

City and Islington College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

THE
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COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

City and Islington College

Greater London Region

Inspected November 2000

City and Islington College is a large general further education college in the London borough of Islington. It is highly successful in widening participation in further education within the community. The college provides extensive educational opportunities for young and adult students, many of whom are from minority ethnic groups. Many students progress to higher education. In preparation for the inspection, the college produced a comprehensive and thorough self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. Some of the weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Since the last inspection, the college has made significant improvements in many areas of its provision. Governance and management are outstanding. Governors and managers work well together in planning the strategic direction of the college. There is an effective, open and consultative style of leadership and management. The college has developed productive partnerships with a range of external organisations. The college provides excellent support for students, many of whom enter the college with few qualifications and poor basic skills. The college's innovative leadership development centre was established in response to the concerns of staff about the low retention

and achievement rates of some younger students. The quality assurance systems are good, and have led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, and student retention and achievement rates. Most of the teaching is good, and some is outstanding. The college should improve: students' pass and retention rates on some courses, particularly those for adults; and some aspects of its accommodation. It should also ensure that all students are punctual.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	2	Support for students	1
Art and design and furniture crafts	2	General resources	3
Access to higher education (humanities)	2	Quality assurance	2
Modern foreign languages	2	Governance	1
ESOL	2	Management	1
Basic skills	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 City and Islington College is a large general further education college located on 10 sites in the London borough of Islington. Three of the college's sites are close to the City of London, six are located in Holloway at the centre of the borough, and one site is at Finsbury Park on the border with the London boroughs of Hackney and Haringey. The college was established in 1993 through the merger of four post-16 institutions. The college is a major provider of full-time education for 16 to 19 year olds in Islington and some of the surrounding areas. It is also a major provider of education and training for adults. It is in strong competition with five neighbouring further education colleges and two large school sixth form consortia.

2 The college is in a part of London where there are extremes of affluence and poverty and stark contrasts in people's level of educational attainment and wealth-earning potential. Approximately 50% of the college's students come from Islington, and many others are from neighbouring boroughs. Approximately 36% of Islington residents are from a wide variety of minority ethnic groups. Of the children in local schools, 33% are bilingual and 49% of these pupils are not fluent speakers of English. During 1999-2000, approximately 54% of the college's students were from minority ethnic groups, and 57% were women. Although Islington has a few areas of considerable affluence, it is classified as the tenth most deprived local authority in England. Of secondary school pupils, 49% are entitled to free school meals and 80% of the college's students are identified as coming from areas of socio-economic deprivation. In 2000, only 26.5% of pupils in Islington schools gained five or more grades at C or above in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), compared with the national average of 49%. Most local employers and businesses are small,

apart from the major public services. In June 2000, Islington had an unemployment rate of 8.3%, compared with 4.9% in London as a whole.

3 The college offers young people and adults in the area, a broad range of courses leading to qualifications. The college provides courses in nine of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. In autumn 2000, over 1,000 of the college's students progressed to higher education. The college is expanding the range of courses in basic skills, and in the vocational areas where there are employment opportunities.

4 In 1999-2000, the college had a total of 18,000 students, funded through a variety of sources. Of these, 4,194 were full-time students, including 3,097 aged 16 to 19 years. There were 7,520 part-time students funded by the FEFC. Students study on courses leading to general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), GCSE, general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The college also offers courses leading to a range of specialist qualifications, as well as courses which are accredited by the National Open College Network (NOCN). Approximately 60% of students are enrolled on courses leading to level 1 and level 2 qualifications.

5 The college participates in all the main local regeneration partnerships. The college is the contractor for the borough's adult education programme and works closely with the borough on implementing the lifelong learning plan for Islington. The college is the Central London (North) hub for the University for Industry.

6 The college's mission states: 'We aim for all students to achieve success in terms of learning, gaining valuable qualifications and moving on afterwards to their next goal. We also aim for the whole experience to be an enjoyable time of personal development'.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 20 November 2000. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. The college submitted its own data for students' achievements for 2000, which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Eleven inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 54 days, carried out the inspection. Six inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the inspection. The TSC inspectors focused on work-based training supported by the college in management and professional training, business administration, and health, care and public services. Where appropriate, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading the college's provision.

8 The college was also inspected in November 1999 and January 2000 as part of the area 16 to 19 inspection of Hackney and Islington. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) report on the area incorporates the findings of inspectors from Ofsted, the FEFC, and the TSC on provision in schools, colleges and private training providers. In the college, courses which mainly attract students aged 16 to 19 were inspected in the following curriculum areas: science; business; care; English; and modern languages. Most of the lessons observed were good or better, and many were outstanding. In 1999, retention rates on GNVQ courses at foundation level were well above the national average for the sector and on GCE A level courses and most GNVQ courses at intermediate and advanced levels, they were in

line with the national average. Pass rates on GCE A level courses were well above the national average, and on GNVQ courses at all levels, they were in line with, or above, the national average. The proportion of students who gained grade C or above in GCSE subjects was well above the national average. The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses for young people at all levels. It is successful in recruiting many young people into further education who have poor or modest qualifications on entry and in encouraging them to succeed. The college provides excellent support for its young students. Many students progress to higher education. More than 60% of 16 to 19 year olds in Hackney and Islington who progressed to university in 1999, were from City and Islington College.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. It also includes some lessons inspected in November 1999 as part of the area 16 to 19 inspection. Of the lessons inspected, 71% were rated good or outstanding. This is above the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. The figure of 3% for lessons rated less than satisfactory or poor is better than the average.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	8	10	1	1	0	20
GCSE	2	1	3	0	0	6
GNVQ	0	4	3	0	0	7
NVQ	0	7	0	1	0	8
Other vocational	2	3	5	0	0	10
Other*	8	17	11	1	0	37
Total (No.)	20	42	23	3	0	88
Total (%)	23	48	26	3	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

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

Note: percentages subject to rounding

*includes access, ESOL and basic skills courses

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. The average attendance in the lessons observed is at the national average, and the average number of students attending each lesson is close to the national average.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
City and Islington College	10.2	76
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

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

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

11 Inspectors observed 12 lessons, covering the range of the college's engineering provision. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found some additional strengths. Some weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- much good and well-planned teaching
- effective management of courses
- many students' high achievement and retention rates
- thorough recording and monitoring of students' progress
- effective development of students' key skills
- good links with higher education

Weaknesses

- some students' lack of punctuality for lessons
- lack of work experience opportunities for students

12 The college offers a range of electrical installation, electronics and general engineering courses. Students are able to progress to higher education engineering courses offered in partnership with a local university, and through links with other local universities. However, links with industry are less well developed, and there are few work placement opportunities for full-time students. Courses are well managed. There are effective arrangements to ensure that the assessment of students' work is carried out at the appropriate standard. As recognised in the self-assessment report, course teams meet

regularly, and they record and monitor the progress of their students thoroughly.

13 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most teaching is good. Teachers plan their lessons well, ensuring that students experience a variety of effective learning activities. Practical workshop or laboratory exercises frequently complement theory work covered in the classroom. One theory lesson on health and safety included graphic video examples of industrial hazards. This was followed by a workshop lesson where the students were able to observe a simulated accident and analyse safe working procedures for accident prevention. In a GCE A level electronics lesson, the teacher used a variety of teaching and learning methods effectively to introduce students to the theory of amplification. This was followed by individual laboratory exercises that involved students in constructing and testing electronic amplifiers. Where appropriate, students are able to develop the key skills of number, communication and information technology (IT) during their vocational lessons. In the few less effective lessons, teachers spent too long talking about the topic, and expected students to copy excessive notes from the whiteboard. In some of the lessons, a number of students arrived late, disrupting the work of those present. In a few lessons, frequent calls received by some students on their mobile telephones distracted them and others in the class from their work.

14 As noted in the self-assessment report, student achievement and retention rates are mostly good, and are either above or at the national average for the sector. Student achievement and retention rates on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) level 1 electronics servicing and electrical installation courses, and the GNVQ intermediate course, improved significantly in 1999-2000. However, student retention and achievement rates have declined on the GNVQ foundation course. In 2000, a student from the college achieved a

Curriculum Areas

national award for electrical installation. Most students' work is of a good standard and teachers provide them with helpful written comments on their work. Many students maintain good work files and some make good use of IT and Internet materials in presenting their work.

15 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is good specialist equipment available to students. Students benefit from excellent computer-aided design and computer-assisted learning facilities, which they are able to use outside formal lessons. The learning centre has a good range of engineering books and CD-ROMs. Teachers are appropriately qualified for the subjects that they teach, although some lack recent industrial experience.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation	1	Number of starters	29	17	11
		Retention (%)	69	65	55
		Achievement (%)	*	82	67
C&G electronic servicing and electrical installation part 1 qualifications	1	Number of starters	82	131	86
		Retention (%)	73	72	84
		Achievement (%)	66	66	78
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	35	30	14
		Retention (%)	51	63	93
		Achievement (%)	28	53	69
C&G electronic servicing and electrical installation part 2 qualifications	2	Number of starters	74	66	42
		Retention (%)	88	72	81
		Achievement (%)	57	82	79
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	†	51	18
		Retention (%)	†	67	94
		Achievement (%)	†	61	71
GCE A level electronics	3	Number of starters	13	13	8
		Retention (%)	100	69	100
		Achievement (%)	78	88	100

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

*data unreliable

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design and Furniture Crafts

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering most aspects of visual arts. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that one weakness had been understated.

Key strengths

- extensive range of courses and qualifications
- effective course and lesson planning
- much good teaching
- good development of students' basic art and design skills
- high pass and retention rates on many courses
- students' success in progressing to higher level courses

Weaknesses

- inadequacies in some aspects of the arrangements for curriculum management
- some unsatisfactory specialist accommodation
- some students' lack of punctuality for lessons

17 The college offers an extensive range of courses for full-time and part-time students, leading to art and design qualifications. Since the last inspection, the college has carried out a review of the programme area and made significant changes to the courses offered. For example, a new course leading to GNVQ at advanced level, and a national diploma in foundation studies have been established.

Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the development of modular courses, particularly at level 1 and level 2, represents a significant strength. These courses help students to progress to employment or further or higher education. The school of visual, performing arts and media is responsible for the management of vocational courses. The sixth form centre, however, manages all GCSE, GCE A level and some GNVQ courses.

Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that some aspects of course management are unsatisfactory. For example, the college has relied too heavily on part-time teachers for course development and they have not necessarily been able to liaise closely with full-time staff in order to make the best use of their expertise. The minutes of school and curriculum team meetings show that staff spend an appropriate amount of time discussing key issues such as, the recruitment of students, the review and evaluation of courses, and staff training. Records of meetings show that targets set for retention and achievements are carefully considered.

18 There is much good teaching. Teachers use appropriate schemes of work and lesson plans, and a variety of suitable teaching methods. These cover formal lectures, demonstrations, practical activities and one-to-one tuition. In the best lessons, teachers emphasise the relevance of theory to practical work, give students well-designed handouts, and address the needs of individuals. These strengths are identified in the self-assessment report. In one outstanding lesson on furniture crafts, students were learning different methods of producing measured drawings. Through careful planning and enthusiastic teaching, the teacher skilfully ensured that students produced excellent working drawings, essential to making pieces of furniture. In another highly effective lesson, students were working on garment cutting. The teacher's obvious expertise, enthusiasm and effective classroom

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management made the lesson an exciting and rewarding experience for the students. They achieved high standards in their practical work. Students in many subject areas work responsibly on their own in developing personal styles and teachers encourage them to learn from each other. However, in a few lessons, the work set was insufficiently demanding. Some students disrupted lessons by arriving late but their lack of punctuality went unchecked. Assessment procedures are clear and students know what is required of them.

19 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that, in general, student achievement rates are good. Pass rates on the GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses, furniture crafts, GCE A levels and access courses, are above the national average for the sector. Students' practical work is of a good standard. Most carry out effective research, develop their ideas well and demonstrate a high degree of knowledge and skill in creative art and design. Students on the furniture crafts course have acquired extensive knowledge of design and production and achieve high standards of craftsmanship in manufacture. Many students on furniture craft courses have undertaken commissioned work for individual clients and some art and design students have been successful in prestigious competitions. Many students progress to higher level further education courses and to higher education.

20 Teachers are appropriately qualified. Many teachers are practising artists and designers and often exhibit their work. Those teaching on the furniture crafts course keep up to date with methods of manufacture through links with industry. Since the last inspection, specialist resources including accommodation have been improved. For example, more IT equipment is available to students, a ceramics studio has been refurbished, and the college now has specialist accommodation for fashion and textiles work. Some other specialist accommodation, particularly that used for

general drawing and three-dimensional design, remains unsatisfactory.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in art and design and furniture crafts, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation	1	Number of starters	19	16	18
		Retention (%)	47	87	94
		Achievement (%)	100	100	93
C&G furniture crafts part I and II	1 to 3	Number of starters	35	32	27
		Retention (%)	88	81	90
		Achievement (%)	75	77	78
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	20	21	23
		Retention (%)	70	65	86
		Achievement (%)	64	100	83
NOCN pre-access courses	2	Number of starters	230	240	250
		Retention (%)	83	84	93
		Achievement (%)	34	50	54
Access to higher education	3	Number of starters	56	52	47
		Retention (%)	96	95	87
		Achievement (%)	67	76	81
GCE A level art	3	Number of starters	28	40	60
		Retention (%)	78	88	73
		Achievement (%)	43	89	94

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

Curriculum Areas

Access to Higher Education (Humanities)

Grade 2

21 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering full-time and part-time access courses with humanities options. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good range of courses
- much good and outstanding teaching
- many students' success in progressing to higher education
- good retention rates on most courses
- particularly good resources and teaching accommodation

Weaknesses

- insufficient additional learning support for students
- late arrival of students for many lessons

22 The breadth of the college's range of access to higher education courses in the humanities was not recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. These include full-time and part-time level 3 modular access courses, each offering a range of optional modules; an access course for students wishing to progress to a teaching degree course; and a level 2 pre-access course for those students who wish to progress to level 3. Courses are well managed. The induction course for modular access students provides students with opportunities to experience the various options before making a final choice. All students are provided with helpful course handbooks, which set out course content, and offer advice on how the work should be done. There are effective arrangements for finding out what learning

support individual students need. However, at the time of inspection, only half of those students identified as needing support were receiving it. Course files are maintained thoroughly. Course teams review and revise aspects of their courses and teaching methods effectively. All schemes of work are detailed and specify clear learning objectives.

23 Most teaching is good or outstanding, as noted in the self-assessment report. Teachers provide students with stimulating and varied learning activities. In a successful pre-access lesson, students were introduced to *Hamlet* by watching and discussing different film versions of the opening of the play and some other key moments. Most students enjoy their lessons, and work with interest and determination. Many make valuable contributions in discussions and group work. In a study of scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, each member of the class made perceptive comments about the roles of the main characters. Teachers are fully aware of the needs of individual students and ensure they find time to attend to these. Course assignments are well planned and are designed to help students develop essential skills. Early on in each option of the modular access course, each student is required to produce a set of notes. Teachers mark the notes and return them to the students with detailed advice on how to improve their selection and presentation of content. Students on access courses also benefit from a well-planned IT course. Many lessons, however, were disrupted by the late arrival of students.

24 Many students progress to higher education courses. Approximately 80% of those students who completed their courses in 1999-2000 successfully progressed to university. In the last three years, retention rates on many access courses have been above the national average for the sector. The student achievement rate on the modular access course has improved in 1999-2000, and is now in line with the national average. On the pre-access course, the

Curriculum Areas

student achievement rate declined significantly in 2000. The self-assessment report acknowledges the decline in recruitment to most courses. There are clear marking policies. Tutors give students clear and comprehensive written feedback on their work.

25 Much of the accommodation for access courses is good. Classrooms are clean, bright, well furnished and suitably equipped. The

learning centre has an exceptionally wide range of relevant books. There is good liaison between the centre and teachers. Students are able to use the computers in the centre and in the IT suite. There is a range of specialised learning materials for students, including lists of websites to help students with their individual research.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in access to higher education (humanities), 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Pre-access courses	2	Number of starters	32	35	35
		Retention (%)	72	74	74
		Achievement (%)	91	96	46
Access certificate to teaching degrees	3	Number of starters	31	27	16
		Retention (%)	94	67	88
		Achievement (%)	83	83	71
Access modular courses	3	Number of starters	123	130	124
		Retention (%)	80	82	69
		Achievement (%)	81	64	71

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

Curriculum Areas

Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

26 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in modern foreign languages and took into account the findings from 13 lesson observations undertaken during the area inspection of 16 to 19 provision. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but considered that one significant weakness had been understated.

Key strengths

- well-managed courses
- well-planned lessons
- much good and outstanding teaching
- students' high achievement rates on many courses
- well-resourced specialist rooms

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on part-time courses for adults

27 The college offers a significant range of language courses for 16 to 18 year olds and adult students. These include day and evening courses at the college's sixth form centre in GCSE, GCE A level and advanced supplementary (AS) French, Italian and Spanish. Additionally, GCSE German, GCE A/AS level Turkish, GCE AS Bengali and GCE A/AS level Chinese courses are offered to students wishing to study minority or community languages. Courses are well managed. Schemes of work for most courses are thorough. Many annual course reviews are comprehensive. Managers produce summaries for staff of the main findings from these. There is a good range of enrichment activities relating to languages. For example, some students on a GCE A level course have

taken part in a study visit to Nantes and they spoke enthusiastically of their experiences.

28 Many lessons were good and some were outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that teachers use the foreign language being taught effectively as the main means of communication. Lessons are well planned. In most, students undertake demanding activities that require their full concentration and enable them to extend their knowledge and skills. In many lessons, students were confident in their use of the language, and some demonstrated a high level of fluency. Teachers make good use of a wide variety of resources, and often use learning materials they have devised themselves, to supplement those that are commercially available. During a French language revision lesson, the teacher used a selection of poems carefully to help students understand the topic and the use of the perfect tense. The teacher laid out a table to help illustrate a poem about a café. This was followed by a discussion in which all students were keen to take part and their ideas were thoughtful and well expressed. Many teachers structured their lessons carefully. They aimed to help students increase their proficiency and confidence in understanding and using the foreign language gradually. In a minority of lessons, students found the content too difficult and struggled with the learning tasks. In a few lessons, the teachers talked too much and gave over-lengthy explanations. The students had few opportunities to respond and contribute themselves.

29 Students' achievements are good on many courses. On the GCE A level courses for full-time students aged 16 to 18, pass rates are well above the national average for the sector in French, German, Spanish and Italian. The proportion of students aged 16 to 18 who achieve grade C or above in Spanish or Italian, respectively, is above the national average but on French courses, it is below the national average. Except on German courses, the pass

Curriculum Areas

rates for adults on GCE AS courses are well above the national averages. Students' examination results on courses in community languages, however, are declining. Retention rates are poor on some courses. Retention rates on GCSE and GCE AS evening courses are below the national average. Most students' written work is of an appropriate standard. Teachers mark the work carefully, using a standard marking scheme. They provide students with helpful suggestions on how they can improve their work and, where necessary, they give them additional exercises.

30 Students benefit from good resources, which include two 18-desk language laboratories. One laboratory is also equipped with integrated video playback facilities, and 14 computers that give access to the Internet. Students are able to use the computers with confidence. Teachers are well qualified. Many are native speakers of the languages they teach. Full-time teachers provide part-time staff with good support.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE European languages	2	Number of starters	264	266	134
		Retention (%)	66	61	61
		Achievement (%)	42	52	77
GCE A level French (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	41	28	39
		Retention (%)	92	57	74
		Achievement (%)	61	92	91
GCE A level Spanish (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	25	20	17
		Retention (%)	92	87	85
		Achievement (%)	84	77	91
GCE A level community languages: Chinese and Turkish	3	Number of starters	39	36	25
		Retention (%)	74	39	62
		Achievement (%)	79	86	73
GCE AS European languages: French, German, Italian and Spanish	3	Number of starters	90	50	78
		Retention (%)	64	68	62
		Achievement (%)	34	38	79

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

Curriculum Areas

ESOL

Grade 2

31 Inspectors observed 14 lessons on courses for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), for both adults and 16 to 18 year olds. They found the self-assessment of this curriculum area thorough and detailed but found both strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- good and outstanding teaching in most lessons
- effective identification of students' learning needs
- well-planned and well-managed curriculum
- good retention rates
- students' success in progressing to higher level courses

Weaknesses

- students' low achievement rates on ESOL courses at intermediate and higher levels
- inconsistent assessment of some students' work

32 The college offers a good range of ESOL courses for both full-time and part-time students. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the curriculum is well planned and well managed. The college has good links with the local community, and has been responsive to the diverse demands for courses. The number of students enrolling for ESOL courses has grown significantly over the last two years. Courses are designed to take account of cultural diversity in the local community and to meet the needs of potential students. For example, some courses are

offered for women only, and some take place at weekends. Some other courses cater for young, newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees. These courses include a range of vocational options, designed to help students to progress to higher level vocational courses.

33 There are effective arrangements to ensure that students are enrolled on courses that are appropriate to them. Careful assessment of each student's learning needs is carried out. This leads to the development of an individual learning plan. Teachers thoroughly review the progress of their students each term. Students who are performing well are able to progress to other courses. Some of these lead to qualifications offered by external awarding bodies.

34 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most teaching is good and some is outstanding. The best lessons are well planned and have clear aims and objectives. Many lessons were structured skilfully to enable students with poor literacy skills to become more proficient and confident in reading and writing in English. In one lively lesson, the teacher went over previous work carefully by involving students in a group exercise. As the lesson progressed, students were productively engaged in correcting each others' punctuation and grammatical mistakes. Their learning was further strengthened through more group work and role-play activities. A few lessons were not planned well. They lacked clear objectives and structure. Some teachers require the students to spend an excessive amount of time completing worksheets. Teachers encourage students to use the learning centre to develop the skills of working on their own. Students are given homework regularly and their course files are well organised. There is an effective programme of tutorials for all students.

35 As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, student achievement rates on courses leading to qualifications at basic and elementary

Curriculum Areas

levels have improved over the last two years, and are now above the national average for the sector. Many students progress to higher level ESOL courses. Student achievement rates, however, on courses leading to intermediate and higher intermediate awards are low. The college is currently investigating whether it might be appropriate for students to work towards alternative qualifications. Retention rates are good for all courses, and are at, or above, the national average. The retention rate on all NOCN courses is particularly high. Most students achieve good standards in their assessed work. As part of their marking and assessment, some teachers give the students clear and helpful feedback on the quality of their work. Other teachers, however, fail to mark students' work thoroughly, and do not provide students with sufficient guidance on how they may make progress and improve their performance.

36 Accommodation for ESOL students is good. Most rooms are attractive and walls are decorated with posters and displays of students' work. Specialist staff in the learning centres provide ESOL students with help and support. The centres are well stocked with a wide range of good learning materials for both students and teachers. Students have access to tape recorders and computers. Teachers are well qualified and suitably experienced. There is a large number of part-time teachers, and many are course tutors.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
ESOL short courses (NOCN accredited)	Entry	Number of starters	*	*	1,535
		Retention (%)	*	*	92
		Achievement (%)	*	*	68
Pitmans basic (short course)	Entry	Number of starters	521	433	447
		Retention (%)	95	89	89
		Achievement (%)	30	57	66
Pitmans elementary (short course)	Entry	Number of starters	434	430	433
		Retention (%)	89	86	89
		Achievement (%)	27	58	54
Pitmans intermediate and higher (short courses)	1	Number of starters	305	366	464
		Retention (%)	93	85	88
		Achievement (%)	8	32	34
Pitmans spoken higher intermediate (short courses)	1	Number of starters	*	51	178
		Retention (%)	*	92	90
		Achievement (%)	*	68	35

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

37 Inspectors observed 13 lessons across the range of literacy and numeracy provision below level 2. Inspectors were in broad agreement with the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong commitment of staff to improving students' basic skills
- extensive range of numeracy and literacy courses
- effective course management
- much good teaching
- students' good achievement rates on some courses
- broad range of easily accessible learning materials

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-ordination of basic skills provision across the college
- some teachers' failure to match learning activities to students' abilities

38 The college offers an extensive range of courses in numeracy and literacy. Care is taken to meet the needs of prospective students. Courses at different levels are offered at various times and locations throughout the borough. Staff have a strong commitment to helping students improve their basic skills. They work with a number of external organisations, such as the local authority and a major transport provider, to provide basic skills courses. Within the college, other basic skills provision covers the key skills of communications and application of number as part of vocational courses at entry and foundation level. Additional learning support in literacy and numeracy is also

provided during lessons for students at vocational entry and foundation level programmes. There is effective leadership and management of basic skills courses. There is, however, insufficient co-ordination of some aspects of basic skills provision across the college. For example, there is no overall co-ordination of the teaching of literacy. Teachers have little opportunity to identify and share good practice.

39 Good use is made of initial assessment to identify students' learning needs. The college has recently introduced a combined key and basic skills assessment for new students on vocational courses at entry level, and one school is piloting an accredited initial guidance and assessment module for students.

40 Most teaching is well planned. In the better lessons, teachers responded well to the individual needs of students, and encouraged them to learn how to work on their own. One particularly good literacy lesson began with a discussion. The teacher encouraged students to talk about their neighbours, and this stimulated the students to engage in some lively debate. The students then worked well together as a group and the teacher invited those who were confident enough to read aloud. After that, the students worked at their own pace on comprehension exercises. The teacher provided students with support and encouragement and gave them helpful feedback on the quality of their work. In a numeracy lesson, students made effective use of an article on Big Ben to extend their number vocabulary. In the few less effective lessons, teachers failed to take into account the range of abilities and learning styles within the group, and did not give students constructive suggestions on how they might improve their work.

41 Information held by the college on students' retention and achievements for basic skills qualifications has, until recently, been combined with other qualifications. However,

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data produced by teachers show that over the last three years, student achievement rates have continuously improved. Pass rates on most courses are now at or above the national average for the sector. Staff ensure students work towards qualifications that meet their individual needs. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, students have benefited from the help they receive from additional learning support tutors in lessons on foundation level courses.

42 Accommodation and resources for the teaching of basic skills are good. Some teachers make good use of IT in teaching basic skills. Computers are usually available to students at most locations. The learning skills centre and most classrooms are well stocked with a variety of learning materials. Some specialist teachers hold qualifications in teaching basic skills. However, as noted in the self-assessment report, many teachers involved in teaching basic skills within GNVQ courses have not received any training in the teaching of basic skills.

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Support for Students

Grade 1

43 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Most of the weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry and admission procedures
- good personal tutoring in many areas
- successful mentoring project
- effective use of IT in learning support
- effective support and welfare services
- excellent childcare facilities
- expanding range of enrichment activities

Weaknesses

- delay in providing additional learning support for a minority of students

44 There is good promotion of the college's courses in local secondary schools. Trained teams of staff visit schools frequently throughout the year. The college holds open days and provides opportunities for prospective students to attend 'taster' courses. Publicity materials are clear and informative. There is an attractive range of brochures and prospectuses giving details of courses available, including those for adults. Some of this publicity material is available in some of the languages spoken in the local community. The college's Internet website, which provides information about the college and its courses, is well used by prospective students. In 2000, the website was awarded first prize in a prestigious national competition. Prospective students receive impartial advice and guidance about their intended course of study. At the start of their courses, students participate in a range of well-planned and

effective induction activities. Comprehensive information about college facilities and activities is easily accessible to students on the college's intranet.

45 During their courses, students are well supported by their tutors. Lead tutors in each school are responsible for ensuring that tutoring is consistently good. A tutorial quality team, which oversees tutorial activities, meets regularly. All full-time and part-time vocational students have personal tutors. During tutorials, the tutors reviewed the progress of individual students towards reaching their targets. In the sixth form centre, successful and lively group tutorials focus on health, social or political issues. Where appropriate, tutors record and monitor students' progress in developing key skills. There are informative and comprehensive handbooks available to assist tutors in their work. Since 1989, the college has implemented a mentoring scheme for students from some minority ethnic groups. The mentors are successful members of the local minority ethnic communities. About 2,500 students have been mentored by 780 mentors. Since the implementation of the mentoring scheme, retention rates have improved. In 1999, the leadership development centre was opened. Staff at the centre assist with the personal development of students on intermediate level courses, and make effective use of information and communications technology. Students using the centre can also benefit from the sports activities, seminars and conferences that take place there. The college operates an 'upward bound' scheme on Saturday mornings to help pupils from local schools with their GCSE studies.

46 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the college's self-assessment report that since the last inspection, progress has been made in improving the learning support provision for students. For example, seven college sites now have well-resourced learning centres. The study skill centre on the Camden site provides

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excellent IT facilities for group and individual work. Since the appointment of learning co-ordinators in all schools, the provision of learning support has been managed more effectively. The college has also appointed additional specialist support teachers. Additional learning support is provided in lessons where it is required, and its impact is carefully monitored. The demand for additional learning support is considerable. Many students now receive it and the financial costs of meeting their needs are high. A few students experience delay in receiving additional learning support because they have to wait until funding for it can be found. The support provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The pioneering dyslexia unit is outstanding. The unit provides innovative computer voice recognition systems for a growing number of students. This is a notable strength.

47 Advice, guidance, and counselling services for students are well managed. The staff providing these services work well as a team. Advice, guidance and counselling are available on all sites, and the college maintains contact with outside agencies providing specialist counselling services. Students receive good advice and help on financial matters and with finding accommodation. The college has productive links with local housing associations, and administers a variety of welfare funds. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, many students receive financial help from the college. At times, however, the administration of financial help is slow. The college has good facilities for students with young children. These include a day nursery and crèches. Funds are available to students to help with the costs of childcare provided outside the college. Careers education and guidance are included in the tutorial programmes, and are provided by careers specialists and the local careers service. Students are given particularly useful advice on higher education. Approximately 1,000 students progress to higher education courses each year.

48 The college's enrichment programme is extensive. All students have free membership of the local leisure centre and 1,000 students use it. Visits for students are arranged to museums, theatres and conferences. Students have the opportunity to participate in stage productions and musical events. There is an active students' union which provides financial assistance for student clubs, and also organises social events. The president of the students' union is a member of the college's corporation.

General Resources

Grade 3

49 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but identified a few additional strengths and several additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- carefully developed and sound accommodation strategy
- effective management of accommodation
- well-managed learning centres
- widespread availability of up-to-date IT resources

Weaknesses

- inaccessibility of 35% of accommodation to students with restricted mobility
- inadequate social areas for students on some sites
- some inefficient use of space
- poor environmental control in some buildings

50 The college was established in 1993 through the merger of four post-16 institutions with 13 sites in Islington, the City of London, and Hackney. A key strategic objective of the

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college has been the rationalisation of the accommodation. The college is currently based on 10 sites. Five of these are late nineteenth-century brick-built schools, and most of the other buildings were built in the mid-twentieth century. The college recognises in its self-assessment report that across the sites some resources are not used efficiently and there is some duplication of facilities. The Victorian buildings are not easy to adapt in order that they may provide suitable accommodation for the courses the college offers. They have high operating costs but the college cannot make full and efficient use of the buildings. The college's accommodation strategy has been carefully developed to ensure all accommodation is fit for its purpose and the college can meet its current and future curricular objectives. It also takes into account the recommendations of the recently published area inspection report for 16 to 19 provision in Hackney and Islington. The strategy aims to reduce the number of college sites from 10 to four, and includes plans for new purpose-built sixth form and lifelong learning centres.

51 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the accommodation has improved since the last inspection, but some is still unsatisfactory. The accommodation is managed well, within the constraints imposed by the age and layout of the buildings. Managers have responded to feedback from students and staff on ways of improving the accommodation. The college holds several of its sites on a short-term lease and it has mainly carried out improvements to those buildings which it intends to retain. Most classrooms are carpeted and adequately furnished and equipped. However, there is poor heating and ventilation and inadequate noise insulation on several sites. Students have access to refectories on nine of the college's sites. Some sites have inadequate common room facilities. Others are closed at times during the working week. Managers have improved the security arrangements on all sites,

and access to buildings is confined to single entry points. Good use is made of posters and other display materials to improve the buildings internally.

52 Students have access to learning centres at eight of the 10 college sites. There is some library provision at the Shepperton and Montem sites. As recognised in the self-assessment report, the learning centres are well managed by a team which meets regularly to co-ordinate the provision of learning sources across the sites. Recently, a decision was taken to open the centres for longer periods. Centres are now open all day until the early evening on four days during the week. In some centres, there are not enough study spaces or quiet study areas.

53 There are good, up-to-date computing facilities for students. Students have access to 1,300 networked computers across nine college sites. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:6. Students are able to use electronic mail facilities and the Internet. There is a three-year replacement cycle for all computers. Each school has a member of staff responsible for promoting the use of information and learning technology. Use of the college's intranet is becoming widespread among students and staff.

54 Since the last inspection, more buildings and facilities have been made accessible to students with problems of mobility. However, some 35% of the accommodation remains inaccessible to these students. There are very few toilets for students with restricted mobility. There are no sports facilities at any of the college's sites. Crèche facilities are provided at four of the colleges' sites, with places for 78 children.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 2

55 Inspectors were in broad agreement with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. At the time of inspection, weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were being addressed and progress in rectifying them had been made in a number of areas.

Key strengths

- effectiveness of quality assurance system in initiating improvements
- well-established and thorough self-assessment process
- effective lesson observation scheme
- productive staff development programme
- effective arrangements for obtaining the views of students

Weaknesses

- some over-complex aspects of the self-assessment process
- inadequate staff appraisal scheme

56 All who work in the college have a clear commitment to achieving the continuous improvement of the college's provision and services. Since the last inspection, quality assurance processes have been extended to include observation of lessons and tutorials, the setting of service standards for support areas, the setting of targets for student retention and achievement rates, and a cycle of formal reviews of students' progress. There is a comprehensive quality assurance policy which specifies the aims and procedures of the quality assurance system. The director of curriculum and quality assurance oversees all aspects of quality assurance. Across the college, committees and panels monitor the implementation of quality

assurance procedures, study the findings from these closely and recommend action for improving provision. The quality assurance process has been instrumental in initiating action to improve teaching and learning, student achievement and retention rates, and to other aspects of college services.

57 The college has well-established procedures for self-assessment. Course teams draw up annual self-assessment reports, which contribute to the reports produced by each school of study. Senior managers study self-assessment reports and action plans closely to check that requisite standards are being met. There is a programme of internal inspection to check that self-assessment is undertaken rigorously. The internal inspection process culminates in an annual self-assessment report for the college. A self-assessment review group is responsible for verifying the findings in the college's annual self-assessment report. Staff, students, representatives of employers, and of the local training and enterprise council (TEC) all contribute to the report. The college recognises as a weakness that some aspects of self-assessment have become too cumbersome, and that there is some duplication of action plans. Some staff experience difficulty in completing the process thoroughly. Managers are planning to reduce the complexity of some of the self-assessment procedures.

58 The findings from self-assessment are taken into account in strategic and operational planning. Through a comprehensive schedule of planning and monitoring activities, all staff know when their work has to be completed and submitted to relevant managers or committees. Targets for enrolment, retention and achievement are determined at an annual meeting between school managers and the principal and other senior managers. During the meeting, the extent to which previous targets have been met is considered carefully. However, in some areas there is little consultation with curriculum managers about

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enrolment targets. Extensive use is made of national data to compare the performance of the college with that of other colleges. These data are made available on the college's intranet. Throughout the year, there are regular and productive meetings between senior managers and heads of school to review progress in implementing action plans and towards the achievement of targets.

59 The lesson and tutorial observation scheme is effective. The findings from observations are carefully considered and action has been taken to rectify weaknesses in teaching and learning and to improve the tutorial programmes. The findings from observations are recorded carefully and are taken into account in the self-assessment report. The college has used the standards fund effectively and imaginatively to improve, for example, the quality of short courses and tutorial provision, and to determine performance indicators and targets for course teams.

60 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are good arrangements for identifying the training needs of staff. Objectives for training and staff development activities relate to the college's strategic objectives. When drawing up the staff development programme, managers take into account the training needs of staff identified through operating plans, staff appraisal interviews and the findings of lesson observations. An internal programme of staff development is offered, which includes training for teachers who have been identified through lesson observations as needing support. The staff development cash budget constitutes 1.3% of the college's staffing budget. There is a well-defined programme for the induction of new staff. All staff development activity is thoroughly evaluated. There are effective arrangements whereby staff who have attended training sessions pass on what they have learnt to their colleagues. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, some aspects of staff appraisal are unsatisfactory. Few staff are set targets against which their performance can be

measured. During the appraisal interview, managers focus on the training needs of staff rather than the quality of their work and performance. A few staff have not been appraised. In April 2000, the college successfully achieved the Investor in People award.

61 There are effective arrangements for obtaining the views of students about their experience of the college. Questionnaires are widely distributed, and an external agency is contracted to obtain the views of specific groups of students. Action has been taken on students' responses to provide students with clearer information about assessment, improve the scheduling of assignments and improve the catering facilities. Effective monitoring is carried out to check that the college honours the commitments it makes in the students' charter. Complaints are dealt with swiftly and monitored through the student affairs committee.

Governance

Grade 1

62 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been overstated. Others had been rectified by the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- governors' valuable contribution to determining the strategic direction of the college
- the good range of skills and expertise amongst governors
- effective and efficient clerking
- effective monitoring of progress towards reaching strategic and operational targets
- thorough evaluation of students' performance
- rigorous appraisal of senior postholders

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Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

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

64 The corporation has a determined membership of 20, comprising seven business governors, three staff governors, one student, one local authority nominee, three community nominees, three co-opted governors, one parent governor and the principal. At the time of inspection, the corporation had a vacancy for the parent governor. Nominations for this post are presently being sought. The search and governance committee operates effectively in reviewing all applications for membership of the corporation. Members of this committee interview governors nearing the end of their term of office and who wish to serve a further term, to assess their contribution to the corporation before recommending that they be re-appointed to the governing body. The committee is also responsible for the corporation handbook which highlights the seven principles of public life and brings together a number of relevant documents.

65 As noted in the college's self-assessment report, the college benefits from the broad range of governors' skills and experience. Governors' expertise covers business, law, finance, education, marketing and media, and is well used on the corporation's committees. These skills have been particularly useful during the development of the new accommodation strategy. Governors have a good knowledge of the college's local community and context in which the college operates. They have made a

significant contribution to reviewing and refining the mission and values of the college and the development of its aims. Through a series of training workshops, they have debated and considered the strategic role of the college, the influence of national and local developments upon the college, and the college's role within the local community. In 1999, the corporation held a well-attended open meeting, which was combined with a presentation ceremony.

66 Members of the corporation demonstrate a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. The corporation conducts much of its business through seven committees, which undertake a thorough and detailed examination of the issues within the corporation's remit. The committees report regularly to the full corporation with their recommendations. Each committee is supported effectively by a member of the senior management team. Individual committees have responsibility for monitoring aspects of the implementation of the operational plan and reporting to the full corporation. The curriculum and quality committee reviews student retention and achievement rates. Governors receive annual updates on the extent to which the college has achieved its strategic and operational objectives, and on student retention and achievement rates. They question managers thoroughly about poorly performing courses, and investigate the effectiveness of actions designed to address any weaknesses. Governors demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding of the areas within their brief.

67 Clerking is efficient and effective. Agendas, minutes and supporting papers prepared for the corporation and its committees are timely and excellently presented. Corporation and committee minutes are available to staff on the college's intranet. All papers follow a common format, which includes a summary and reference to any financial implications. The corporation conducts its business in accordance

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with a clear set of standing orders. Governors are required to accept the code of conduct in writing before appointment. The code of conduct, standing orders, and other corporation documents reflect the corporation's commitment to the open conduct of business. Governors are also required to update the register of interests annually. The corporation has reviewed and revised its procedures thoroughly to ensure that the governance of the college is carried out with probity.

68 The induction programme for new governors includes visits to college sites and meetings with the clerk, managers, staff and students. A few governors have not been able to attend the induction activities. Governors hold three internal training workshops a year, one of which is a residential event. The training workshops provide good opportunities for members to improve their understanding of current issues affecting the sector, and to develop their working relationships with each other. The appraisal of senior postholders is rigorous and the process includes a relevant governor. During their appraisal process, the postholders receive an exacting evaluation of their performance, are set new targets, and have their training needs identified.

69 The corporation conducts a review of its performance. Governors evaluate their effectiveness by answering a questionnaire. Governors have recognised in their self-assessment report that the current arrangements for evaluation of the corporation's performance require further development. Some progress has already been made, and a set of performance indicators has been established.

Management

Grade 1

70 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that the college had been rigorous in its identification of weaknesses, most of which had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- open and consultative leadership
- good financial management
- strong and beneficial external links
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity
- rigorous approach to planning
- successful action to improve student retention and achievement rates

Weaknesses

- little systematic sharing of good practice by staff

71 The college has an open, consultative and effective style of leadership, as noted in the self-assessment report. The senior management team meets weekly, and comprises the principal and five directors. Before making proposals for the strategic development of the college, managers carry out a detailed analysis of the needs of the local community. A summary of the strategic plan is circulated to all staff. The introduction of curriculum 2000 was effectively planned. The college has consistently achieved its enrolment and funding unit targets. Student retention and achievement rates have steadily improved, and in some areas are above the average for the sector. There is a clear and straightforward annual planning cycle. Since the last inspection, and as noted in the self-assessment report, the college has

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successfully developed a broad range of beneficial external links. It has a productive association with other London colleges, universities, the local TEC, local authorities, businesses, voluntary bodies and community organisations.

72 The college management team, comprising the 22 heads of schools and services, meets fortnightly to consider operational matters. Heads of schools and services meet regularly with members of the senior management team to carry out a rigorous review of progress towards reaching operational targets. Managers understand their roles. They welcome the responsibility delegated to them and their accountability for meeting objectives and targets. They have benefited from regular management training activities which have raised their awareness of the need to continue improving their working methods. Staff are well informed about the values and overall aims of the college. Full-time staff have access to electronic mail and the college's intranet. There is a monthly newsletter on general developments. Meetings of all managers are held several times a year to disseminate information. Training events and regular team meetings help to promote better understanding of the college's strategic direction.

73 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has a clear budgeting process. Budgets are set within parameters previously determined by governors. Budgets presented to the finance and general purposes committee and the corporation include a commentary on key assumptions and an analysis of risks to achieving the budget. The most recent budgeting process included the presentation of four different budget scenarios to governors, to illustrate the possible results under different sets of circumstances. Management accounts are prepared monthly for senior management and governors. Accounts are presented to each

meeting of the corporation's finance and general purposes committee, and to each meeting of the corporation. These include a clear textual commentary, graphical presentation of key variances, and clear statements of capital expenditure. Budget holders receive monthly financial reports produced directly from the accounting system. The college has an experienced and qualified finance team.

74 The curriculum is well managed. Managers and staff believe that recent appointments of staff with responsibility for additional learning support, key skills and tutorial arrangements have led to improvements in these areas of cross-college provision. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, however, there is a need to improve some aspects of curriculum management. For example, there are few systematic arrangements whereby those staff who work to different managers but teach on similar courses may liaise with one another and share good practice. There are plans to reduce the number of the college's sites from 10 to four in the next three years. Managers believe that by concentrating courses on fewer sites, it will be easier for staff to manage the curriculum even more effectively.

75 Staff at all levels are firmly committed to upholding equal opportunities. Cultural diversity is valued in the college. All staff and students are expected to promote and safeguard equality of opportunity. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy with clear guidelines for its implementation. The equal opportunities committee plays a key role in monitoring the promotion of equal opportunities throughout the college. It carries out analysis of data on the gender, ethnicity, and disabilities of staff. The committee takes findings from this analysis into consideration when drawing up action plans and determining targets for improving the promotion of equal opportunities. Particular attention is given to the recruitment procedures for staff. The mentoring scheme for minority ethnic students

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is particularly effective. There are successful initiatives to promote equal opportunity, such as establishment of the college's leadership development centre.

76 Since the previous inspection, the college has made much progress in improving its computerised management information system. The system is used effectively by managers and by many staff to monitor enrolment and student retention and achievement rates. Inspectors did not, however, agree with the finding in the self-assessment report that the management information system constitutes a key strength. A few staff do not have easy access to it. The system is not yet capable of generating some essential information promptly. As noted in the self-assessment report, upgrading of the college's IT facilities is continuing.

Conclusions

77 The college has well-established self-assessment process. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and detailed. It was the outcome of a rigorous process of assessment, involving all staff, corporation members and representatives of external organisations. Some of the weaknesses the college identified in one curriculum area and some cross-college provision had been rectified by the time of inspection. Inspectors agreed with the college's grades for four of the six curriculum areas and two of the five areas of cross-college provision. Of the five grades awarded by inspectors which differed from the college's assessment, four grades were one grade higher, and one curriculum grade was a grade lower.

78 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 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	23
19-24 years	19
25+ years	56
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Note: FEFC-funded students

Student numbers by level of study (November 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	19
Level 2 (intermediate)	20
Level 3 (advanced)	24
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Level not specified	15
Non-schedule 2	20
Total	100

Source: college data

Note: FEFC-funded students

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

Programme area	Full-time	Part-time	Total provision (%)
Science	1,212	1,891	27
Construction	0	120	1
Engineering	148	211	3
Business	397	342	6
Hotel and catering	121	546	6
Health and community care	498	438	8
Art and design	730	1,187	16
Humanities	810	985	15
Basic education	278	1,800	18
Total	4,194	7,520	100

Source: college data

Note: FEFC-funded students

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 81% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	271	121	0	392
Supporting direct learning contact	90	0	0	90
Other support	132	7	0	139
Total	493	128	0	621

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£21,871,000	£22,900,000	£25,600,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.28	£17.57	£17.48
Payroll as a proportion of income	64%	66%	63%
Achievement of funding target	99%	103%	101%
Diversity of income	14%	16%	17%
Operating surplus	£508,000	-£353,000	£26,000

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

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

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

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

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

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

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
1	Number of starters	561	802	987	1,303	1,085	1,017
	Retention (%)	81	80	78	75	80	83
	Achievement (%)	48	54	60	44	45	39
2	Number of starters	1,571	1,683	1,771	949	1,060	754
	Retention (%)	83	80	76	74	72	72
	Achievement (%)	67	78	81	47	64	59
3	Number of starters	2,083	2,129	2,016	1,655	1,803	1,550
	Retention (%)	*	70	72	63	72	73
	Achievement (%)	72	76	76	53	59	63
4 or 5	Number of starters	58	53	34	624	579	414
	Retention (%)	83	89	88	92	80	88
	Achievement (%)	58	66	77	32	58	44
Short courses	Number of starters	492	660	774	10,933	11,040	10,531
	Retention (%)	86	87	88	88	88	90
	Achievement (%)	27	53	48	30	48	59
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	297	149	512	2,377	775	1,399
	Retention (%)	82	83	69	80	77	81
	Achievement (%)	38	65	65	33	63	51

Source: ISR

*data may not be reliable

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