

Cordwainers College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99

THE
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COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	–

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

Cordwainers College ***Greater London Region***

Inspected May 1999

Cordwainers College is a small specialist designated college in the London borough of Hackney. It has an international reputation for its leather work and footwear design courses. It offers courses in two of the 10 FEFC programme areas. The college is a registered charity incorporated under the *Companies Act*. It is generously supported through the commitment of its governing body, the Cordwainers College Association Limited, and by related industries through its trade and industry advisory committee. The college has experienced difficulties since 1998 when it lost nearly all its senior managers and some key members of academic staff through resignations and redundancies. Governors took decisive action in appointing an experienced acting principal who is contracted to correct a poor financial position. A new principal is to be appointed by January 2000. Inspectors recognise that the college's self-assessment was produced at an inauspicious time in the college's otherwise extensive and stable history. The college made some realistic and self-critical judgements about its provision. Inspectors concluded that there are many additional weaknesses in the structure and operation of the college which were not recognised. In particular, there are significant weaknesses in quality assurance. The college has not undertaken lesson observation to identify weaknesses in teaching and learning.

There is confusion over the mission and the strategic plan is no longer relevant. The interim nature of management arrangements has a negative effect on both operational planning and on management of the curriculum. Students' achievements and retention on some courses are below average. The learning environment is generally poor.

The college has strengths in its specialist staff expertise, in some documentation, in some verification procedures, in some of its resources, in marketing, and in its reputation and links with industry. The college should: improve its teaching and learning strategies; re-establish its quality assurance policy and develop an operational framework which extends quality assurance to all college functions; review its strategic planning process; establish a policy for punctuality and attendance; develop and establish the setting and achievement of targets; develop the reporting and use of performance indicators and benchmarks to review students' retention and achievements; continue the development of its learning support services; review its accommodation strategy, including its plans for maintenance and refurbishment; improve its IT provision and increase its use in the curriculum. The association should consider its membership in relation to its mission, and arrange for the regular and formal review of the college's academic performance and policies.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Saddlery	3	Support for students	3
Footwear and accessories	3	General resources	4
Art and design	3	Quality assurance	5
		Governance	3
		Management	4

The College and its Mission

1 Cordwainers College is a small, designated specialist college situated in the London borough of Hackney. It was established in 1887 as a leather trades school and adapted, as the first school of its kind in the world, to provide technical training for the shoe manufacturing industry. The college is a registered charity incorporated under the *Companies Act*. Its governors, the Cordwainers College Association Limited, are drawn mainly from the leather-related livery companies and the leather industry. The college enjoys a high national and international reputation for its specialist leather work courses and has strong links with the footwear and fashion industries both in the United Kingdom and overseas. The college's first trade advisory committee was formed in 1896. The current advisory committee which is active in its support of the college, includes representatives from leading companies, and independent designers and retailers, associated with leather goods, saddlery and footwear.

2 The college has been at the present site since 1946. In recent years it has developed and diversified its curriculum programme to provide further and higher education courses in footwear, fashion accessories, saddlery and art and design. All the college's further education courses fall within the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme area for art, design and performing arts or, to a lesser extent, in the programme area for engineering. The college has links with City University, which validates an undergraduate course. The college has begun to establish worldwide educational links with other institutions to offer training in related subjects. It has links with seven universities in the United States of America through a biennial semester programme. In addition, Cordwainers College services the delivery of the footwear and accessories options which are part of the menswear/women's wear fashion MA programme offered by the Royal College of Art.

3 The college recruits locally from Hackney and surrounding boroughs as well as nationally and internationally to its specialist courses. The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group of institutions which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. The profile of students shows that 80% of students are aged 19 or over and of these 45% of students are aged 25 and over.

4 Since the last inspection, some significant changes have been made in the distribution of the college's work by level. Overall enrolments have increased by 12% against enrolments in 1994-95. Provision of higher education as a part of the whole has increased by 9% and enrolments to non-schedule 2 work have increased from 8% to 18% of the total student population. Enrolments to courses at national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 1 to 3 have declined from 62% to 43% of the total student population.

5 The FEFC now provides less than half of the college's total income, but is the college's single main source of funding. Tuition fees are a significant element of college income since a fifth of the full-time students are from outside the European Union. The contribution from the Higher Education Funding Council for England has increased significantly. Additional financial and other support comes from the Cordwainers Company, other relevant livery companies and associated industries and businesses. Cordwainers College is also involved in a number of European projects aided by the designation of the borough of Hackney as part of a European objective 2 area.

6 The mission of the college is to maintain and develop its role as a world centre for education, training, research and consultancy in its specialist areas. It also seeks to preserve the highest standards of traditional craft skills and to play an active role in the development of new products, processes, techniques and services to meet the changing needs of its future clients.

Context

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 10 May 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the self-assessment report and considered information from other directorates of the FEFC. The college's individualised student record (ISR) data for 1996, 1997 and 1998 were used to compile the tables in the curriculum area reports. The inspection was carried out by six inspectors and an auditor for a total of 28 working days. They observed 24 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff, student groups and representatives from the British Footwear Association, the Education Business Partnership Islington, and the college's Trade and Industry Advisory Committee.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 24 lessons inspected, 38% were judged to be good, but none outstanding, and 8% were judged to be less than satisfactory. This profile compares with the average of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. The highest attendance level, 77%, was in saddlery classes and the lowest, 55%, in footwear and accessories classes.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	0	3	0	0	0	3
Other vocational	0	6	13	2	0	21
Total (No.)	0	9	13	2	0	24
Total (%)	0	38	54	8	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Cordwainers College	11.0	65
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Saddlery

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed six lessons. They included most of the college's courses in saddlery which cover bridle, harness and saddle making, tack repairs and lorinery (the metal parts associated with harness and saddlery). Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good retention and examination pass rates
- students' attainment of good craft skills
- good progression to employment
- staff with a high level of technical expertise

Weaknesses

- declining recruitment rates
- poorly organised and incomplete course documentation
- some poor classroom management
- poor punctuality and irregular attendance in some lessons
- few opportunities for work placement

11 Students' qualification aims in their first year of studies are the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) certificate in saddlery and the loriners intermediate certificate. In their second year, students take the C&G advanced certificate in saddlery and the loriners senior certificate examination. Students also have the opportunity to submit work for assessment by the Worshipful Company of Saddlers as part of the National Skills Assessment scheme.

12 A new course leader is having to address many issues as a consequence of significant changes in staffing. The number of students

following courses in this area has declined significantly. Students' files are poorly organised and information on students' achievements is incomplete. There are few records of course team meetings. This has made it difficult for the course leader to monitor students' achievements. Inspectors agreed that the judgements in the college's self-assessment report are realistic about the poor quality of some course documentation and the lack of rigour of course review and evaluation.

13 Most teaching is satisfactory. In practical lessons, teachers give clear demonstrations and provide close supervision of students' work. Students respect the professionalism and expertise of their teachers. The teaching is purposeful and students know what is expected of them. Students are able to work individually on practical activities and carry out their work competently and safely. Students often assist each other with their set tasks. Those who attend regularly are highly motivated and develop good, relevant, craft skills. In general, students' class work is of an appropriate standard. Teachers make good reference to industrial practice. In some lessons, teachers fail to plan the work effectively and have poor classroom management. Students' attendance is not monitored systematically and teachers do not respond effectively to students' poor punctuality. Schemes of work are minimal and are not accompanied by lesson plans. Teachers make little use of visual displays to encourage students' learning. Only a minority of students have their learning abilities or needs identified and met. Because of low recruitment, students working at different levels are frequently combined into the same class. Some teachers do not cope well with students of different ability in the same lesson.

14 Teachers do not have a consistent standard for assignment briefs and, in some cases, do not provide clear assessment criteria. In assessing students' work they do not always apply the same standards. Teachers mark students' work

Curriculum Areas

accurately but some of their written comments are not detailed enough to help students to improve their work. The course leader has a clear understanding of the need to improve the quality of the students' experiences and is encouraging students to acquire both traditional and modern skills. This is useful in the workplace and is welcomed by employers. The college is also developing productive links with a variety of employers. In the past there have been few opportunities for work placements in this subject area.

15 Examination pass rates and retention are generally good and inspectors agreed with the college's identification of them as a strength in its self-assessment report. Pass rates for the C&G advanced certificate in 1998 showed an increase on those in 1996. Pass rates for the C&G certificate increased in 1997 over those in 1996, but dropped in 1998. Maximum retention

has been achieved on the advanced certificate for the last three years. However, some students' attendance is poor. Many students have difficulty attending scheduled classes because of work commitments. Students have won prizes in a number of national competitions. Those students who enter for the Worshipful Company of Saddlers skills tests are usually successful. A high proportion of students find work in the industry.

16 Teachers have good vocational qualifications and demonstrate a thorough knowledge and understanding of their subject. The self-assessment report identified a need for staff to acquire teaching qualifications. Inspectors agreed with this. Most workshop equipment is old but suitable for its purpose. Workshops are appropriately organised but are in poor decorative order and provide a poor learning environment for students.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in saddlery, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G rural saddlery certificate	1	Expected completions	16	24	13
		Retention (%)	100	92	92
		Achievement (%)	50	91	83
C&G rural saddlery advanced certificate	2	Expected completions	26	16	21
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	85	88	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Footwear and Accessories

Grade 3

17 Inspectors observed eight lessons covering part-time and full-time further education courses in footwear, accessories and leather goods. Inspectors agreed with many judgements in the self-assessment report but identified other strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- excellent links with industry
- benefit for students from working alongside advanced level students
- good specialist machinery and equipment
- a high level of specialist staff expertise

Weaknesses

- poor attendance and punctuality
- ineffective course planning and monitoring of students' progress
- some poorly-managed lessons
- some dull accommodation in poor condition

18 The college offers full-time and part-time courses in footwear and accessories. Other part-time courses are available in related subjects such as millinery, pattern cutting for footwear, and professional practice for designers. Most courses are linked to industry, though some are non-certificated. Over the last three years, recruitment has been good to both the national diploma and the C&G footwear courses. In the current academic year, recruitment to the national diploma has declined. A range of related higher education courses provides good progression opportunities. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that the college has excellent links with local and national

industry. These links inform curriculum developments and have resulted in donations of specialist machinery and sponsorship.

19 Students benefit from sharing specialist facilities with advanced level students. In most lessons, students are responsive, well motivated and work purposefully. Students develop competence in practical studies and receive good advice and support from expert staff. Students discuss their individual technical problems with teachers who give clear instructions on the processes they should follow. In a good lesson, held in a design development resource centre, the teacher varied the activities effectively to enable students to work on a wide range of tasks which included two-dimensional design work, surface decoration for leather, and the production of working drawings, and presentation sheets. Teachers frequently check students' progress to see that students understand what is expected of them. However, some lessons are poorly managed. Inspectors noted that teachers made little or no comment on students' poor attendance and punctuality which they observed in the majority of lessons. These weaknesses were not identified by the college in its self-assessment.

20 Teachers do not include specific assessment criteria for specialist and key skills in their assignment briefs. This does not correspond to awarding body guidelines. There are insufficient formal, interim assessments for extended assignments. Teachers do not provide sufficient formal written feedback. There are many omissions in the sheets used to record the results of assessments and students were unclear about their achievement for some projects. Inspectors were not able to support the finding in the college's self-assessment that assessment records are up to date and that students' progress is monitored and recorded.

21 Students achieve appropriate standards of work. In 1997-98, all students, who completed their studies and remained in the United Kingdom, progressed to higher education or

Curriculum Areas

employment. In 1996-97, pass rates on the national diploma course fell to well below the national average for equivalent national diplomas in design but improved in 1997-98. Retention on C&G courses is good. Examination results on C&G courses are poor, primarily because many students are reluctant to sit the examination. Course reviews are carried out annually for full-time courses. Part-time staff have little involvement in the review process. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Based on the data available, inspectors were not able to agree with the finding in the college's self-assessment that there is a high level of student attainment in this subject area.

22 The college has good specialist facilities for footwear and accessories. Workshops are well equipped with industrial machinery. The facilities include computer-aided design software

applications to an international standard for design and pattern cutting. This system simulates many applications used in the footwear industry. Technician support is good and technicians help students to use specialist equipment to ensure that health and safety requirements are met. The design development resource centre is used effectively as a teaching area and as an open access facility for students wishing to work on their own. Some lessons are held in dull accommodation which is in a poor state of repair. Staff have a high level of specialist expertise and good industrial experience. This was identified as a strength in the college's self-assessment and inspectors agreed with the judgement. The library resource for footwear and accessories is used well by staff and students. It includes a wide range of good-quality periodicals and fashion forecasting information.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in footwear and accessories, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G footwear manufacture stage I	2	Expected completions	51	41	48
		Retention (%)	98	100	60
		Achievement (%)	20	27	19
BTEC national diploma in design footwear/accessories and footwear technology	3	Expected completions	28	38	35
		Retention (%)	43	53	74
		Achievement (%)	92	50	81

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 3

23 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering general art and design courses at intermediate and advanced level. They agreed with some strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They also identified some weaknesses not recognised by the college.

Key strengths

- thorough course documentation
- effective assessment and internal verification
- good pass and retention rates for general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate

Weaknesses

- lack of opportunity for part-time teachers to contribute to curriculum management
- poor punctuality and attendance
- GNVQ advanced pass and retention rates well below the national average
- little use of information technology (IT) within the curriculum
- poor specialist accommodation and equipment

24 The college offers a GNVQ intermediate course and a diploma in foundation studies at advanced level. In 1998, the college decided to halt recruitment to a GNVQ advanced course and to reinstate a national diploma in general art and design. During the inspection, students were completing the final year of the GNVQ advanced course. The college also offers specialist design studies in higher education which provide a progression route. Course handbooks and students' handbooks are of a good standard. They provide clear explanations of college services, curriculum content, teaching

and learning methods, assessment and progression opportunities. Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment report understated the quality of course documentation.

25 The college relies excessively on the contribution of part-time teachers. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that this over-reliance has a detrimental impact on the content, organisation and management of the curriculum. The team supporting the one full-time co-ordinator comprises one fractional full-time teacher and seven part-time, hourly-paid, teachers. Part-time teachers are not normally available to attend art and design team meetings or to contribute to course review and evaluation. Minutes of team meetings record discussion about students' motivation and achievements, project assignments, internal and external verification and key skills. Responsibility and deadlines for action are not recorded.

26 Most of the teaching was satisfactory and some was good. In the best lessons, teachers use good schemes of work and plan lessons, projects and assignments well. In a good lesson on the GNVQ advanced course, the teacher successfully held students' attention by relating business practice in marketing to students' own art and design interests and enabled students to prepare a personal business plan. Teachers share aims and objectives with students and integrate key skills with assignment briefs. These are discussed with students during personal tutorials. Teachers frequently check students' learning and encourage students to question issues under discussion. In a few lessons, teaching and learning was unsatisfactory. In many lessons, poor punctuality disrupts teaching and learning. In one lesson, late arrivals repeatedly disturbed both the teacher and other students making presentations of their work. The eventual attendance in this lesson was less than half the number on the register. Attendance during the inspection was well below the national average for the sector. Some teaching of IT has only

Curriculum Areas

recently been introduced. Inspectors saw little evidence of the use of IT in the curriculum and concluded that the use of IT is underdeveloped. Inspectors considered that the college's overall findings for teaching and learning in its self-assessment report for this subject area were overgenerous.

27 There are effective procedures for assessing students' work. Assessment is fair and well organised. Teachers give good support to students to help them make progress. A good system of internal verification is well established across the programme area. Inspectors agreed with the college that the programme area has strengths in its assessment procedures.

28 The self-assessment report identified that students' achievements on some courses are a strength and inspectors agreed. For example, in 1998, examination pass rates and retention rates for the GNVQ intermediate level course

were above national average. However, In 1998, the examination success rate and retention for the GNVQ advanced course were well below the national average.

29 Since the last inspection, the college has provided additional accommodation for art and design. Studio space is adequate; there is a small ceramics workshop and a print room which provides sufficient space for textiles and some basic printmaking. Most specialist accommodation and equipment are in poor condition. Studios and classrooms are in need of refurbishment. A small woodworking workshop was temporarily out of use because it did not meet health and safety regulations. Photographic facilities are poor and students are unable to make effective use of some equipment because of a lack of technician support. Students have little access to IT resources.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art and design, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Expected completions	15	12	14
		Retention (%)	60	83	86
		Achievement (%)	89	60	75
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Expected completions	*	13	34
		Retention (%)	*	77	59
		Achievement (%)	*	80	60
BTEC diploma in foundation studies in art and design	3	Expected completions	20	15	28
		Retention (%)	85	87	100
		Achievement (%)	76	77	86

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*course not offered

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

30 The college's self-assessment report listed a number of strengths and weaknesses in student support services. It did not directly identify some important weaknesses.

Key strengths

- prize-winning, attractive and informative college publicity material
- good links with schools
- good learning support for individual students
- well-managed residential accommodation for students
- effective counselling and welfare advice from college staff

Weaknesses

- delivery of the tutorial programme
- incomplete guidance for tutors
- ineffective attention to attendance and punctuality
- inadequate co-ordination and monitoring of careers support
- under-resourcing of learning support

31 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college produces a range of attractive and informative publicity material. Administrative staff provide comprehensive information about the college and its courses, and deal effectively and efficiently with inquiries. Course leaders interview most applicants and offer them specialist and impartial advice. Overseas applicants who cannot be interviewed have their applications processed through detailed correspondence.

32 The college has developed links with many local schools. Staff visit schools regularly to inform teachers and pupils about the college. Schools are invited to open days and exhibitions

to see the work of the college. The college participates in projects organised by the Islington and Hackney business and education partnership. These enable local school pupils to experience basic practical work in the college. The college identified these as strengths in its self-assessment report and inspectors agreed.

33 Since January 1998, the college has made considerable progress in developing an effective system of initial screening. Students receive effective support in a range of language and study skills techniques. There are reliable and informative reports on individual students' progress and worksheets for use with individual students. The self-assessment report stated that learning support for individual students is a strength. It also recognises that there are limitations in its provision. Support is only available to students at certain times each week and there is no designated learning support centre to develop a full range of resources. Inspectors agreed with both the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college.

34 The personal tutorial programme is defined in a tutors' handbook. This gives clear information about some tutoring work but insufficient guidance on other aspects such as group tutorials. For example, there is a specification for personal tutorials to guide tutors to monitor students' progress effectively. The tutorial programme entitles each student to two personal interviews each term. Time is also allowed for tutors to organise occasional group tutorials on general issues. Most students receive their quota of individual tutorials. Students also value the frequent opportunities which tutors take in a small and friendly college to discuss issues and problems. Group tutorials are held less regularly and not all are of high quality. Teachers have had no in-service training to develop skills in personal tutoring. There is no personal tutorial entitlement for part-time students, although course tutors are encouraged to assist students with difficulties. Some students have indicated that they would

Cross-college Provision

welcome written reports on their progress but the college has not yet responded to this request.

35 During the inspection, poor attendance and punctuality emerged as major weaknesses. They were not identified as problems in the college's self-assessment report. There are no clear procedures for attendance or punctuality in either the tutors' or students' handbooks. The system of monitoring attendance as part of the progress reviews for individual students is clearly ineffective. Students themselves are not clear what the college expects and what action it will take to deal with poor attendance and punctuality.

36 The college has addressed a concern about the lack of specialist careers advice from the local careers service since identifying it in its self-assessment. This support is only available for 14 days each year. Typically in a specialist college, inspectors found evidence of good support from teachers and library staff. Many students receive good advice on how to develop and implement a personal career plan. The careers advice offered in the college is not co-ordinated and its quality is not monitored. Some students are not clear about the help they should receive and the students' handbook offers limited information. Some students have not developed effective career plans, and some information on the jobs noticeboard is substantially out of date. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge these weaknesses.

37 The college's modern, attractive and well-managed residence offers good-quality accommodation and a supportive environment. The college gives priority to first-year students to help them to adjust to being away from home. Staff supervising the residence liaise effectively with other staff in the college over any concerns about students in the residence. Students value the counselling and advice available in the college, and inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this is a strength. A part-time counsellor deals with a

wide range of welfare enquiries and a significant number of requests each year for counselling. Useful information is available to students on benefits, accommodation and financial issues. The counsellor is supported in her work by a local practising psychiatrist. The college has a hardship fund and bursaries, including support from the Cordwainers and Saddlers Companies to help students who have financial problems. There are clear criteria for this support and a well-explained application process.

General Resources

Grade 4

38 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Inspectors concluded that some strengths were understated and that a few weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- the Cordwainers Leather Industries Centre
- the students' common room and residential accommodation
- effective library and resource services

Weaknesses

- lack of a current accommodation strategy
- poor condition of much teaching accommodation
- insufficient IT resources available to students and staff
- inadequate work areas for teachers
- poor access for students with restricted mobility

39 The college occupies a single site in Hackney. Since the last inspection, the college has benefited from two major building projects.

Cross-college Provision

A student residence with 87 bedrooms was completed in 1996. It is situated beside the college main building and provides excellent accommodation for students. Also in 1996, a three-storey 'Cordwainers Leather Industry Centre' was completed. The centre provides a range of services and opportunities for the fashion footwear and accessories industries. A small shop, open during the lunch period, provides students with a selection of art materials at cost price.

40 Accommodation is a significant problem for the college. There are no clear priorities and accommodation is not effectively managed. Information on room use is not available. The college does not have an up-to-date accommodation strategy. The college did not fully recognise these weaknesses in its self-assessment report. However, there was a frank assessment that accommodation is shabby and in need of much refurbishment. There is no information centre for prospective students to obtain advice and guidance. Temporary buildings used as general classrooms are unsatisfactory. There is generally poor access for students with restricted mobility. The college has made no progress with its accommodation strategy since submitting an unsuccessful bid for lottery funding to improve its estates.

41 The college has some well-equipped workshops for shoe manufacturing, saddlery and leather goods. It makes good use of small exhibition spaces to show students' work. The college is developing a maintenance and repair plan and has recently refurbished a combined student common room and refectory. This large, well-lit room, provides a useful place for students to meet and to study. Staff rooms are inadequate and few teachers have access to computers. Most teaching rooms in art and design are unkempt and are not always used effectively.

42 The library has had a significant reduction in its budget but it is well used and is effective. In its self-assessment report, the college

recognised that the library and resources centre are small and in need of investment. The library is well managed by a full-time librarian supported by a full-time library assistant and a part-time assistant librarian. It maintains convenient opening hours and students value the service and the support they receive. Since the last inspection, the college has installed a computerised library system. Data available for funding, cataloguing, usage, stocktaking and ordering are much improved. The library has two computers with access to the internet and one CD-ROM facility. Liaison between the librarian and curriculum managers is good. The librarian attends course team and course leader meetings and has up-to-date knowledge of curriculum and course developments. The library's annual review and development plan demonstrates good performance against realistic and challenging targets. These strengths were not sufficiently emphasised in the college's self-assessment report.

43 Since the last inspection, the college has established a small IT centre with 28 computers, two scanners and five printers. It has also improved its computer network to support administrative and academic communications systems. There are not enough computers available to staff and students and the centre has difficulty in meeting a growing demand. The overall ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is low at 1:14. The college's self-assessment report did not fully acknowledge this problem or the lack of a strategy for updating, managing and teaching IT. There is a 'computer user' policy but the effectiveness of the centre is not well monitored. These issues are being addressed by the college. The computer-aided design system used by footwear designers and manufacturers is available to students. The Cordwainers Leather Industry Centre building provides additional resources for students. This area includes some computers, visual aids, specialist equipment and materials, information on current trends, displays of students' work and other inspirational material for students' reference.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 5

44 Although inspectors found that the college had made some realistic judgements about its quality assurance arrangements, the inspection team was unable to agree with the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance. Inspectors identified significant weaknesses which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report and considered that strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- good internal verification procedures
- staff development linked to the college's and individual staff needs

Weaknesses

- lack of a clear, coherent quality assurance framework
- inconsistent implementation of quality assurance procedures
- discontinuity of key activities such as annual review and evaluation and appraisal
- insufficiently rigorous course review and evaluation
- lack of staff awareness of quality assurance processes
- insufficient use of standards, performance indicators and targets
- overgenerous grading in the self-assessment report

45 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that quality assurance needs further development. The college has not yet created a unified and workable quality assurance system. It had made some progress in developing quality assurance when changes in the management structure in 1998 interrupted the development and

implementation process. Neither annual review and evaluation nor staff appraisal were fully implemented in 1998.

46 The college's systems for monitoring and reporting on quality assurance are disjointed. There is no quality assurance policy and no clear, well-documented framework for quality assurance. There are insufficient links between quality assurance, self-assessment and strategic planning. Teachers and staff have little understanding of the purpose of quality assurance or of their role in quality assurance processes. Compliance with quality assurance procedures is not enforced. The college recognises that some course teams have not conducted regular reviews of their performance with sufficient rigour. Action plans are incomplete or insufficiently detailed. For example, low achievement is not addressed by action points. Information on performance is not collected systematically or evaluated in depth. Few course teams set precise and measurable targets or use performance indicators. The art and design course team are implementing a well-planned internal verification process which is to be used as a model for the college.

47 Following the last inspection, a subcommittee of the academic committee, the academic standards and development committee, was set up to monitor academic quality assurance. The role of these committees in relation to each other is not clear and their impact on academic quality has been limited. The academic committee did not meet on one occasion but was subsequently reconvened by the acting principal. Staff report that it is beginning to become a lively forum for debate on issues that could lead to improvement in the quality of provision.

48 Quality assurance procedures are not well developed in all cross-college support areas. Some customer service standards exist. In many areas they do not exist or are at an early stage of development. Some areas, such as the

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library, identify standards and undertake checks on the quality of service. In 1998, few cross-college areas evaluated their practice and provision. The library has continued to evaluate its performance, in contrast to most other areas.

49 The college gives insufficient attention to analysing student data. Examination successes and retention are considered by the academic standards and development committee and by the academic committee but their evaluation has lacked rigour. The self-assessment report recognised a need to improve the use of performance indicators for attendance, retention and achievement. Targets for retention and achievement have only recently been established.

50 Survey questionnaires and course evaluations are used to elicit students' views on the quality of courses and college services. The level of response to questionnaires has been poor. Support service managers and course team leaders decide what action should be taken in the light of students' responses. This action is not systematically monitored and there is an uneven level of feedback to students on the results.

51 The students' handbook includes the charter. Although the handbook is available to all students, they are generally not familiar with the charter or aware of their entitlements and commitments. The charter is not used effectively as part of the quality assurance process. It contains a few measurable targets. There has been some analysis of the achievement of these targets, for example, the speed of response to postal or telephone enquiries. The complaints procedure is outlined in the charter. Most students use less formal ways to register their complaints through, for example, course team meetings. The college does not have procedures to analyse the nature and range of complaints or whether they are resolved to students' satisfaction.

52 The college is committed to professional development for staff. Although the budget is

small, there are good opportunities for staff to undertake training courses and engage in other forms of personal development. Staff speak appreciatively of the training opportunities they are offered. Priorities for staff activities are related to individual and college needs. An annual appraisal system was introduced after the last inspection. The system broke down in 1998 with the departure of key appraisers and, at present, it makes little contribution to the college's effectiveness. Most staff were not appraised in 1998 and only a few have been appraised in 1999.

53 The college's first self-assessment report covered all aspects of its work. Each academic and cross-college area produced an individual self-assessment. Lesson observations were not carried out and little use was made of performance indicators to assist staff to assess the quality of teaching and learning in curriculum areas. The self-assessment report did not include all the weaknesses identified during the inspection. The proportion of lessons identified by inspectors as good or outstanding has declined since the last inspection.

Governance

Grade 3

54 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. One key weakness relating to membership of the governing body was not identified.

Key strengths

- the commitment, business expertise and specialist knowledge of governors
- practical support of the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers and contacts with industry
- decisive action to address weaknesses

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Weaknesses

- membership does not fully reflect the college's mission, student body or local community
- inadequate involvement in determination of strategic plan
- insufficient monitoring of the college's academic performance
- no appraisal of the performance of the principal

55 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The Cordwainers College Association Limited substantially conducts its business in accordance with its memorandum and articles of association. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

56 The association has 20 members. Six are nominated by the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers. The principal and two senior members of the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers are ex-officio members. There are two staff members, one student member, and a training and enterprise council (TEC) nominee. In addition, seven members are co-opted by the association. They include three from other livery companies and a governor nominated by the borough of Hackney. There are currently two vacancies, including one for the member nominated by FOCUS Central London, the local TEC. The present membership includes 11 governors whose terms of office have now expired. They have not been formally reappointed, as required by the memorandum of association.

57 Governors are strongly committed to the college. They have a broad range of business expertise. Many are experienced and influential in the trades and industries relevant to the college's specialisms of footwear and leather goods. The association's strong links with the

Worshipful Company of Cordwainers have benefited the college and its students. The college's residential building was wholly funded through a charitable organisation managed by the Cordwainers Company. These strengths were acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report. Three members, apart from the staff members and the acting principal, are experienced in education. Only one member of the association is experienced in a field of art and design. This aspect of the college's work is under-represented in the membership of the association and contributes to the confusion amongst teaching staff about the college's mission and identity. The gender and ethnic make-up of the association does not reflect the student body or the community in which the college is situated, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. There are five women members of the association, four of whom are the acting principal and the staff and student governors. None of the members is of minority ethnic origin. There is scope within the articles of association for a broader range of members to be recruited. The association does not have a search committee to give advice on the appointment of governors.

58 The association has the following committees: finance and general purposes; audit; and the remuneration of senior staff. There is also a trade and industry advisory committee which provides advice, resources, work placements and other opportunities for students. The committees have terms of reference which clearly identify their responsibilities and relationship to the corporation. The association has not established a quorum for each of its committees. It is not clear how many members need to be present for a committee to be quorate and make valid decisions. Terms of reference for the audit committee have not been revised to reflect those recommended in the *Audit Code of Practice*. Governors maintain an effective oversight of the college's finances. Members of the finance and general purposes committee are sent copies of

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the management accounts each month. The accounts are formally received each term by both the finance and general purposes committee and the association.

59 During 1998, the association took decisive action when they identified management and financial problems in the college. Since then, their main focus has been on the college's financial recovery. Governors are not able to receive regular reports against strategic objectives because of the lack of a relevant strategic plan. The association has not used measures relating to students' retention and achievements to monitor the college's academic performance. It does not monitor the implementation of the college's policies, for example, on equal opportunities. In their self-assessment, governors identified the need to set academic priorities and targets and to be involved in the strategic planning process at an earlier stage. They acknowledge that they were not sufficiently critical during the development process for the 1997 to 2002 strategic plan. However, the association identified financial difficulties at an early stage of the plan's operations. Governors have not appraised the performance of the principal, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report.

60 The clerk to the association is independent of the college and is appropriately experienced. Governors receive good-quality agenda and minutes for all meetings. Most newly appointed governors receive information about their duties, although a structured induction programme has not been established. The self-assessment report identified this weakness. The student governor was not inducted into her role. The self-assessment report was drafted by a small group of governors with help from the clerk. It was then presented to the full association for discussion and confirmation. This was the first time the association had reviewed its performance, and governors found it a valuable exercise. The association has recently adopted a code of conduct and revised

its register of interests to reflect the Nolan committee's recommendations on openness and accountability. Not all governors have completed the new declaration of interests. The association does not have effective procedures to ensure that governors declare their interests annually.

Management

Grade 4

61 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. Some additional and fundamental weaknesses were not identified by the college.

Key strengths

- exceptionally strong links with industry and the local community
- decisive action to improve the college's financial position
- increased diversity of funding

Weaknesses

- the interim nature of current senior management arrangements
- the lack of an up-to-date strategic plan
- under-achievement of FEFC enrolment targets
- uncertainty amongst staff about the college's mission and identity
- inadequate monitoring of policies

62 The management of the college is under good temporary control. In October 1998, following the departure of the previous principal, governors appointed an experienced acting principal on a temporary contract for three days a week. Governors have advertised for a new principal to start by January 2000. Earlier in 1998, three director posts were deleted to reduce management costs. An attempt to recruit a vice-principal proved unsuccessful. The brief for the acting principal

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is to improve the college's financial position. She was assisted by an external consultant for the first six months of her appointment. The acting principal has formed a senior management team comprising the director of finance and administration, and three co-ordinators, who deal, respectively, with the curriculum, resources and services. This group meets regularly. Two of the co-ordinators have additional academic duties.

63 Only some aspects of the college's strategic plan 1997 to 2002 are still considered current. The plan is no longer regarded by managers as relevant because it was based on unsound financial predictions. There is no updated curriculum strategy. Many staff report a lack of cohesion between the college's traditional craft disciplines and the more recent art and design provision. There is little sharing of good practice across the curriculum because there is no common rationale for the college's programme of courses. The college's self-assessment report acknowledged that the mission statement is unrealistic in its stated aim to be the premier global provider of art and design, as well as its distinct leather work specialisms. As a result, not all staff support the mission statement. These issues have an adverse impact on the interim management arrangements and have considerably increased the workload of the recently appointed co-ordinators. The issues were not fully acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

64 The acting principal has initiated a recovery plan to overcome the college's financial deficit. Decisive action has been taken, including rigorous application of teachers' contractual terms. The college has not met its FEFC enrolment targets since 1995-96. It made a financial deficit in 1997-98 and projects a reduced deficit for the current year. The college's financial recovery is partly dependent on increased recruitment of overseas students. Recruitment of non-European Union students has increased fourfold since the last inspection.

The college recognises the importance of market research to its future success. A new marketing manager has been appointed and a good range of marketing and promotional activities is taking place this year. A fuller marketing plan is being developed.

65 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college's income is obtained from several sources. The finance team provides timely management accounts which are reviewed monthly by senior managers and members of the finance and general purposes committee. The accounts include an income and expenditure account, balance sheet and a cashflow forecast prepared on a rolling 12-month basis. They have recently been improved by the inclusion of financial targets. There is a written commentary to aid the understanding of readers but it does not cover all aspects. The computerised financial accounting system is not used to prepare the management accounts.

The self-assessment report acknowledged that the college's financial regulations are not comprehensive. They are being revised. Internal and external auditors have not identified significant weaknesses in the college's internal controls.

66 Managers have not used performance indicators to identify trends in students' retention and achievements. The college's management information systems are being developed to make them year 2000 compliant and to improve the services and data available to college staff.

67 The college's mission statement commits the college to equality in all aspects of its provision. The equal opportunities policy is given in brief in the students' handbook, and in full in the staff handbook. There are examples of the promotion of equality through curriculum projects. The college supports a well-integrated community of young people from many

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countries and ethnic backgrounds. It recruits a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas, particularly to its art and design and short courses, which attract predominantly local students. There is no overall system to ensure the implementation and monitoring of the college's policies. The college's health and safety policy is monitored through a health and safety committee. The minutes of this committee do not always record clearly the actions to be taken, or confirm when actions are completed. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Conclusions

68 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first produced by the college. It provided a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Inspectors acknowledged that the self-assessment was undertaken in difficult circumstances and consider that the college made some realistic and self-critical judgements about the quality of its provision. They concluded, however, that there are many additional weaknesses that the college did not recognise. The report contained little or no use of performance indicators or of data relating, for example, to students' retention and achievements. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded by the college for only one of the three curriculum areas inspected. The grades awarded by inspectors for the other two curriculum areas were one grade worse than those given by the college. Inspectors judged all of the sample of curriculum provision as satisfactory. In the cross-college areas, the inspection team judged the college to be overgenerous in its assessment of all aspects of provision other than governance. Significant weaknesses were not identified in the areas of quality assurance, management, general resources and support for students.

69 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 (April 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	36
25+ years	45
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (April 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	4
Intermediate	22
Advanced	17
Higher education	39
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	18
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (April 1999)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Engineering	61	37	23
Art and design	260	60	77
Total	321	97	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 64% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (May 1999)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	10	12	0	22
Supporting direct learning contact	8	3	0	11
Other support	18	3	0	21
Total	36	18	0	54

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£1,905,000	£2,148,000	£2,022,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£30.05	£31.16	£26.04*
Payroll as a proportion of income	61%	66%	72%
Achievement of funding target	87%	90%	90%
Diversity of income	54%	59%	60%
Operating surplus	£29,000	-£47,000	-£35,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Expected completions	n/a	n/a	n/a	33	19	22
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	100	100	73
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	12	0	0
2	Expected completions	31	25	23	112	108	126
	Retention (%)	81	92	83	98	97	68
	Achievement (%)	52	60	70	36	39	29
3	Expected completions	24	22	30	26	27	50
	Retention (%)	88	86	93	85	81	94
	Achievement (%)	75	68	70	73	44	72
4 or 5	Expected completions	5	1	9	46	70	71
	Retention (%)	100	100	100	98	93	96
	Achievement (%)	80	100	89	96	90	96
Short courses	Expected completions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unknown/ unclassified	Expected completions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: ISR

n/a: not applicable

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