practice in the use of information and learning technology, but key skills are not developed systematically. This issue is not recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers regularly use question and answer techniques, but with varying degrees of skill. In the best lessons observed by inspectors, students concentrated on their work and were inquisitive. Attendance at the lessons inspected was good and is carefully monitored. Throughout the year, students meet individually with tutors to review progress. The college's system of target-setting based on each student's previous GCSE achievements is effectively used. Teachers set regular and appropriate assignments. They follow a common policy for marking, return of work and record-keeping. Teachers provide a good analysis of students' strengths and weaknesses and detailed comments on their work to help them progress. In addition, teachers provide much informal support to students.

Curriculum Areas

27 In social science GCE A level subjects, 16 to 18 year old students achieve well. In 1996 and 1997 GCE A level results were well above the national pass rate. There has been a significant improvement in GCE A level sociology examination results, but not in retention, during the three years 1995 to 1997. In 1997, at least two-thirds of all students achieved grades A to C in psychology, law and sociology. Whilst the college's self-assessment report records high achievement in GCE A level subjects, it did not take account of some poor achievements by the small number of students taking GCSE subjects. In 1995 and 1997, students achieved pass rates in GCSE psychology, law and archaeology which were below the national rates. Retention rates are generally satisfactory. The faculty is taking action to improve its retention rates. The good level of students' achievements is reflected in the high progression rates to higher education.

28 Course and faculty management is good. Staff have clear direction and work well as a team. A framework of regular meetings, training sessions and annual staff review enables staff to share good practice. At faculty level operational planning is effective. A system of regular course review is well established, but it is not effectively implemented by all course

teams. Inspectors agreed with the college's own assessment of the management and organisation of the college's humanities faculty as a strength.

29 Most social sciences teaching is based in a purpose-built block which includes eight classrooms, a private study area and a staff room. The private study area provides good opportunities for students to study on their own using several networked computers, two of which are linked to the internet and have CD-ROM facilities. Inspectors agreed with the college that the accommodation is pleasant and well equipped. There is a high quality of display of students' work both in classrooms and corridors. Audiovisual equipment is well used. Social sciences students make good use of the library which has been well equipped with a range of specialist and standard texts.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities: social sciences, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level psychology	Retention (%)	*	69	75
	Pass rate (%)	83	87	100
GCE A level history	Retention (%)	*	68	68
	Pass rate (%)	89	92	84
GCE A level sociology	Retention (%)	*	39	46
	Pass rate (%)	56	89	100
GCE A level law and politics (students 16 to 18)	Retention (%)	*	67	75
	Pass rate (%)	86	100	83

Source: college data

*data unavailable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

30 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report and with the general view of the high quality of student services.

Key strengths

- effective schools liaison
- extensive adult guidance service
- productive emphasis on individual tutorial support
- comprehensive learning support arrangements
- well-organised student services
- thorough preparation for higher education
- effective welfare advice for students
- rigorous monitoring of attendance

Weaknesses

- low take-up of centrally-provided learning support after screening
- a minority of less effective tutorial provision

31 Student services are well organised. The student services team has responsibility for tutorial provision, learning support, adult guidance, schools liaison and personal support. Staff monitor carefully the quality of the services provided for students. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that initial guidance for students and schools liaison is very good. There is a full programme of events with 11 to 16 schools in the area to provide comprehensive and objective information for prospective students. Students told inspectors that they were well informed about the college before they enrolled. The college has an active adult guidance service which carries out many interviews in the college and the surrounding

community. The adult guidance unit took part in a preliminary pilot of the proposed national standard for guidance services.

32 All full-time students are given an initial screening test to assess their literacy and numeracy skills. The results of the tests are carefully analysed. Students identified as needing learning support are offered a follow-up interview. Learning support tutors visit tutorial groups in order to familiarise students with the service. Teaching materials used by learning support tutors are sometimes used by teachers on their courses, for example, in a GCSE English group and in numeracy work for a GNVQ science group. This practice helps to break down barriers between learning support and teaching on courses. More specialist support, for example for Oxbridge candidates, is offered by faculties. Only a small number of students take advantage of the centrally provided learning support service. The action plan in the self-assessment report highlights the need to raise the status of learning support.

33 The college has close links with local special schools. In addition to its specific provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, two students are studying on general vocational courses and have the help of a support worker. A newspaper-style broadsheet publicising part-time courses has specific information for people with disabilities. Specialist resources are offered. There is only a brief mention of facilities for people with disabilities in the full-time prospectus.

34 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that tutorial support is very effective. In group and individual tutorials most of the time is devoted to individual monitoring and guidance which is undertaken with great care. There are general guidance activities, for example, concerning health education. Tutors are given a weekly newsletter containing notices and information for students. There is a useful tutors' handbook which gives clear

Cross-college Provision

guidance to help them in their role.

Action-planning is supported by the use of GNVQ careers units. Tutorial support is also offered to adult students. All part-time students on courses involving more than six hours a week of tuition are offered a place in a tutorial group. Approximately 20 per cent of these students took up the offer in 1996-97.

Other part-time students are contacted to check on their satisfaction with their course and to see if further assistance is needed. Students are very positive about the support they received from their tutors, who keep detailed records and monitor attendance thoroughly. The quality of tutorials is monitored by a programme of observations. Inspectors agreed with the college that tutorial provision is suited to individual needs and provided by highly committed tutors. A minority of tutorials are less effective.

35 A well-publicised confidential counselling service is offered to students by an external agency. Emergency and additional counselling is provided by a senior manager, who is a qualified counsellor. A quarter of personal tutors have completed a counselling qualification. Students spoke positively of the counselling service. The financial support available to students is well publicised and there is an appeals procedure which can be used if the grant of funds is refused. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the personal support offered by the college helps to remove barriers to attendance. The college ensures that students' children take priority for places in the college nursery. The college also provides some financial support for private childminding arrangements.

36 The college has a contract with the local careers service to provide careers guidance two days a week, making use of a well-resourced careers room in the library. The college is working towards the Investor in Careers award. Careers advisers visit vocational classes, and staff contact GCE A level students who have not applied to university. Inspectors agreed with the

college's self-assessment that there is a full, timely and varied programme of events to support and inform higher education applications. The college hosts an annual higher education conference and organises visits to universities.

General Resources

Grade 2

37 The college's self-assessment report does not cover all aspects of its general resources. Some strengths and weaknesses are omitted. The judgements which are included were broadly confirmed by the inspection.

Key strengths

- attractive and well-maintained site and buildings
- well-equipped and comfortably-furnished classrooms
- good provision of books, journals, videos and CD-ROMs
- a good range of computer software and access to the internet on the computer networks
- the refurbished college theatre well used by college and community
- good staff access to computers and copying facilities

Weaknesses

- insufficient space in both the library and the refectory at peak times
- lack of access to computers with tutor support outside lessons
- the poor condition of the Victoria Road site

38 The college occupies an attractive site on the outskirts of Cirencester. Most buildings date from the 1960s. Later additions include the library, a single-storey humanities block and office accommodation. Inspectors agreed with

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the college that the grounds and buildings are well maintained. There is adequate car parking and directional signs on the site are good. The college also has a small site, used for very few classes, in Victoria Road, near to the town centre. This site is in poor condition and is inaccessible to wheelchair users.

39 Classrooms on the main site are generally well equipped and comfortably furnished. Some have television and video facilities. They are of adequate size for the classes using them. A few rooms have poor heating and ventilation. Wheelchair users can gain access to ground floor areas, where all specialist facilities, except the language laboratory, are located. There is no wheelchair access to the upstairs of the buildings. Teachers are accommodated near to their teaching rooms. Staff rooms have adequate work space, storage space and computers. Teachers have good access to photocopiers and are well served by a fast and efficient central photocopying service. Most support staff have suitable accommodation, but a few work in cramped conditions.

40 Facilities at the main site include a theatre, a well-equipped 24 place nursery, a small shop, two football pitches and a small gymnasium. The theatre has recently been refurbished. It has new seating for 250 people. Sound and lighting equipment is of a high standard. There is a rehearsal room, changing facilities and a licensed bar. The theatre is used by students, the local community and visiting theatre groups. The self-assessment report refers to the crowded and untidy refectory. The kitchen and the dining area are both too small. Since there is no student common room, the refectory also serves this purpose. It is equipped with satellite television and table football. On each day litter builds up to an unacceptable level. Surveys of students' opinions show some dissatisfaction with the refectory and the service it provides.

41 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment of its library facilities. There is

good provision of books, journals, videos and CD-ROMs. There are effective links with faculties, which are each required to spend at least 10 per cent of their revenue budget on library resources. The books held by faculties are not systematically catalogued by the library or subject to formal security systems. Adjoining the library there is a well-stocked careers library, a small meeting room and a small resource centre equipped with five computers and materials to help students develop their writing and learning skills. The layout of the study spaces ensures a quiet environment, which is appreciated by students. At peak times there are insufficient study spaces for the number of students wishing to study there.

42 The college has 124 computers for students' use. Eighty-seven are fast, reliable, modern machines. There are also eight laptop computers which are available for use by students in remote locations. Central control of purchasing ensures that there is a common standard for hardware and software. The networks have a good range of software and access to the internet. The modern machines are located in rooms which are mainly used for scheduled classes. Students may use spare machines during classes and they have access to computer rooms when classes are not taking place. However, in neither case can they be sure of support from a teacher. There are few open-access computer facilities where students can work with help from teaching staff.

43 The college estate is well managed. There is a planned maintenance programme and routine maintenance requests are dealt with promptly. A room-utilisation survey has shown that most rooms are well used during the day. Surveys have been carried out to assess long-term maintenance requirements and the suitability of the site for students with disabilities. Asset registers are kept. The college has an environmental policy which includes the collection of materials for recycling and the use of recycled materials.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 2

44 Inspection evidence generally confirmed the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance. The college has already taken action on a number of weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the clear framework and procedures for quality assurance
- the use of value-added measures to monitor and set targets for students' progress
- the effective use of the views of students and their parents
- rigorous lesson observation
- effective and well-managed staff development and appraisal

Weaknesses

- the failure of course reviews to follow the same format
- unsystematic use of quantitative data to evaluate the quality of provision
- the lack of performance standards in the college charter and procedures for its regular review

45 Inspection findings confirmed the strong commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement throughout the college. Support and teaching areas have set standards against which performance can be measured. For example, the college information service sets standards for the time they will take to supply information to users. The quality assurance framework requires the analysis of feedback from students and parents, achievement and retention rates, internal and external verifiers reports, target-setting for individual students

and lesson observation. The framework is set out clearly in a quality assurance manual. It is monitored by a newly-established quality systems group which reports to the academic board.

46 Questionnaires completed by students and their parents are routinely used to inform planning. Course reviews are largely based on student feedback from a well-designed questionnaire on cross-college provision and the quality of teaching and learning. Students are involved in course review meetings. They generally feel well informed regarding the outcome of review processes. A summary report on the outcomes of course review informs discussions at the academic board. Student feedback has clearly led to improvements in provision. For example, students' comments on the value of field work have led to more off-site work on a number of courses: comments on the pace of some science lessons have led to more time for revision being built into the course. However, course review reports do not follow the same format or include the same content. In July 1997, for example, some reports included commentary on retention but others did not. Employers are not always involved in advising and commenting on provision.

47 In the previous year the course review process had been strengthened by the introduction of a more systematic approach to performance analysis. Course teams are required to focus particularly on indicators of retention and achievement and key action points from course reviews. These are recorded in course logs. Teams are now required to review certain aspects of their provision according to a set calendar. In September, for example, all teams are expected to review their induction courses. Each course has a file which contains the outcomes of reviews, notes of meetings, staff development, course syllabuses and internal and external verification details. The college has set standards for course files and these are monitored. There is still variation in the extent

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to which performance is systematically analysed using quantitative data, although there was significant improvement in consistency in the December 1997 round of reviews.

The self-assessment report recognises the need for further improvement. The college is a member of a group of six tertiary colleges who meet regularly to compare aspects of their performance.

48 Inspection confirmed that the college has made good progress in its work on the use of value-added measures. Students on GCE A level and GNVQ courses are set target grades to achieve based on their GCSE profile on entry. This information is provided for all first- and second-year students soon after they begin their courses. Students are expected to exceed these grades in their work throughout the year.

Progress against the target grades is regularly discussed with students and parents. Students are referred to the appropriate director of studies when their grades fall below target. Students and parents have especially valued this information. Value-added data are also used by course teams to evaluate the performance of subjects and courses.

49 The college effectively monitors the quality of teaching and assessment. There is a well-designed system for lesson observation. Lessons are graded using the FEFC inspectorate grading scale. Internal verification procedures are well established and effective. There are clear procedures for ensuring that assessments are properly designed, set at an appropriate level and marked to moderated standards. Special arrangements are in place to support new teachers. Issues requiring a response in external verifiers' reports are acted upon within 10 working days.

50 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that a high priority is given to the development of its staff. Staff development is well managed and effective. There is a substantial programme of college-based training

including training for assessing vocational programmes. Staff wishing to attend training events have to explain how the training relates to college, course and individual priorities. The college's approach is valued by staff. Staff development activities are evaluated and outcomes disseminated. Annual staff appraisal is well established. Nearly all full-time and most part-time teaching and support staff have been appraised during the past year. Teachers' appraisals involve lesson observation. New staff take part in a well-managed and regularly-reviewed induction programme.

The college has recently been re-accredited as an Investor in People.

51 Most full-time students are aware of the charter and its contents, although it contains few performance indicators and arrangements for its monitoring and review are underdeveloped. The complaints procedure, however, is well understood and effective. Complaints are dealt with promptly and to a consistent standard.

52 The college's self-assessment was linked to the annual round of operational planning. Governors were involved throughout the process and approved the final report. Detailed criteria for classroom observation were established and used. Each faculty, section and course team carried out a self-assessment of their work using standard documentation and procedures. This information was aggregated into cross-college and curriculum reports by a cross-college group with responsibility for self-assessment. Inspectors found that the data on students' achievements supplied by the college were reliable and accurate. Evidence to support the report was clearly referenced. Appropriate action plans were included which outline how weaknesses will be addressed. The self-assessment process was well thought out, thorough and consistent. However, it is not yet completely integrated with the college's quality assurance system.

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Governance

Grade 2

53 The inspection team agreed with most of the judgements about governance in the self-assessment report. Governors are taking action to address the procedural weaknesses described.

Key strengths

- the useful blend of skills and experience
- the close involvement of governors in strategic planning
- effective monitoring of the board's performance
- governors' active involvement in producing the college's self-assessment report
- good induction and responsive training for governors
- clear and effective working relationships between governors and the directorate
- effective succession planning

Weaknesses

- some duplication of work by committees
- failure to monitor systematically the implementation of a minority of college policies
- lack of standing orders for the conduct of meetings
- register of interests not up to date

54 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good.

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 Governors are committed to the college and its mission. They have recently spent some

time reviewing the college's mission statement. Governors' expertise covers business, industry, public service, education and the professions. The need for more members from local community groups was identified in the self-assessment report. As a result, the chair of a local volunteer bureau has been recruited. Individuals, known as 'guest members' are invited to join one of the governors' committees as non-voting members to enable them and the board to assess their suitability for full membership when vacancies arise.

This arrangement is proving successful. The self-assessment report identified the need to improve further the system for selecting governors. Proposals have been drawn up by the nomination committee for approval by the board in April 1998. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that governor training is a strength. New governors receive induction and training in their roles and responsibilities. Training needs identified by members resulted in a two-day joint planning seminar for governors and the college's planning group.

56 Meetings of the governing body and its committees take place regularly and are well attended. Agendas and papers are prepared and distributed in good time. Minutes are held in the library and are available to the public on request. There is some duplication of work among the committees and the board is currently reviewing their remit. For example, the policy planning and financial affairs committees duplicate some of each other's activities. There are no standing orders or code of conduct, although these are being developed. There is a register of interests for governors and senior staff, but it is not up to date.

57 Governors effectively monitor the board's performance and their contribution to the college. Inspectors agreed with the college that governors were fully involved in the self-assessment process. The vice-chairman was a member of the group that co-ordinated the production of the self-assessment report.

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A governor was also a member of the college group that produced the section of the report on support for students. The self-assessment report was taken in a draft form to the governors for discussion. They subsequently discussed and approved the final report. Although policies on health and safety and equal opportunities have been approved by governors, they do not receive sufficiently regular reports on the implementation of these policies.

58 Governors have a clear understanding of their strategic role. They have recently reviewed the mission statement and are closely involved in strategic planning. A series of joint meetings between governors and managers formulates the strategic plan. Governors are generally well informed about the college's performance. College performance is monitored against 10 key strategic priorities. College-wide targets are set annually. These cover students' achievements and aspects of financial performance. Governors are developing increasingly specific targets against which to measure the college's performance. The self-assessment report notes that governors have varying degrees of contact with, and knowledge about, the college. They are kept generally well informed of curriculum developments at board meetings.

Management

Grade 2

59 Inspection findings generally confirmed the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of management.

Key strengths

- the clear management structure
- effective communication
- good teamwork at all levels
- the consultative strategic planning process

- good links with a range of external agencies
- effective financial management

Weaknesses

- variable quality of operating plans
- underdeveloped market research
- co-ordination of working groups

60 There is a strong sense of partnership between senior managers, teachers and non-teaching staff in the development of the college. This is encouraged through an extensive range of working groups which make an effective contribution to the management of the college. These groups, for which there is a meetings schedule, enable staff to voice their views and to participate in decision-making. Staff appreciate the sharing of ideas which results from their involvement in these groups. However, they find it time consuming and, in some cases, there is overlap between the agendas of various meetings. In its self-assessment, the college recognises these issues and is in the process of reviewing and rationalising the working group structure.

61 There is a clear management structure and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. They have a good understanding of the issues facing the college. Communications with staff and students are generally effective. The vice-principal issues a weekly newsletter to all staff. Changes to the organisational structure have been managed effectively. The number of faculty heads was reduced from seven to five in the summer of 1997. The college identified the need to review the use of staff time and the deployment of support staff. A survey of working hours has been completed which has resulted in new initiatives to monitor staff workloads. Support staff are now more effectively deployed.

62 Teachers, support staff and governors contribute to the college's strategic plan.

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Operational plans produced by faculties and sections in the college are closely linked to strategic objectives. Some contain clear targets, others are less clear. The college has now provided more detailed guidance in order to improve the consistency of these plans. There is increasing use of targets against which the college can measure its success. For example, retention targets are set for course teams.

63 The college has a range of useful policy documents, produced by college staff and agreed by the governing body. There is a comprehensive health and safety manual. Arrangements for implementing and monitoring the health and safety policy are supported by a health and safety committee, which reports to the academic board. An equal opportunities group promotes awareness of equal opportunities and monitors the implementation of the equal opportunities policy. The group recently undertook a curriculum audit to identify the extent to which equal opportunities issues are addressed across college courses.

64 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has a finance director and an appropriate number of finance staff, who are suitably qualified and experienced. Financial progress in the form of management accounts which include all the elements recommended as good practice, is reported on a monthly basis to budget holders, the college directorate and members of the financial affairs committee. The college directorate considers the management accounts monthly, and these are reported to the financial affairs committee each time it meets, which was seven times in the previous year. Financial regulations and procedures are in place.

65 The college's management information system produces reliable student data. Weekly attendance records are sent to tutors. Retention and destination rates are monitored carefully. The college shares information on students' destinations with its partner schools,

and uses these data to inform strategic planning. However, in a number of areas there is some duplication of information in manual and computerised form. The college has undertaken a systematic review of its management information needs and is in the process of installing an improved system.

66 The college has developed good working relationships with external bodies, including the local education authority (LEA), schools, Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Cirencester Chamber of Commerce and the local careers service. The college's involvement with the community has been strengthened by the establishment of a Football Academy in association with Cirencester Football Club and the Sundial community theatre based in the new college theatre. The college is a member of the South Cotswold Business Club and the Cheltenham and Cotswold Education Business Partnership. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college needs to undertake more systematic market research. The college has carried out surveys of employers' and parents' views. It is a member of the local labour market information group which commissioned a survey on the needs of the long-term unemployed in the Cotswold area and it makes use of market information from a variety of sources.

Conclusions

67 Inspectors concluded that the college's self-assessment report presents a generally accurate picture of its provision. Inspectors found it a useful document which helped them to plan and carry out their inspections. Strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning were often too briefly described in the text of the report. However, the close match between the teaching profile awarded by inspectors and the college demonstrates clearly that the college assesses the quality of its teaching and learning well. With the exception

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of one programme area grade, the college's grades matched those awarded by inspectors.

68 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	33
19-24 years	5
25+ years	60
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	25
Intermediate	11
Advanced	35
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	28
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	129	205	13
Agriculture	5	22	1
Construction	0	26	1
Engineering	4	33	1
Business	110	390	20
Hotel and catering	39	60	4
Health and community care	44	106	6
Art and design	141	191	13
Humanities	359	379	30
Basic education	15	256	11
Total	846	1,668	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	52	23	0	75
Supporting direct learning contact	10	1	0	11
Other support	41	4	0	45
Total	103	28	0	131

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,056,000	£3,185,000	£3,270,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£17.90	£16.93	£17.90
Payroll as a proportion of income	76%	77%	*
Achievement of funding target	98%	108%	*
Diversity of income	23%	22%	*
Operating surplus	-£227,000	-£214,000	*

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)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

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

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

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	268	246	310
	Average point score per entry	4.9	5.3	5.1
	Position in tables	top third	top 10%	top third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	15	43	78
	Percentage achieving qualification	27%	70%	77%
	Position in tables	bottom 10%	middle third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	50	48
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	34%	56%
	Position in tables	*	bottom 10%	middle third

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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