

# Colchester Institute

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1997-98**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
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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# Contents

Paragraph

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## Summary

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## Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	7

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## Curriculum areas

Computing and information technology	9
Construction	15
Hotel and catering	21
Art and design	28
Music and performing arts	35
Humanities	40

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## Cross-college provision

Support for students	46
General resources	55
Quality assurance	62
Governance	71
Management	81
Conclusions	90

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## College statistics

## Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

## Colchester Institute

### *Eastern Region*

#### Inspected March 1998

Colchester Institute is a general further education college located on three sites in Colchester, Clacton and Witham. The institute produced a clear and concise self-assessment report in preparation for inspection. Staff and corporation members and external representatives were involved in the self-assessment process. The report was approved by the corporation and the academic board before submission to the FEFC. The logical structure and clear presentation of the report helped inspectors to reach conclusions about the quality of provision in the institute. Strengths stated in the report are supported by evidence and actions are identified to address each weakness. Inspection evidence confirmed the accuracy of many of the judgements included in the report.

The institute offers nine out of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Five of these programme areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The institute meets local needs in the courses it offers from pre-foundation to degree and postgraduate level. The institute works effectively with many partners, including the Essex TEC, who view the

institute as responsive. Courses are well managed and standards of teaching are generally good. Students work well at their studies and achieve good results on many courses. Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise to the institute. The institute is in a sound financial position. Communication between managers and staff is good. The institute should: improve poor retention rates and students' achievements on some courses; improve the co-ordination of support for students and raise the level and quality of tutorial support; review its organisational structure in order to improve curriculum management; address the lack of corporate curriculum policies in some areas; strengthen its quality assurance; improve the operation of the management information system; and address accommodation issues which have an adverse effect on teaching and learning.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Computing and information technology	3	Support for students	3
Construction	2	General resources	2
Hotel and catering	2	Quality assurance	3
Art and design	2	Governance	2
Music and performing arts	3	Management	3
Humanities	3		

## The Institute and its Mission

1 The institute was formed in 1976 through the merger of the North East Essex Technical College, the School of Art in Colchester and St Osyth's Teacher Training College at Clacton-on-Sea. The Colchester site has provision for over 80 per cent of the students, with other sites at Clacton-on-Sea and Witham. The Clacton-on-Sea site offers specialist business, hotel and catering and leisure and tourism courses, and residential accommodation for up to 200 students. The leased Witham site is a specialist centre for occupational therapy courses. The institute offers a wide range of courses and programmes from pre-foundation to degree and postgraduate level in nine of the Council's programme areas. Degree and higher national diploma courses are well established, and the institute is a regional college of Anglia Polytechnic University. It also provides franchised higher education courses in collaboration with the University of Essex. There are four 11 to 18 secondary schools within the Borough of Colchester, and the rural district of Tendring has five 11 to 18 secondary schools. There are productive working relationships between the institute and the local 11 to 16 secondary schools and the Sixth Form College, Colchester.

2 Colchester has a developing economy with a population of 149,100 which is expected to grow to 159,500 by the year 2006. New housing is contributing to the continued expansion of the town. Colchester is dominated by the service industries which employ over three-quarters of the workforce. The largest employers in the town of Colchester are in the education, health authority, local authority and engineering sectors. A substantial proportion of the resident population commutes to work in Greater London. Future employment growth is forecast in the service and information technology (IT) sectors. Unemployment in Colchester was 3.1 per cent during the autumn of 1997 compared with the national rate of 6.2

per cent. A predominantly rural area, Tendring relies on agriculture, tourism, and transport-related industries. Unemployment was 8.8 per cent in 1997. The rural district of Tendring has assisted area status.

3 The majority of students pursuing further education courses come from the Borough of Colchester and the rural district of Tendring, but significant numbers are also drawn from mid-Essex and the neighbouring county of Suffolk. Rail and bus communication links into Colchester are good but in Tendring they are infrequent.

4 During 1996-97, the institute enrolled 2,990 full-time students and there were over 7,700 part-time, day and evening enrolments. It expects to enrol approximately 11,500 students during 1997-98. In addition, there are 911 full-time students pursuing higher education courses in business, combined studies, design, hotel and catering, leisure studies, music and health and social care in collaboration with Anglia Polytechnic University. The institute has developed contracted provision with Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and other funding organisations.

5 The curriculum is delivered through 10 schools of study. The institute employs 272 full-time equivalent permanent teachers and 39 full-time equivalent teachers on fixed-term contracts. There are 192 full-time equivalent support staff, including those who directly support student learning.

6 The institute's mission statement has recently been revised with an emphasis on eight key objectives:

- 'meeting the local needs of individuals, organisations and businesses
- developing continuous improvement
- raising students' achievements
- widening student participation
- increasing the use of IT in teaching and learning

# Context

- generating surpluses for capital investment
- reducing the level of dependency on Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and Higher Education Funding Council for England funding
- developing strategies for the dissemination of good practice’.

## The Inspection

7 The institute was inspected during the week beginning 16 March 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the institute’s self-assessment report and information about the institute held by other divisions of the FEFC. The institute submitted data on students’ achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by the inspectorate against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors for a total of 49 days and an auditor for four days. The inspection team observed lessons, examined students’ work and institute documents, and met governors, managers, institute staff and students.

8 Of the lessons inspected, 63 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 7 per cent were less than satisfactory. This profile compares with a national rate 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 76 per cent which is close to the average for the sector according to the same report. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	0	5	1	0	7
GNVQ	6	10	7	1	0	24
NVQ	3	8	2	2	0	15
Other*	2	2	2	0	0	6
Other vocational	7	6	6	1	0	20
Total	19	26	22	5	0	72

\*GCSE and higher education

# Curriculum Areas

## Computing and Information Technology

### Grade 3

**9 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. Inspectors broadly agreed with the institute's judgements on the two schools of engineering technology and computing, and administration and business technology. In a few instances, inspectors considered that the self-assessment report understated weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- comprehensive range of courses with clear routes for progression
- the well-organised teaching in the better lessons
- high pass rates on some part-time courses

#### Weaknesses

- ineffective teaching and lesson planning in some lessons
- low pass rates for general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses
- the organisation and content of tutorials
- insufficient staff development

10 Inspectors agreed that the programme area offers a broad range of courses. These meet a range of individual students' needs, providing clear routes for progression from foundation to advanced level. Students can study for the GNVQ in IT either full time or part time. Courses leading to the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 726/1 provide students with a variety of attendance patterns. The institute acknowledges that the curriculum is not effectively co-ordinated across the two schools; for example, in the sharing of good practice and the duplication of some course provision. Links with local schools are underdeveloped.

11 In the better lessons, teaching is well organised. Inspectors agreed with the institute that teachers used a range of teaching and learning methods to stimulate and maintain students' interest. In the best lessons, teachers had appropriate schemes of work and made effective use of questions to extend and test students' knowledge. For example, in a GNVQ foundation lesson, students worked individually and in groups to investigate a leisure activity. Students collated and recorded information using a wordprocessor, and analysed options taking account of the needs of individual students with physical disabilities. Assignments are used effectively by teachers to consolidate students' learning but they do not always contain information about grading criteria. In a few less effective lessons, teachers did not adapt their materials to take account of the range of students' subject knowledge and study skills. On the GNVQ advanced course the emphasis by teachers on analytical and research skills was too demanding for some students. The differences in the levels of investigation skills required by students to distinguish between obtaining a pass, merit or distinction award are not clear. There are inadequate arrangements to provide additional support in literacy and numeracy for students on some courses. Insufficient attention is given to the assessment of key skills by teachers. These key weaknesses were not identified in the institute's self-assessment report.

12 There have been improvements in course management since the last inspection. Course documentation contains detailed and appropriate schemes of work. As acknowledged by the institute, effective communication is promoted through regular team meetings. Induction is effectively organised and students receive course handbooks and valuable advice on managing their portfolios of work. On some courses, for example, the GNVQ advanced course, tutors maintain detailed records of students' progress and provide students and parents with termly reports. Individual student



# Curriculum Areas

attendance is monitored but there are no arrangements to summarise attendance patterns for individual students or for a complete course. Not all courses have timetabled tutorials and a supporting tutorial programme. Course team action plans lack clarity and measurable targets.

13 Computer facilities are up to date and have an appropriate range of modern software. There are insufficient multimedia computer systems to enable students to complete their assessed work efficiently. The chairs provided in the technology computer suite are not suitable for work at computer workstations. Teachers have recent experience of commercial practice in IT and are appropriately qualified. Planned staff development for teachers to gain appropriate training and development lead body assessor awards or to keep up to date with some IT developments has not been achieved.

14 Students' portfolios are well presented and organised, and their work is of an appropriate standard. Practical work is carried out competently. Inspectors agreed with the institute's assessment that there are good levels of retention on most courses. Pass rates on part-time and modular IT courses have

improved over the last three years. Students' achievements in GNVQ awards are below the sector average. The self-assessment report did not take sufficient account of the importance of students' achievements. Retention on full-time and part-time one-year vocational courses is good, averaging 86 per cent over the last three years.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced (or precursor)	Retention (%)	46	43	64
	Pass rate (%)	56	33	46
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	77	69	72
	Pass rate (%)	58	18	59
GNVQ foundation	Retention (%)	83	68	76
	Pass rate (%)	83	60	50
C&G 726, 424 (part time)	Retention (%)	100	86	91
	Pass rate (%)	44	78	95

Source: institute data

# Curriculum Areas

## Construction

### Grade 2

**15 Eleven practical and theory lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the institute's self-assessment report although they also identified some weaknesses which were not included in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- high quality of teaching
- practical work undertaken in a realistic work environment
- relevant work-related assignments
- students' practical work of a high standard
- high pass rates on some courses
- effective course management

#### Weaknesses

- inconsistent integration of key skills
- the lack of assessment criteria for assignments
- failure of school managers to use performance indicators
- the low retention on national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 programmes

16 Inspectors agreed that the institute offers a wide range of construction courses, including the higher national certificate in building studies, GNVQ and NVQs level 2 and 3 in bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, electrical installation, and mechanical engineering services. These meet both individual students' and employers' needs, and provide clear routes of progression to higher education. Individual teachers have productive links with industry which are used effectively to illustrate to students current industrial practice. Induction packs meet the needs of students. Course

leaflets are of a good standard and provide students with clear information.

17 Inspectors agreed with the institute that the quality of teaching is high. Teaching and learning is planned to meet the needs of individual students, and appropriate lesson plans and schemes of work were available in all lessons. Most students have a clear understanding of the purpose of their studies. Students were generally good at organising their own learning. The skills and knowledge acquired by students is appropriate to their level of study. Students produce work of a high standard in practical lessons which are mostly set in a realistic work-environment. For example, students in a GNVQ advanced lesson working in groups, demonstrated their understanding of structural design principles by constructing a five metre span tetrahedron framed structure using cane, dowels and rubber bands and discussed its practical application. The teacher acted as a facilitator giving a clear introduction to the topic and following up with feedback on the design.

18 The curriculum area is well managed and students are represented on course teams. Course tutors meet regularly with the head of school to discuss course management. Teachers are clear about their responsibilities. Performance indicators and targets are not set or used by the school in order to monitor attendance and improve achievement and retention rates. This was not identified in the institute's self-assessment report.

19 Staff are effectively deployed. Full-time and part-time staff within the curriculum area possess appropriate industrial and professional qualifications and experience, but the lack of staff development restricts teachers' ability to update their industrial experience. Classroom and workshop accommodation are of adequate size, but the electrical installation workshop is uninspiring. A well-equipped resource base

# Curriculum Areas

enables students to develop their studies on their own. The library has a range of up-to-date textbooks and learning materials for the curriculum area.

20 Students' GNVQ and NVQ portfolios are well presented and organised. Relevant work-related assignments were usually set. However, the lack of assessment criteria hindered teachers' ability to assess students' assignments fairly and consistently. Teachers' written feedback to students was not always informative and lacked suggestions that would help students to improve their work. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The teaching of key skills is not included in all courses; for example, IT is only formally integrated with GNVQ and higher national certificate programmes. Results for the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses in construction and the built environment, and the higher national certificate in building studies are above the national average. The school has no strategies to address the poor levels of retention on NVQ courses which has averaged 45 per cent over the last two years. This key weakness was not identified in the institute's self-assessment report.

## Examples of students' achievements in construction, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 2 construction craft	Retention (%)	78	43	46
	Pass rate (%)	74	94	89
GNVQ intermediate construction and the built environment	Retention (%)	75	100	89
	Pass rate (%)	100	90	75
GNVQ advanced construction and the built environment	Retention (%)	80	96	95
	Pass rate (%)	50	64	67
Higher national certificate building studies	Retention (%)	100	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	90	86	77

Source: institute data

# Curriculum Areas

## Hotel and Catering

### Grade 2

**21 The inspection focused on GNVQ and NVQ hospitality and catering courses. Ten lessons covering theory and practical activities were observed. Inspection evidence supports the main findings of the institute's self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned courses with clear progression routes
- the high standard of practical work
- the development of appropriate technical and key skills
- careful monitoring of students' progress
- high pass rates on most courses
- well-established and productive links with employers
- the good range of realistic work environments

#### Weaknesses

- poor levels of retention on NVQ level 2 food preparation and cookery
- lack of foundation level provision
- some poor accommodation and ageing equipment
- insufficient use by teachers of IT and specialist software

22 A wide range of courses enables students to progress within the institute from intermediate level to higher education. A GNVQ foundation course is planned to start in September 1998. Courses are managed effectively.

23 Teaching schemes and lesson plans are well organised. There is a variety of learning activities which maintains students' interest. Inspection confirmed the institute's judgement that priority is given to the application of

vocational knowledge and skills. Institute restaurants and kitchens provide excellent opportunities for students to develop their technical skills in realistic work environments. Students have a good record of success in catering competitions. The standard of practical work is high. Students display good team-working and communication skills. There is innovative teaching of key skills which are included on all NVQ courses. The institute acknowledges that teachers make insufficient use of IT and specialist software in teaching and learning, and that this is an area for further development.

24 Assignments are well devised to a standard format and integrate the assessment of key skills. Students' written work is of an appropriate standard for the level of their course. Teachers mark students' work carefully and make constructive comments that help students to improve their performance. The self-assessment report acknowledges that a more rigorous internal verification system needs to be implemented. Students' progress is carefully monitored and recorded through individual target-setting at tutorials.

25 There are good links with local schools. Prospective students are able to sample work in the restaurants or kitchens before making a decision about a course. Induction is well planned and includes health and safety training. Links with industry are strong. Employers sponsor a number of student prizes and support awards ceremonies to celebrate students' achievements. Students' studies are enhanced by visits to industry and European study trips. Students are encouraged to find part-time employment and to use their experience to gather evidence for accreditation which counts towards their award. Teachers help students to find suitable placements and assist them in finding employment at the end of their studies.

26 There is a diverse range of catering operations. Menus are designed to include items which students would expect to find in the

# Curriculum Areas

catering industry. Students produce food of a high standard. Since the last inspection improvements have been made to the restaurant kitchen at Clacton. Kitchens on the Colchester site have inadequate ventilation systems and are too small for the number of students in a group. Much of the kitchen equipment is old. Shortcomings in specialist accommodation and equipment are acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Most staff have recent experience of working in industry. Technicians are used effectively to support teachers and students. The library bookstock at Clacton is comprehensive with a good range of periodicals but there is a narrower range at Colchester.

27 Pass rates on the majority of hospitality and catering courses are above national averages. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course have improved significantly since its introduction in 1995. The institute's self-assessment report identifies the poor retention rate on the NVQ level 2 food preparation and cookery course. Action has been taken to monitor attendance more carefully and follow up absences. Most students successfully gain

awards in addition to their main qualification; for example, NVQ level 2 food preparation and reception students also study for NVQ level 2 food and drink awards. All students gain basic hygiene certification. In 1997, 70 per cent of NVQ students achieved communication and IT key skills. About 50 per cent of students progress from intermediate to advanced courses at the institute. Approximately 95 per cent of completing students gain employment in the hospitality industry.

## Examples of students' achievements in hotel and catering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	68	70
	Pass rate (%)	*	76	82
NVQ level 3 food preparation and cookery	Retention (%)	87	90	80
	Pass (%)	89	94	76
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	89	85	89
	Pass rate (%)	19	48	69
NVQ level 2 reception	Retention (%)	93	80	70
	Pass rate (%)	78	100	75
NVQ level 2 food preparation and cookery	Retention (%)	+	47	45
	Pass rate (%)	+	100	88

Source: institute data

\*course not running

+data not available

# Curriculum Areas

## Art and Design

### Grade 2

28 Twelve lessons were observed for students enrolled on full-time and part-time courses. Full-time courses observed included the BA honours art and design, the national diploma in media, the first diploma in printing, the GNVQ intermediate and combined groups from the national diploma foundation studies with the second year GNVQ advanced art and design. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses.

#### Key strengths

- high standards of teaching
- the vocational relevance and emphasis of the curriculum
- the drawing, fashion and photography programmes
- high pass rates on most courses
- good progression to higher education
- the benefits of an inter-related further and higher education provision
- the broad range of industrial-standard equipment

#### Weaknesses

- some poor punctuality and attendance by students
- poor retention on the GNVQ advanced and national diploma media courses
- the underdeveloped range of study opportunities

29 The recently established school management team has made good progress in developing a modular vocational curriculum, drawing on good practice developed in the degree programme. Modules enable local students to have more choice in their studies

and offer more flexible learning opportunities. The modular higher education course offers specialisms in fashion and textiles, fine art, graphic design and three-dimensional design. Inspectors agreed that further education students benefit from shared teaching, access to the higher education library and equipment, and opportunities to attend lectures and participate in exhibitions.

30 There is a small range of opportunities for students to progress within further education courses. The programme consists of specialist courses in media and in printing and three general art and design courses which are targeted at school-leavers. Drawing, fashion and photography are particular curriculum strengths. Only the BTEC national diploma foundation studies and printing courses are offered on a part-time basis. The national diploma courses offer good progression opportunities to higher education. At present, there is no satisfactory progression route for part-time adult students.

31 Inspectors agreed that the standards of teaching and learning in the school were high. Teachers manage students' learning effectively and use a variety of teaching methods. Supporting materials were informative and mostly of high quality. There are recognised weaknesses in the level of guidance and support offered to adult students on the part-time national diploma foundation course. Lessons observed as part of the self-assessment process were graded significantly higher than the profile of grades awarded by inspection.

32 A students' liaison manager has been appointed to review inconsistencies in the frequency, content and recording of tutorials, an issue identified in the school's self-assessment. Teachers regularly review students' progress during studio sessions. Inspectors agreed with the institute's assessment that staff encourage students to work towards high professional standards. Work placements are arranged for

# Curriculum Areas

the minority of students who do not wish to apply to higher education but seek employment. Most students have opportunities to work on simulated live projects or on assignments through links with external agencies or industry. Attendance figures were slightly below the national average for the sector. Punctuality on some courses was a matter for concern. Students from the one-year foundation course, and second-year students from the GNVQ advanced, follow a common curriculum. There is good organisation and management at school and programme levels.

33 Inspectors agreed with the institution's identification of a broad range of industrial-standard equipment as a strength. IT is integral to all course programmes and the recently updated specialist computers and software are a key resource. There is an appropriate range of library books and periodicals for the breadth of the course provision.

34 Students achieve high standards in their studio work. Pass rates are high and exceed national averages on a number of courses. Retention rates have improved significantly on the GNVQ intermediate course, from 75 per cent in 1995 to 85 per cent in 1997. However, retention rates for the GNVQ advanced and the BTEC national diploma in media were low in 1997. There is good progression, as noted in the self-assessment report, for students on the foundation studies and GNVQ advanced diploma courses.

## Examples of students' achievements in art and design, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	65	60
	Pass rate (%)	*	96	98
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	70	67	85
	Pass rate (%)	64	70	70
BTEC national diploma foundation studies in art and design	Retention (%)	91	90	95
	Pass rate (%)	96	94	93
BTEC national diploma in media	Retention (%)	*	*	52
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100
First diploma in printing	Retention (%)	75	89	79
	Pass rate (%)	67	69	79

Source: institute data

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Music and Performing Arts

### Grade 3

**35 Inspectors observed 16 lessons covering further education courses in music and performing arts. Inspectors largely agreed with the institute's self-assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. However, the action plan included in the self-assessment report did not fully address all weaknesses. The institute did not award a specific grade to the provision inspected.**

#### Key strengths

- the variety of effective teaching methods
- good opportunities for students to gain performance experience
- the enrichment resulting from excellent links between further and higher education
- a good record of progression to further studies
- the strategic development of the further education curriculum

#### Weaknesses

- the absence of effective planning in many lessons
- some unsatisfactory general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) results
- the lack of effective action to improve the poor attendance and late submission of assignments by some students
- unsuitable accommodation adversely affecting teaching and learning
- the lack of equipment replacement policies in music

36 The institute's music curriculum enables students to progress from further education to postgraduate studies. The institute has well-established degree programmes supplemented

by a foundation diploma in music which prepares students for entry to higher education. The diploma course includes opportunities to take GCE A levels in music, in addition to instrumental and performance studies. In 1996, a diploma in contemporary and popular music was launched. The course is managed by an external organisation but is taught on institute premises. The new diploma has recruited well. However, this provision has yet to be effectively integrated with other music courses, particularly with regard to its management and use of resources. BTEC first and national diploma courses in performing arts have been introduced in the last two years. These initiatives support the institute's claim that the curriculum has been successfully reviewed and is innovative.

37 Students benefit from a variety of teaching and learning methods, including an effective mix of theory and practice. This was evident in, for example, a harmony lesson during which students sang through music arrangements completed during a homework assignment. Inspectors did not agree with the institute that lessons are well planned. In many instances, lesson plans lacked appropriate detail. Teachers on performing arts courses encourage students to explore contemporary approaches to dance and drama. For example, in three projects students were required to research Mike Leigh's approach to characterisation, Tarantino's use of dialogue and African dance. Students have good opportunities to participate in timetabled and extra-curricular performances. The institute's extensive concert programme is largely managed by students. Further and higher education provision is effectively integrated. The opportunity for further education students to perform with students enrolled on degree programmes is a significant strength recognised by the institute.

38 There was a high pass rate for students who completed the first diploma in performing arts course in 1997. The institute's tradition of developing practical musicianship is evident in



# Curriculum Areas

the high level of instrumental skills exhibited by some students. Pass rates for the foundation diploma in music are good but on GCE A levels are below national averages. Overall, 60 per cent of music-related GCE A levels achieved by students were at grade D or lower in 1997. Student retention on the foundation diploma course has also been below 70 per cent for the last three years, although it has steadily improved. Despite these weaknesses, recognised by the institute, almost all who complete the course achieve a diploma and progress to higher education. The first cohort of music students on the diploma in contemporary and popular music have yet to complete their studies. Significant weaknesses in student attendance and in the submission of assignments are being successfully addressed. However, many students are behind in their work, an issue not identified by the institute in its self-assessment report.

39 Some accommodation for music and dance is inappropriate. It is particularly poor for students on the diploma in contemporary music who spend most of their time in huttled accommodation. In a recent survey, 69 per cent of these students regarded their accommodation as unsatisfactory. The institute is well aware of the lack of soundproofed rooms, but has yet to take effective action to remedy this. The current situation causes complaints from staff and

students. The multi-purpose gymnasium used for dance has poor acoustics. The music school has a large collection of instruments but does not have a rolling programme to replace expensive items such as pianos. Staff are well qualified; many have postgraduate qualifications and professional affiliations. The school has recently increased the number of teachers with vocational course expertise.

## Examples of students' achievements in music and performing arts, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
First diploma in performing arts	Retention (%)	*	*	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	89
Foundation diploma in music	Retention (%)	60	64	68
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100

Source: institute data

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Humanities

### Grade 3

**40 The inspection covered aspects of humanities courses for general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), GCE A level, GCE advanced supplementary (AS), and access to higher education courses. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- well-managed teaching and learning
- effective links between teaching and assessment practices
- good learning materials
- a wide range of course and subject combinations

#### Key weaknesses

- poor communication key skills
- poor retention and pass rates on some GCE A level and GCSE courses
- failure of some teaching to challenge more able students sufficiently

41 The school provides a wide range of GCE A level and GCSE courses. Timetables ensure that students from GNVQ and other courses across the institute can follow complementary courses. It is possible to combine courses from different GCE A level programmes. For example, a full-time student may take up two GCE A levels from the two-year courses on offer and, in addition, a one day a week subject which can be taken over two years. A course which prepares students for entry to the access to further and higher education programmes is run four times a year and allows students a choice of whether to attend one day or evening a week.

42 All courses inspected had schemes of work and appropriate course documentation. The

planning of the access programme was particularly detailed and effective. Aims and objectives of lessons were clearly stated and most lecturers monitored progress and reviewed learning objectives. Teaching was generally supported by a range of excellent and well-produced handouts. As acknowledged by the institute, a number of lesson plans and schemes of work are of poorer quality and give little detail of the teaching methods to be used or the resources needed. Students displayed a clear understanding of the purpose of assessment and its relevance to their studies.

43 The institute recognises that teachers have good working relationships with their students. Most teachers used a variety of teaching methods to sustain students' interest. However, in no class was there evidence of the more able students being sufficiently challenged. Class work failed to provide extra or more difficult tasks, and there was frequent evidence of students' lack of attention. Teachers waited for all students to finish and did not provide additional exercises for those students who had coped more competently and successfully with the original work. In GCE A/AS level and GCSE lessons, students showed poor levels of communication key skills. Many students were unable to understand or use essential vocabulary, and their written work contained frequent errors of spelling and punctuation. There is no overall monitoring of students' progress in communication key skills. These weaknesses are not identified in the self-assessment report.

44 Teaching accommodation is fit for purpose. There are sufficient library resources to support the programme; for example, specialist texts in history, literature, sociology, law and psychology are up to date and relevant to the curriculum.

45 Students' work is thoroughly and consistently marked and detailed written feedback is given to those students experiencing difficulty. Teaching takes account of assessment practices and techniques and effectively links

# Curriculum Areas

examination requirements to exercises, class work and essays. Inspectors agreed with the institute that some examination results are at or above the national average. Results on the GCE A level psychology and sociology were well above national averages in 1996 and 1997, grades A to E. However, retention and achievement on some GCE and GCSE subjects is poor; for example, retention on the GCE A level one-year sociology course for 1996-97 was 31 per cent. The performance of 16 to 18 year olds as compared with students aged over 19 is frequently below the national average.

## Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level French	Retention (%)	90	45	60
	Pass rate (%)	92	83	75
GCE A level sociology	Retention (%)	89	74	85
	Pass rate (%)	72	69	90
GCE A level psychology	Retention (%)	69	45	60
	Pass rate (%)	53	71	74
GCE A level English language and literature	Retention (%)	69	52	74
	Pass rate (%)	72	79	83
GCSE law	Retention (%)	69	67	71
	Pass rate (%)	36	55	50
GCSE sociology	Retention (%)	55	50	70
	Pass rate (%)	83	90	89
GCSE psychology	Retention (%)	86	73	66
	Pass rate (%)	69	59	38
GCSE English language	Retention (%)	51	57	55
	Pass rate (%)	52	71	68

Source: institute data

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

**46 Inspectors agreed with many of the institute's judgements on the strengths and weaknesses in its provision of support for students. They concluded, however, that the significance of some of the weaknesses was understated.**

#### Key strengths

- generally effective pre-course entry and guidance procedures
- comprehensive and well co-ordinated welfare services
- readily accessible and extensive careers information and guidance
- effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient overall co-ordination of support for students
- unevenness in the level and quality of tutorial support
- inadequate arrangements for monitoring and providing additional learning support in basic skills
- underused careers guidance facilities

47 The institute provides a comprehensive support service for students. However, there is no overall co-ordinated strategy for student support. Responsibility is shared between the managers of the guidance unit, welfare services, learning support and the heads of schools. The institute recognises the need to develop a more integrated approach to this aspect of provision.

48 There is a good range of attractive publicity material, including prospectuses and course leaflets. Students generally find them useful in providing initial information about the institute, although some complained that there was insufficient information on fees and other costs.

Staff in the well-resourced guidance centre provide an effective service, and have appropriate careers and educational guidance qualifications. In addition to work in the institute they provide guidance interviews for year 11 pupils in local schools. The institute's schools hold regular open days and applicant advice evenings supported by an events co-ordinator.

49 Inspectors agreed with the institute's assessment that induction of students is generally effective. However, in some areas insufficient attention was given to explaining the institute's overall services and facilities. An attractive and informative diary contains the charter, the equal opportunities policy and the complaints procedure. There are comprehensive course handbooks for most courses.

50 The provision of tutorial support is uneven. This weakness is identified clearly by the institute. In the past, tutorial support has concentrated on supporting and monitoring students' academic progress. In some curriculum areas this is well developed and effective but, in others, it is either unsystematic or does not exist. There is no institute-wide curriculum for pastoral support and personal development. Few opportunities are available for sharing good practice in tutorial support. Despite these shortcomings, most students found their personal tutors helpful.

51 Inspectors agreed that there are good levels of support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Since the last inspection the institute has developed a more effective framework for learning support. Additional learning support is provided by the institute's own staff and through additional specialists from outside the institute, such as educational psychologists and teachers of the deaf. Students feel well supported by staff in the learning support unit, the resources centre and the special education team. In the well-resourced learning support centre timetabled and 'drop-in'

# Cross-college Provision

facilities are well co-ordinated to provide teaching for communications and numeracy.

52 The institute acknowledges that the provision of additional learning support for students who need help with their basic skills needs to be better organised and resourced. All full-time students take an initial test to assess whether they need additional support in literacy or numeracy. Tests are marked centrally and results sent to personal tutors who are expected to encourage students to attend the learning support centre or to ensure that support is provided within the vocational area. The institute has no effective mechanism for identifying whether this support is provided and taken up by students.

53 The institute has a service level agreement with Essex Careers and Business Partnership. A careers adviser is available for consultation on four days each week at the Colchester centre and one day a week at Clacton. The take-up of individual interviews is low at both centres. Careers advisers are also available to work with tutor groups to run careers seminars, but this facility is not used effectively by all schools of study. The guidance centre has an extensive and up-to-date careers library and advertises suitable job vacancies.

54 Inspectors agreed with the institute's claim that students receive good levels of personal support. The welfare services team provides a comprehensive range of services at both campuses, including counselling, financial assistance, general welfare advice and an accommodation service. The team is well co-ordinated and regularly reviews its service. The application process for financial support is clear and managed fairly. An additional hardship fund supports students who do not qualify for assistance from the access fund. Students receive good levels of support from a specialist counselling service. The two institute counsellors are professionally qualified and receive appropriate external supervision. They have extensive contacts with welfare agencies in

the wider community. The students' union is active in seeking to improve leisure and social facilities for students. The student common room has been refurbished and the facilities extended to include television, video games and drinks machines. There is also a room set aside for quiet study and relaxation. A student liaison officer is jointly funded by the institute and the students' union and helps ensure good communication between students and the institute management. Students have representatives on most course teams.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**55 Inspectors agreed with the institute's assessment of the key strengths and weaknesses in resources. The resources section drew upon a number of subsidiary reports prepared by staff for libraries and learning resources, health and safety, technicians and personnel.**

#### **Key strengths**

- most accommodation fit for purpose with modern facilities and equipment
- well-equipped libraries, media and resource centres
- high investment in information learning technology
- effective use of workshop supervisors and technician instructors
- comprehensive accommodation strategy

#### **Weaknesses**

- low level of space utilisation at the Clacton site
- some areas inaccessible to wheelchair users
- the lack of sports and recreational facilities

# Cross-college Provision

56 A number of significant improvements have been made to the Colchester site since the last inspection. The accommodation is generally fit for purpose and well equipped. Some facilities and equipment have been upgraded: for example, there are improved staff work and common rooms, and improvements to the three-dimensional machine workshop areas. The nursery has improved toilets and a kitchen. The accommodation is well maintained and is generally tidy and clean. There are enough classrooms of an appropriate quality and many are well grouped in curriculum areas. The number of temporary huts, identified as poor accommodation in the previous inspection, has been reduced, although music and access students still use these facilities. The accommodation leased from the North East Essex Health Authority at Witham is used for occupational therapy courses. It is comfortably furnished, spacious and has a number of well-equipped specialist facilities. Inspectors agreed with the judgements on the quality of the institute's accommodation in the self-assessment report.

57 Inspectors agreed that the library, media and resource centres are a particular strength of the institute. The services offered through these centres are effectively co-ordinated through a single line manager. The Colchester library has 200 study spaces, double the median for the sector, and two small quiet rooms. There is a specialist music listening room. Books are plentiful and there is an extensive range of periodicals, tapes, videos and CD-ROM databases. Overall usage and the borrowing of stock is monitored through a computer cataloguing system. There are good purpose-built libraries at Witham and Clacton. The service is efficiently organised and maintains good security. Curriculum and site librarians liaise effectively to ensure that stock reflects the needs of students. The resource centre at the Colchester site is well used by approximately 300 students weekly and offers a good range of resources in numeracy and communication

skills. Not all teachers promote the use of this facility amongst their students. Specialist vocational resource centres are well developed for health and social care and construction. There are appropriately equipped media centres offering television and editing studios at Colchester and Clacton. Workshop supervisors and technician instructors help students to develop their practical skills. For example, a beauty therapy supervisor is responsible for the efficient management of the salons and supervises students while they are working independently.

58 Inspectors agreed that there has been a high level of investment in improving the quantity and upgrading the quality of computing facilities for students. Developments are supported by a users group and a well-established IT policy. Students have access for 12 hours daily to the computers in the resources centre and at weekends at Clacton. Art and design students have restricted times at which they can access specialist computers.

59 There have been some improvements to the student common room at the Colchester site and a number of improvements to snack bars on the main site. A quiet common room is currently underused. Students interviewed at the time of inspection were unaware of the improved social facilities available. The institute acknowledges that social, recreational and sports facilities are limited. Student residential accommodation at the Clacton site varies considerably in quality and some rooms are too small. Parts of the sites at Colchester and Clacton make it necessary for pedestrians to cross car-parks or roads. The institute recognises this as potentially hazardous.

60 In spite of some improvements through the provision of ground-floor toilets and ramps, wheelchair users cannot gain access to some areas of the institute. Inspectors concluded that the accommodation strategy contains an accurate analysis of areas for improvements. Most of the Colchester site and all of the

# Cross-college Provision

Witham area are accessible to all students. There have been some design and maintenance problems. The entrance to the toilet adjacent to the learning resource centre is blocked when the outer door is fully opened and some lifts have not been in full working order for long periods of time. Lifts at the Clacton site are not easily operated by wheelchair users and several parts of the site, including the library, have poor access for those with restricted mobility. There has been no recent survey of access to the accommodation but the institute discusses problems and proposed improvements with students.

61 The Clacton site is severely underused, as noted in the institute's self-assessment report. Use of general purpose rooms is 28 per cent at the Clacton campus compared with 58 per cent at the Colchester campus. For specialist rooms the figures are 34 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. A substantial part of the Clacton site consists of converted hotels. The institutes accommodation strategy identified a strategy for rationalising its accommodation and for concentrating higher education provision on the Colchester site.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**62 While in broad agreement with most of the judgements in the institute's self-assessment report, inspectors identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance.**

#### **Key strengths**

- clear commitment to continuous improvement
- well-established programme review and evaluation system
- effective system for course validation

- effective involvement by external representatives and staff in the self-assessment report

#### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient monitoring of action plans
- the lack of rigour in some aspects of the self-assessment process
- the lack of measurable targets
- the lack of clear, monitorable service standards in the charter
- the failure to link staff development and appraisal to corporate objectives

63 The institute expresses a commitment to continuous improvement in the mission statement, the strategic plan and through the recently established governors' quality assurance committee. Through this committee, governors evaluate the work of the corporation and students' achievements and assess quality assurance procedures. The action plan for quality assurance is clearly linked to corporate objectives identified in the strategic plan. To consolidate its work on self-assessment the institute ran a conference for staff in December 1997 on quality. In a recent survey, staff expressed their belief in the institute's commitment to continuous improvement. This strength is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

64 The review of academic programmes is the central element of the institute's quality assurance system. Annual monitoring reports, written by programme leaders to a standard format are produced for all courses. The quality assurance handbook also provides guidance on course committees and representation by students. Procedures are well understood and supported by staff. In the best practice, staff keep good records and are self-critical and there is good communication in course teams. Course leaders and managers are required to identify action points in response to issues arising from

# Cross-college Provision

the monitoring process. The institute acknowledges that action plans are not rigorously monitored to ensure that action has been taken.

65 Inspectors agreed with the institute that new courses are subject to a process of comprehensive internal validation. Course teams prepare detailed proposals which are considered by validation panels whose members include staff from other schools and appropriate external representatives. The approval procedure allows the institute to assess rigorously the quality of new course proposals before they are submitted to external validating bodies. Since June 1997, the Academic Standards Office has monitored that conditions and recommendations have been met.

66 In May 1997, the institute introduced a comprehensive approach to self-assessment. This strength was identified in the institute's self-assessment report. The self-assessment process drew on existing procedures and identified the need to collect more evidence from staff and through surveys of students' perception and observations of teaching and learning. All sections of the institute had produced self-assessment reports by July 1997. The process was effectively led by a steering group of staff representing all levels of the institute and a nominee from another Essex college. External representatives were invited to comment on the draft self-assessment report, and account was taken of their views. Staff have been kept well informed of developments through a self-assessment newsletter and briefing sessions.

67 Inspectors concluded that some aspects of the self-assessment process were not sufficiently rigorous. The institute acknowledged that not all reports were sufficiently self-critical, that a few were merely descriptive and that some managers had used the self-assessment format as a vehicle for complaints. Many observations of lessons were over graded and this had an impact on the final curriculum grades awarded. Insufficient account was taken of key

weaknesses when grading lessons, particularly when the observer was from the same school. For example, two art and design lessons were awarded high grades in spite of factors such as 50 per cent attendance in some lessons, ill-prepared students and inappropriate resources to support learning.

68 Inspectors agreed with the institute's recognition that there is little monitoring and evaluation of students' achievements. Although data on students' achievements are held on a central database, each school has manual records which give conflicting information. Within schools, the data held centrally are viewed as unreliable. Some tutors pay insufficient attention to detail in undertaking validation checks on central examinations data. The academic board receives programme review statistics produced by heads of school but these data frequently differ from those held centrally. Inspectors found that unreliable achievement data have reduced the institute's ability to review current performance rigorously and set realistic achievement targets.

69 Commitments in the student charter are not supported by clear service standards that can be monitored. The institute's grievance procedure is in the student diary and this also outlines the complaints procedures. Complaints procedures are not followed. There is no consistent monitoring of complaints in terms of response times or analysis of patterns. This was not clearly identified in the institute's self-assessment report.

70 There are separate well-documented appraisal systems for teaching and support staff. The appraisal system for teachers includes lesson observation by a chosen registered observer and student feedback. Appraisal is undertaken bi-annually and the main focus of the process is developmental. However, some schools of the institute have not completed appraisals since 1994. The appraisal scheme for support staff was introduced in 1995 and has been actively taken up. The staff



# Cross-college Provision

development budget is set at 1.5 per cent of staff costs. The institute acknowledges that the uptake of staff development is not clearly linked to the achievement of operational and strategic objectives. A staff training and development manager has been appointed with the responsibility of linking the annual training plan to the strategic plan.

## Governance

### Grade 2

**71 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the institute but also found some weaknesses not listed in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- governors' promotion of the work of the institute
- the range of skills and experience of board members
- procedures for assessing the board's own performance
- effective monitoring of the performance of the principal and senior staff
- effective clerking arrangements
- good decision-making procedures
- effective delegation of business to most committees

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of students' achievements
- lack of clear definition of role of link governors to the institute's schools
- no structured induction or continuous training for governors

72 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the institute is good. The board 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.

73 The business of the board is well managed. The secretary to the board is experienced and has the required status and independence to enable her to perform her duties effectively. Board and committee agendas are sent out in good time, supported by informative and well-structured papers and minutes are promptly prepared and distributed.

74 The board has approved standing orders to guide the conduct of its business which are regularly reviewed and updated. A code of conduct has also been adopted by the board. The register of interests, which is open to public scrutiny and updated annually, includes all governors, their immediate relatives and senior staff. It is currently being expanded to include staff with significant financial responsibilities.

75 Appropriate committee structures are in place, supported by clear terms of reference. The business of delegated governance is conducted largely through the finance and general purposes, personnel and audit committees. Members of the finance and general purposes committee review the most recent institute management accounts at each meeting. The audit committee does not routinely monitor management action on internal audit recommendations.

76 Individual governors devote a significant amount of time to ensure that they undertake their roles effectively, including attendance at an annual strategic planning event. Governors promote the work of the institute throughout the local community through their extensive external contacts. Members are keen to increase their knowledge of the work of the institute. The board has a link governor scheme which involves governors meeting with heads of schools, staff and students and reporting on their visits. All schools and some central

# Cross-college Provision

services have been visited. However, the role of the link board members is not clearly defined and this has led, in some instances, to board members becoming involved in day to day management issues. This issue was not identified in the institute's self-assessment report.

77 Governors take into account the institute's needs in determining board membership. A search committee has clear selection criteria, and has been successful in redressing the identified gender imbalance. Female membership has increased from one member to six in three years. Governors have a wide range of relevant skills and backgrounds. Members use their expertise in reaching decisions in committees. Governors commercial and business experience made a significant contribution to the development of the institute's personnel policies. Board meetings have always been quorate.

78 The board has a self-critical approach to its performance. The results of a comprehensive questionnaire form the basis of debate at an annual self-assessment event. This year's event included a review of achievements since the last self-assessment. The board has a code of conduct. The board monitors the performance of its senior staff through a well established and thorough appraisal system based on targets linked to the strategic plan.

79 Inspectors agreed with the institute that the corporation's monitoring of students' achievements is weak. Inspectors found no evidence of any current consideration of students' achievements, retention or destinations by the board. A quality assurance committee of the corporation has recently been established to address this weakness.

80 Governors acknowledged a need for structured induction and continuous governor development and training. This judgement was supported by inspectors.

## Management

### *Grade 3*

**81 Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the institute in the self-assessment report. However, a number of significant weaknesses found by inspectors were not included in the report.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a well-formulated strategic plan
- strong leadership from the senior management team
- monitoring of college finances by management
- a comprehensive and understandable committee structure
- extensive links with external bodies

#### **Weaknesses**

- insufficiently reliable data to inform management decisions
- the lack of corporate curriculum policies
- inconsistent target-setting between and within schools
- failure of organisation at school level to provide effective curriculum management
- the failure of the management information system to meet the needs of the institute

82 The senior management team comprises a recently appointed principal, deputy principal, two assistant principals responsible respectively for curriculum and quality, a director of personnel and administration, and a director of finance. The senior management team provides strong leadership, and has introduced strategies to promote greater rigour in the monitoring of action. The institute management group includes heads of school and support managers.

# Cross-college Provision

Recent changes to target-setting have provided a more direct link between personal and corporate targets. Senior managers have personal targets; their progress towards meeting these is regularly monitored and it forms the basis of their annual appraisal. However, some heads of school do not have targets that relate to corporate objectives. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

83 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the institute's financial management is good. The finance department is headed by a qualified accountant who is a member of the senior management team. Budget holders receive appropriately detailed monthly reports. They are also provided with a report of commitments. The management accounts, supported by detailed commentary, are produced to a timetable which integrates with finance and general purpose committee and corporation meetings. The senior management team considers the management accounts as a formal agenda item once a month at their meetings. The self-assessment report does not give sufficient weight to the high quality of the information available to support financial management.

84 The institute has, unusually for the sector, established an in-house internal audit service, provided by a qualified and experienced accountant. The internal audit service has maintained independence and effective quality control although there are weaknesses in planning and reporting.

85 The institute recognises that the revised senior management structure provides an effective framework of reporting and control which is understood within the institute. There is an appropriate committee system. The effectiveness of committees has been improved by more specific agendas and the monitoring of outcomes.

86 The absence of key policies on curriculum activities such as tutorials, has resulted in a

wide variety of practices and standards, for example, in the management of tutorials. The ineffective co-ordination of the curriculum was reported in the 1995 inspection. A curriculum development unit was established to encourage an institute wide approach to new initiatives. New projects have fostered some co-operative working between schools and some improved practice. However, their effectiveness has been limited by the lack of clear policy frameworks. Also, there is a lack of clarity about middle management structures particularly between and within the schools. Inspectors did not agree with the institute's claim that it has clear policies and procedures to support curriculum delivery.

87 A comprehensive strategic plan has been produced. The plan incorporates the findings of a business planning group which was established to consider a range of future options within the context of the communities the institute serves. The plan has been widely circulated to staff and is well understood. Operational plans have also been produced by each school or department. The institute acknowledges that the quality of these plans is variable and that they do not all show clear links with the corporate plan.

88 The institute has effective links with a wide range of external organisations and local secondary schools. These have provided market intelligence which has informed strategic and operational plans. Relationships with Essex TEC are productive and have resulted in a number of joint ventures. Collaborative arrangements exist with organisations such as local authorities, Business Link, employers, careers and guidance services. These organisations have supported the institute in a variety of ways, for example, through work placements and in the development of new courses and bids for external funding.

89 The management information system does not meet the information needs of the institute. The institute acknowledges that students'

# Cross-college Provision

achievement and retention data are not reliable and are not available when needed.

Performance standards against which to measure progress are yet to be introduced and this has hindered decision-making by middle managers. Managers lack confidence in the reliability of data and produce their own local systems. Inspectors found it difficult to reconcile data held within the schools with those held on the central system. Following consultation with managers to identify user needs, the institute has developed an information systems strategy which has yet to be implemented.

## Conclusions

90 Although self-assessment is a new addition to the institute's quality assurance system, inspectors found the self-assessment report detailed and evaluative, and its logical structure and clear presentation provided a useful basis for carrying out the inspection. Some weaknesses and a few strengths in the self-assessment report were understated. Conversely, inspectors considered that the significance of some strengths, particularly in relation to teaching and learning, were overestimated. Inspectors concluded that the institute had underestimated its weaknesses in grading two of its curriculum areas, and three aspects of its cross-college provision.

91 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)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	33
19-24 years	23
25+ years	44
Not known	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	12
Intermediate	32
Advanced	36
Higher education	20
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	248	581	8
Construction	261	972	12
Engineering	300	1,788	19
Business	415	1,487	18
Hotel and catering	364	264	6
Health and community care	578	1,061	15
Art and design	466	178	6
Humanities	229	1,194	13
Basic education	129	193	3
Total	2,990	7,718	100

*Source: college data*

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	272	39	19	330
Supporting direct learning contact	65	12	1	78
Other support	127	47	9	183
Total	464	98	29	591

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£17,791,000	£18,308,000	£8,286,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£18.47	£17.84	£18.77
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	69%	67%
Achievement of funding target	105%	108%	104%
Diversity of income	44%	39%	40%
Operating surplus	-£606,000	-£493,000	-£117,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

\*data not available

### Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	186	167	192
	Average point score per entry	3.0	3.4	3.4
	Position in tables	bottom third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	320	345	274
	Percentage achieving qualification	84%	77%	60%
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	267	219
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	46%	51%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	bottom 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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