

# The Cooperative College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1999-00

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 104 college inspections

## 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 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which 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

The Cooperative College is a long-term residential college situated in extensive grounds near Loughborough. The mission focuses on potential students who have not followed an educational programme since leaving school and encourages co-operative values in all college activities. Of the college's income, 6% is derived from the one programme which is funded by FEFC, the accelerated access programme. Until six months before the inspection, little progress had been made in addressing weaknesses identified in the previous report. In the summer of 1999 the college started a major review of its governance arrangements. In October 1999 a principal was appointed, who took up post in January 2000 and subsequently reviewed the senior staffing structure. Considerable progress has been made as a result of the review, but it is too soon

to assess the effectiveness of many of the measures taken. Issues relating to teaching and learning, quality assurance and support for students had not been adequately addressed by the time of inspection. The college should: continue to develop and implement improvements in governance and management; review its quality assurance arrangements and include targets and performance indicators for all of its services; improve the learning experience of students; improve the tutorial programme; and develop a strategic plan that includes all aspects of the college's services.

The grade awarded as a result of the inspection is given below.

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
FEFC-funded provision	4

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 The Cooperative College is one of five long-term residential colleges in England designated, under the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, as eligible to receive funding from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college was established in 1919 and has been based at Stanford Hall, Loughborough, since 1945. The main college building, situated in extensive grounds, is a starred grade II listed building and includes a theatre.

2 The Cooperative College is a registered educational charity. Its corporate trustee is the Co-operative Union Limited. The college's governing body is known as the board of management. The college is the education arm of the Co-operative Union, which is the trade association for co-operative enterprises in the United Kingdom. The college serves all forms of co-operative organisation, from the largest, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, to micro co-operatives.

3 The college's mission continues to focus on provision for adults who have no formal educational qualifications and, many of whom have not followed an educational programme since leaving school. The college aims to emphasise co-operative values and principles in all its activities. Students are recruited nationally, many through contacts in the co-operative movement and through appropriate publications. The programme inspected by the FEFC, the accelerated access programme, accounts for 6% of the college's funding.

4 The accelerated access programme is validated by the National Open College Network

(NOCN). The programme runs for 23 weeks and there are two courses each year, one starting in July and the other in January. The target number for each group is 25 students. There is a choice of courses, social science or business. Students choose five subjects from a range of 10. There is a core of key skills; communication, working with others, mathematics and computing.

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in February 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information provided about the college by other FEFC directorates. The college's data on students' achievements for the three years 1997 to 1999 were checked against class registers and results issued by examining bodies. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the scope of the assessment. The inspection was carried out by four inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 13 days. Inspectors observed nine lessons. They examined students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, support staff and students.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 22% were good and 33% were less than satisfactory. This is substantially lower than the profile of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

# Context

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Accelerated access programme	0	2	4	2	1	9
Total (No.)	0	2	4	2	1	9
Total (%)	0	22	45	22	11	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
The Cooperative College	10.8	86
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

# Curriculum Provision

## Curriculum Provision

### *Accelerated Access Programme*

**8 Inspectors agreed with a few of the strengths in the self-assessment report and identified significant additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good communication between teachers and students
- good progression rates to higher education

#### Weaknesses

- some poor teaching
- an underdeveloped approach to inclusive learning
- ineffective arrangements to ensure adequate standards of students' work
- the poor management of programmes
- shortcomings in the assessment and development of key skills

9 Weaknesses in teaching and learning which were identified in the last inspection report have not been effectively addressed. The self-assessment report identifies as a strength the wide range of learning methods which students experience. Inspectors did not agree. Although teachers do use a variety of methods, many of these are inappropriate in the context of the students' studies. In good lessons, teachers plan ahead appropriately, provide students with up-to-date information and draw on their own and their students' experience to illustrate issues. However, it is more usual for teachers to fail to plan the development of their students' work carefully. They are more concerned to organise the subject matter that they want to cover in lessons than to focus on how and what they want their students to learn.

10 There is some poor teaching. Teachers

often make little effort to check that students have understood the work covered; they allow a few individuals to dominate discussion and question and answer sessions. In one lesson, students had been given a handout in advance of the lesson. The teacher made no effort to check that individual students understood the concepts in the handout. In good lessons, teachers make appropriate use of the work which students have been set beforehand and give clear guidance on how they can take full advantage of resources available in the college to continue and complete their work. However, this approach is not common practice.

Teachers miss some opportunities to build on the work which students may have done prior to the lesson. Topics are frequently covered in a brief and superficial way. Students are allowed to express views without justifying them or providing supporting evidence. Teachers fail to strike a balance between the imperative of covering a broad programme of study in less than half a year and giving adequate coverage to topics in the depth which an access to higher education programme requires.

11 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there has been little progress in developing an awareness of approaches to inclusive learning amongst staff. Teachers are more than willing to give additional time to help students, but in their approach to teaching there is little evidence of differentiation. This weakness which was identified in the last inspection report, shows that some teachers still take insufficient account of students' different abilities. In some lessons teaching directed at the whole class did not effectively provide for students' different levels of attainment or potential in the subject. There is provision for students to develop many key skills. However, the particular opportunities which a residential context can provide for developing the key skill of working with others, are neither effectively planned nor assessed.



# Curriculum Provision

12 College statistics show that most students who enrol on the access course complete their programmes successfully. However, the results reveal fluctuations in retention and achievement rates both from year to year and between the January and July cohorts. There is no clear pattern. Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment report that the trend indicates continuous improvement. Records are kept of the attainment of individual students in additional key skills but are not systematically analysed for each student cohort. College data show that around 70% of the students who successfully complete the course progress to higher education. The self-assessment report acknowledges the difficulty of ensuring that students do not submit work which has been copied directly from other sources. Students sometimes failed to make appropriate reference to the sources that had been used or to compile bibliographies. Teachers in these circumstances were too generous in giving them the benefit of the doubt. They assessed such work at a higher level than the content justified. Course minutes record a reluctance on the part

of teachers to double mark students' work as such a practice might be seen as casting a slight on the expertise of colleagues.

13 Team meetings mainly focus on administration and are well recorded. Opportunities are not taken to share good practice or to develop a collaborative approach to curriculum management. Teachers largely work in isolation from each other. Schemes of work and lessons plans are produced to different formats. Some are simply a list of activities; some have learning objectives; others have no indication of any sequence or timing of the tasks that have been planned for the lessons. Opportunities are missed to consolidate students' understanding of the links between subjects.

14 Most staff teaching on the course are part time and bring with them a wealth of experience. However, the college has been slow to face up to the development needs of all teachers as a means of resolving the weaknesses in teaching and learning which were highlighted in the last report.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in the accelerated access programme, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Certificate in policy studies (January to June cohort)	3	Number of starters	26	22	25
		Retention (%)	88	91	88
		Achievement (%)	70	95	86
Certificate in policy studies (July to December cohort)	3	Number of starters	17	16	13
		Retention (%)	88	75	62
		Achievement (%)	80	100	75

Source: college

# Cross-college Provision

15 The inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, there was a substantial exaggeration of some strengths and underestimation of some weaknesses.

## Key strengths

- a strong commitment to the college's mission by the staff and the management board
- good attention to the domestic needs of residential students
- improvement in the college's financial position since 1996

## Weaknesses

- the absence of strategic or operational plans
- incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- an underdeveloped tutorial system
- inadequate monitoring by governors of the college's finances
- inadequate arrangements for the audit committee and internal audit
- the inadequate scope of budgeting and financial forecasting information

16 Students receive good information about a course prior to application and through the admission process. As identified in the last inspection report, over 20% of students who accept places withdraw before enrolment. The college has recently reintroduced an induction week, after a break of four years. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the induction is a strength. The week is well planned and introduces students to the values of the co-operative movement. The programme strikes a good balance between personal and social development, study skills and an introduction to the academic content of the course. There was no evaluation at the end of

induction week. Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment report that the induction programme is regularly reviewed and improved as a result of student feedback. The previous inspection report drew attention to the lack of arrangements for assessing and accrediting students' prior learning. With some exceptions, this is still the case. All students take an initial basic skills assessment test. Tutors are not given detailed results. They receive a sheet with a superficial summary comment for each student which does not provide an adequate basis for planning a programme of individual support. Extra help is available on an informal basis; it is not planned. Progress is not reviewed and evaluated. Students with dyslexia are able to borrow appropriate equipment.

17 Students find personal tutors welcoming and responsive and value the support which they offer. Each tutor is responsible for four or five students. There is no formal tutorial programme nor any policy to develop tutors' expertise. Practice varies as does the level of knowledge that tutors bring to the role. Some tutors are part time and not available throughout the week. Full-time staff are available if required. Some tutors are not fully aware of how to obtain other support services, for example careers or counselling. Staff development events on tutoring have been sporadic and few part-time staff have been able to attend. Opportunities to question and evaluate tutorial practice, arising from tutors' meetings, are often missed. Students have one interview with an external careers adviser during their course, but the timing is not always appropriate for individual students. Students can use a confidential freefone counselling service. There are no systems for evaluating the effectiveness of either of these services.

18 Students appreciate the opportunities offered to them by a residential course for a period of study away from other pressures and domestic responsibilities. They feel the course enables them to develop personally as well as

# Cross-college Provision

academically. Weekly meetings are held with academic and residential staff who listen and respond to students' questions and concerns. Students appreciate this arrangement. The course handbook contains an extensive equal opportunities policy. Since the last inspection, the college has made significant progress in improving physical access for students with disabilities, responding effectively to dietary needs and improving site security. No woman duty manager is available after 20.00 hours. The college has plans to address this shortcoming.

19 The buildings are attractive, clean and well maintained. Teaching areas are of adequate size and well equipped with whiteboard, flipchart, overhead projector and video playing facilities. Student social areas include a bar, two lounges, a pool room and a games room. There is also a swimming pool and a theatre with an elevating Wurlitzer organ. Student bedrooms are simple and adequately equipped. Fifteen bedrooms have recently been upgraded to a higher standard of fitting and furnishing, and there is a plan to upgrade the others. Four bedrooms offer facilities for students with physical disabilities. Signage around the whole site is poor; there is a confusing variety of styles and signs. Students appreciate the responsiveness of the residential staff, who recognise that for the time of residence the college is their home.

20 The head of resources is a chartered librarian and a tutor on the accelerated access programme. Students find the resources staff helpful and approachable. The resources provision consists of a library, an information technology (IT) area and a silent study area. The library is open for 24 hours a day and the IT facilities are available 14 hours a day. The provision of periodicals is good and there is a small collection of CD-ROMs. Only two teachers have requested that resources staff prepare subject specific resource boxes. Stock and budget ratios for each full-time equivalent student exceed norms in the sector, but library

book resourcing is unsatisfactory. There is no policy for replacing or upgrading the bookstock, where it is inadequate. In several curriculum areas the stock is dated. Student evaluations have drawn attention to the unhelpful layout in the library and the shortcomings of the bookstock. The resources stock management system is inadequate. Only 25% of stock is on a computerised catalogue and stock issues are not monitored or evaluated. These weaknesses in the management of resources are not recognised in the self-assessment report. The extensive archive of the co-operative movement is housed in the silent study area. Students find this archive of considerable value in studying social history, and developing their own research skills with original materials. IT resources are good. The IT room contains 14 multimedia computers. Five of these have Internet and electronic mail access. Currently, the Internet is not available at weekends. The college has plans to address this issue as the result of a recent student meeting.

21 Management responsibility for quality assurance has recently changed and new arrangements are planned. The college does not have a quality assurance policy. Arrangements for reporting on standards and performance are inadequate. The college has a quality assurance committee. It does not include any governors from the board of management. The board has a named governor with a quality assurance remit. The board of management has not established its own quality and standards committee. The quality assurance committee has not agreed standards. A significant weakness, the continuing lack of performance indicators for key areas of activity, is partly recognised in the college's self-assessment. A board of learning, with functions similar to an academic board, meets quarterly to receive reports from the quality assurance committee. The committee reports to the management board, but there is no evidence in its minutes of any action being taken. There

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are no agreed service standards for support areas such as domestic services and few established procedures for monitoring quality of provision in these areas.

22 Teachers collect feedback from students towards the end of each course through the use of a questionnaire. Inspectors agreed with this strength identified in the self-assessment report. The views of students are central to the college's evaluation of the success of the course. A course committee, comprising teachers and two student representatives, meets two or three times during each course. Feedback from students is analysed by the course manager. The detailed findings are not reported to the board of learning. Tutors are not required to evaluate the course and do not agree success criteria for it. The external assessors provide a useful focus for review at the end of each course, but the college places an over-reliance on the value of this review for the purpose of assuring quality. Targets for retention and achievement are not set. The arrangements for course review and evaluation are not effective. The college has a charter. It is included in the students' course handbook and contains a description of students' rights and responsibilities, and a procedure for registering complaints. The college does not keep a central log of complaints by students and does not report the number or the nature of complaints to the board of management.

23 The college produced its first self-assessment report in 1998, within the framework described in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. This report was updated in 1999 and January 2000. The self-assessment process was co-ordinated by managers and included contributions from governors and many of the full-time staff involved in the FEFC-funded provision. Part-time staff and those not in management posts were less involved. As part of the process, lessons were graded and feedback given to teachers. There was an analysis of action since

the last inspection. The grades awarded by the college in the self-assessment report do not give sufficient weight to weaknesses and overestimate strengths.

24 The college has an extensive professional development programme. The plan is costed and teachers and support staff engage in a range of activities which include equal opportunities and health and safety. Some teachers have recently completed their teaching certificates. The programme is based on self-identification of training needs. Not all teachers identified a need to update teaching techniques. Training programmes have not focused sufficiently on weaknesses in teaching, learning and tutoring that were identified in the last inspection report. Peer appraisal was introduced three years ago but is still not fully established. No managers or teachers have been appraised during the last year. The college has been working towards the Investor in People standard for the last five years.

25 Under the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, The Cooperative College is defined as a designated college. It is established by a trust deed and registered by the charity commissioners under the *Charities Act 1993*. Its corporate trustee is the Co-operative Union Ltd. The board of management, the college's governing body, recently commissioned a review of its instrument and articles, after considering the requirements of the FEFC revised instrument of government and financial memorandum. This review has coincided with a far-reaching review by the trustee of its own operations. The review aimed to strengthen joint working between board and trustee to ensure that the revised procedures are in line with the principles and values of the trustee. Much progress has been made, but the process had not been completed at the time of the inspection.

26 The FEFC audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance is weak. The board of management has not conducted its business in accordance

# Cross-college Provision

with the instrument and articles of government. It does not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. There has been a substantial change in the membership of the board of management over the past six months, including a change of chair. There are currently 11 members and they are appointed by the trustee. Members bring to the board an extensive range of experience in business, and the voluntary and academic sectors. They fall into two broad categories: those involved with the co-operative movement and those involved with further or higher education. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of the changes to the membership of the board. The two standing committees, the audit committee and the remuneration and employment committee now have revised terms of reference as well as changed membership. They have not yet met. The professional relationship between the governors and the college senior staff is good. The board has recently completed its register of interests. The newly introduced policies and procedures for governance incorporate the Nolan principles. Current members have made declarations of eligibility. Standing orders and financial regulations covering the conduct of college business have been recently adopted. An independent clerk has recently been appointed. The chief executive had previously carried out that function.

27 The FEFC inspection in 1997 highlighted significant weaknesses in the college's governance. In November 1999, the FEFC's audit service conducted a focus review, which reported that serious weaknesses in the college's arrangements for financial management were still evident. In January 1999 the audit service presented the college with a draft report making recommendations for correction. In February 2000 the college supplied details of the measures it had taken, or proposed to take, to correct the weaknesses that had been identified. The relevance of the

college's responses is generally sound. However, at the time of the inspection it was too early to evaluate the operation of key aspects of these developments in practice.

28 The board did not ensure that the work of the college was being directed by a current strategic plan, nor did it approve annual operating statements. There are no performance indicators or targets to monitor. The audit committee met twice in 1999 and did not oversee the establishment of adequate internal audit arrangements as required by the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The arrangements made during the absence of the former principal were not appropriate. There was no training for governors, based on identified needs, nor a formal governors' induction. Some of these weaknesses are recognised in the self-assessment report. However, auditors found the college's judgement that the governors' role in strategic planning was a strength to be overstated. Also overstated was the judgement that the board monitored the college's finances adequately. In the year prior to inspection the financial information received by the board was neither timely nor sufficiently comprehensive. Progress reports on the college finances were not considered until seven months into the college's financial year. The college and the board had not agreed financial policy indicators covering issues such as solvency.

29 A new chief executive started in post from the 1 January 2000. The college carried out a restructuring of the senior staff two weeks before the inspection. Five newly created development posts were vacant at the time of the inspection. The senior staff have clear lines of responsibility that reflect the diverse nature of the college activities. Remits of college committees have been revised and include clear terms of reference. It is too soon to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report, that staff and students find



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communications within the college reflect a commitment to co-operative values of openness. Over the past few months seminars and discussions have been held with staff across the college to develop and disseminate the fundamental values of the college. Staff and students are aware of the mission and understand its significance. All sections of the college have regular team meetings and there is a college newsletter for staff and students. Most staff have access to electronic mail.

30 The college's strategic business plan has not been revised or updated since 1997 and there are no annual operating plans. There is no formal marketing strategy to address the consistent underachievement of recruitment targets on the accelerated access programme. Neither the health and safety committee minutes nor a health and safety report have been provided for the governing body. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy is not monitored. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the management information system is underdeveloped, and does not provide an adequate basis on which to plan and monitor. The college is addressing this issue.

31 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college has agreed new arrangements with the trustee which transfer key responsibilities for financial management from the trustee to the college. Management action has recovered the college's financial position from deficit in the years prior to 1996 to the achievement of annual surpluses since then. The college faces considerable financial risks associated with its operations. A risk and sensitivity analysis has been prepared but lacks sufficient detail on the financial consequences of various scenarios and there are no formal contingency plans. The form and content of management reports have recently been improved, but significant deficiencies

remain. There are no financial forecasts beyond the 2000 year-end and the scope of the cashflow reports is inadequate. College managers have not yet set or monitored specific financial policy targets, other than budgets. In 1999, the progress reports on the college's finances were not presented to the senior management team until seven months into the financial year.

32 The college has developed a wide range of partnerships, many of which are linked to initiatives within the co-operative movement. It is also a member of the local Lifelong Learning Partnership. As part of the commitment to widening participation, the college is currently involved in developing a range of projects. One is looking at agricultural co-operatives in areas of rural deprivation, another at the social economy in London and another at social entrepreneurship in the Scottish borders. It is too early to determine their impact on the access programme.

## Conclusions

33 The comprehensive and evaluative nature of the self-assessment report proved useful in planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with some strengths and weaknesses, but found that the college overestimated the strengths and underestimated the significance of many of its weaknesses. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses. They found the report overgenerous in its comments on teaching and learning, on aspects of quality, student support, management and governance. The update of the report completed in January 2000 did not explain how the college had addressed weaknesses identified in the earlier report. Some of these had not been addressed. The inspection team did not agree with the grade proposed by the college and awarded a lower grade.

34 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.



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