

# Croydon College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1999-00**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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*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 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

## Croydon College

### *Greater London Region*

#### **Inspected May 2000**

Croydon College is a large, general further education college with a significant higher education provision. It offers an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses which respond effectively to the needs of Croydon and the surrounding region. Since the last inspection, the college has diversified its provision to widen participation and address social exclusion. The college produced its second self-assessment report for the inspection. The report was comprehensive and demonstrated a genuine desire to improve the quality of the college's provision. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements and found some additional strengths and weaknesses. The report placed insufficient emphasis on problems with management information and the difficulties these are causing for systematic monitoring of retention and achievement. In addition, the report under-emphasised poor levels of achievement in some curriculum areas. Inspectors agreed with five out of seven curriculum grades awarded by the college and awarded lower grades for two curriculum areas. One inspection cross-college grade was higher than the grade awarded by the college; another was lower.

The college offers courses in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in five

programme areas was inspected. Basic skills provision across the college was also inspected alongside aspects of cross-college provision. The curriculum is well managed and there are positive working relationships between students and staff. There is strong, accessible leadership and the college is effectively managed. Communications are excellent. Governors and managers work together effectively and contribute appropriately to strategic planning. Inspectors found no significant weaknesses in governance which benefits from the exceptional commitment of board members. The college is strongly committed to the regeneration of the local community and enjoys productive partnerships with a range of external organisations. There is much good teaching and the integration of quality assurance with planning is a strength. The college has an effective appraisal scheme which links staff development to the college's strategic objectives. Students' views are valued and there has been a considerable investment in buildings and accommodation. The college should: improve poor attendance and punctuality on many courses; raise levels of achievement and retention on some courses; review tutorial provision; improve take-up rates for learning support; address issues concerning the accuracy, retrieval and evaluation of data; further develop IT facilities; develop a college-wide strategy for improving students' basic skills.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science and mathematics	4	Support for students	3
Engineering	2	General resources	2
General business and business administration	3	Quality assurance	3
Business: work-based provision	2	Governance	1
English and access (social science)	2	Management	2
ESOL	2		
Basic skills	3		

## The College and its Mission

1 Croydon College was founded in 1888 and has grown to become a large college of further and higher education based on one campus situated in the centre of Croydon. Higher education comprises approximately 25% of the college's provision. A major building programme has resulted in a refurbished higher education centre and a new library, opened in October 1998, which cost £1 million.

2 The Borough of Croydon is the largest London borough with a population of 335,000. It is the thirteenth largest commercial centre in the United Kingdom, outside central London, and one of the largest shopping centres in the south east. The main employment sectors within Croydon's economy are: public services; distribution, hotels and catering; business services; and financial services. Croydon is home to the regional headquarters of over 20 blue chip companies and has a rapidly growing number of small and medium-sized enterprises. The immigration centre of the Home Office is based in central Croydon. The college recruits just over 50% of its students from within the borough, the remainder coming from London and across the south east. There are large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the borough. Although the unemployment rate in Croydon is relatively low, there are local pockets of relatively high deprivation and educational underachievement. Of Croydon's residents, 13% are estimated to have low or very low literacy levels. The figure for numeracy is also low, at 10%. Both figures are lower than those for Greater London as a whole.

3 Croydon has one of the highest rates for 16 year olds staying on at school, in the country. However, in 1999, only 42% of 15 year olds achieved five or more grades C or above in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) compared with 48% in England as a whole. Students in schools and colleges who

were entered for two or more general certificate of education advanced levels (GCE A levels), also achieved results which were lower than those for England as a whole. There is a wide variety of state and private secondary education in the borough, including two city technology colleges. Competition for post-16 students is intense. Further education in Croydon is provided by Croydon College and two sixth form colleges and there are eight other colleges within easy travelling distance. The adult education service provides a range of educational and business training. Croydon College is the only provider of higher education in the borough and is an affiliated college of the University of Sussex. Plans are in hand to expand higher education in Croydon through a commercial partnership within the university sector.

4 Croydon College offers a wide range of courses from entry level to postgraduate level, providing many opportunities for students to progress within the college. Courses are offered in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The average age of students is about 30 years. Almost 70% of them are over 19. About 30% of students are from minority ethnic groups, compared with a figure of 18% for the borough. Last year, around 13,000 students attended the college, one-third full time and two-thirds on a part-time basis.

5 The college plays a major role in local partnerships and regeneration strategies and participates actively in numerous private and public business activities. Along with other training providers, it is developing a University for Industry learning centre.

6 The college's mission is 'to provide flexible and accessible quality learning, achievement and progression opportunities for the benefit of individuals, organisations and the community'. The college plans to achieve its mission through seven key strategic objectives:

# Context

- 'to generate growth within both the further education and higher education sectors of the college and increase market share in selected areas
- to create expansion and better co-ordination of college activities within the local community through liaison and joint planning
- to maintain an effective organisation with high staffing efficiency
- to achieve accreditation through management of college planning, quality assurance and enhancement processes
- to maintain financial viability and generate a reserve for stability and investment
- to ensure that the physical environment is fit for study, work and planned provision
- to continue to develop and implement a dynamic and innovative curriculum which meets the individual learning and development needs of a widening variety of students'.

have not been included in the relevant curriculum sections of this report.

The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 56 days. They observed 77 lessons and 12 'one-to-one' sessions, evaluated students' work and examined documents about the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 77 lessons inspected, 66% were good or outstanding and 3% were less than satisfactory or poor. These figures are slightly better than the national figures. Twelve observations of 'one-to-one' sessions were observed within work-based provision in business. These are not included in the table.

## The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during May 2000. FEFC inspectors worked alongside Training Standards Council (TSC) inspectors who were inspecting work-based provision. The FEFC inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999, and inspectors checked these against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Inspectors found the data to be reliable with the exception of data for work-based learning in the business programme area and for basic skills courses. For this reason, the retention and achievement tables for these areas

# Context

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	13	7	0	0	22
GCSE	0	3	4	1	0	8
GNVQ	4	4	3	0	0	11
NVQ	0	3	2	0	0	5
Other vocational	2	3	1	0	0	6
Other*	6	11	7	1	0	25
Total (No.)	14	37	24	2	0	77
Total (%)	18	48	31	3	0	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*

\*includes basic skills, access and ESOL courses

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The college's attendance rates are below the national average.

### Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Croydon College	9.8	68
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 Areas

## Science and Mathematics

### Grade 4

**10 Inspectors observed 15 lessons in science and mathematics covering GCSE, GCE A level and access to higher education courses.**

**Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but felt that insufficient importance had been attached to poor retention and achievement.**

#### Key strengths

- positive staff/student relations and good support for students
- practical work in science, which is well organised and carried out safely
- effective technical support on science courses

#### Weaknesses

- poor punctuality and poor attendance
- some low retention rates
- low levels of achievement on some courses
- little use of information technology (IT) in mathematics
- students insufficiently involved in their work in some lessons

11 The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time courses. These include: GCSE biology, human biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics courses; one-year and two-year GCE A level courses in biology, human biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics; and access to higher education courses in science and mathematics. The college has made changes to the way the curriculum area is managed but these are too recent to have had an impact on weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

12 The best lessons are well planned and incorporate a variety of methods of working. Teachers provide effective support for individual students, both in and out of lessons.

Relationships between teachers and students are positive and teachers are sensitive to students' needs. Students receive detailed handouts and worksheets. In many lessons, they were also using good revision materials. Students appreciated the individual attention they got from staff while working through these materials.

13 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is safe, well-organised practical work in science. In one practical lesson, chemistry students carried out titrations skilfully and used the results to make kinetics calculations. In a physics practical, pairs of students investigated the relationship between temperature and electrical resistance, then related their results to everyday applications such as thermostats and heat alarms. In some lessons, the teaching was dull; staff failed to engage students' interest and students did not contribute to discussions. In some cases, teachers made no effort to check students' understanding of key points. There was no evidence of IT being used in the teaching of mathematics. Attendance and punctuality were poor in many of the lessons observed during the inspection. Students arriving late for lessons disrupted activities; lesson objectives were not made clear at the outset and the timing of work was thrown out of kilter. The average attendance in the lessons observed was 59%, which is well below the average for the sector. This weakness was identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

14 Achievement rates on GCE A level one-year mathematics and human biology courses, have been above the national average for the last three years. Achievement and retention rates have also been above the national average on access to higher education mathematics and science courses. Achievement rates on the two-year GCE A level courses in human biology and chemistry were good in 1997 and 1998, but very poor in 1999. On other courses, achievement rates have varied or have been

# Curriculum Areas

below the national average over the past three years. Rates of achievement in GCSE mathematics and science subjects have been significantly below national averages. Retention is also well below average on the two-year GCE A level biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics courses. The self-assessment report acknowledged some of these weaknesses in retention and achievement but underestimated their significance.

15 Students' progress is reviewed regularly and action points are recorded. Teachers set an appropriate range of homework and coursework. Homework is usually returned within a week and clear marking schemes have been developed to guide teachers' formal feedback. The written feedback provided by teachers, however, is poor. Tests and internal examinations are set regularly.

16 The accommodation for mathematics and science is modern and well maintained. Classrooms and laboratories are light, cheerful and well equipped. Preparation rooms and staff workrooms are of a good size and appropriately furnished. Laboratory equipment is good and poisons and flammable materials are safely stored. The bookstock in the library is large and generally meets the needs of students, although some science books are out of date. The 'flexible learning' area in the library is well used and appreciated by science and mathematics students. The technician support for science is excellent. The technicians are well managed and have opportunities to undertake staff development activities. The quality of support was recognised by the college in the self-assessment report.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in science and mathematics, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE science subjects	2	Number of starters	141	148	93
		Retention (%)	76	67	77
		Achievement(%)	27	36	39
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	468	379	417
		Retention (%)	75	76	75
		Achievement (%)	26	22	20
GCE A level science subject (two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	150	100	142
		Retention (%)	32	53	53
		Achievement (%)	67	66	28
GCE A level science subjects (one-year courses)	3	Number of starters	90	86	137
		Retention (%)	82	80	68
		Achievement (%)	47	52	44
GCE A level mathematics (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	51	47	54
		Retention (%)	65	80	67
		Achievement (%)	58	64	61
GCE A level mathematics (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	63	63	64
		Retention (%)	33	32	36
		Achievement (%)	62	83	61

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### *Grade 2*

**17 The inspection covered all aspects of engineering including mechanical, electrical, electronic and communications engineering. Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They generally agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- much good teaching
- effective development of key skills
- high retention rates on many courses
- good development of students' technical skills

#### **Weaknesses**

- students' poor punctuality
- lack of work experience for students
- inadequate registration arrangements

18 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that teaching and learning are a strength. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods and make good use of teaching resources in classrooms and workshops. They question students regularly to make sure that they are learning. Assignments are well designed and help to motivate students. Theoretical concepts taught in the classroom, are effectively linked to practical workshop exercises. In one lesson, a group of BTEC national certificate students were set an interesting assignment on wave forms which required them to use spreadsheets. In a few lessons, the teaching was unimaginative and students showed little interest in the work. Teachers talked for too long, course notes were dictated or students were copying from the board for long periods. Students who arrived late disrupted some lessons. The self-assessment report failed to identify this as a weakness.

19 Students' key skills are now being developed on all full-time courses and some part-time programmes. In one lesson, a group of general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced students were working on an IT-based assignment involving product design and marketing. The students were required to demonstrate competence in wordprocessing, using spreadsheets and using the Internet.

20 The self-assessment report accurately identifies high retention rates as a strength of many courses. Retention rates are high or improving and, in many cases, are well above national averages for the sector. The only exception is the retention rate on the GNVQ foundation course, which is poor. The college recognises this weakness. Many students are achieving the levels of technical skill demanded by employers. Computer-aided design students demonstrated high standards of competence in design and explained how their newly acquired skills had enhanced their careers. Some had gained promotion and others were able to offer their clients an improved service.

21 The self-assessment report recognises the thoroughness of internal verification on all courses. Effective, well-planned support for students with individual learning difficulties has been developed. Sign language support is available in some lessons, and there is support in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and dyslexia for students who need it. A new and developing middle management team is working effectively. Inspectors agreed that there are clear links between the college's strategic and operational planning and the objectives being pursued in engineering. Regular, productive team meetings involve staff fully in planning and reviewing the curriculum. There are good communications between staff, who are well informed about departmental and college developments. The self-assessment report acknowledged the lack of opportunities for full-time students to undertake regular work experience. Plans have been agreed for some

# Curriculum Areas

electrical engineering national diploma students to have work placements with local companies during summer 2000. Inspectors considered that arrangements for student registration were inadequate. Registers were not available in all the lessons observed and the completion of new electronic registers were causing difficulties for staff.

to keep up to date with current industrial practice in engineering.

22 Accommodation and resources for engineering are good. Workshops are well resourced and well maintained and additional money has been spent recently on major capital items to improve workshop facilities. Teachers are well qualified in their subjects. They have relevant industrial experience and many hold assessor and verifier qualifications. Staff development opportunities help teachers

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in engineering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation	1	Number of starters	16	23	16
		Retention (%)	94	52	88
		Achievement(%)	0	42	43
National certificate welding and fabrication	1	Number of starters	42	*	14
		Retention (%)	67	*	93
		Achievement (%)	93	*	77
GNVQ intermediate/first diploma engineering	2	Number of starters	72	66	59
		Retention (%)	80	59	69
		Achievement (%)	30	39	66
C&G 4351 computer-aided design (draughting and design)	2	Number of starters	42	62	107
		Retention (%)	81	69	93
		Achievement (%)	85	54	57
National certificate engineering	3	Number of starters	73	81	30
		Retention (%)	89	80	100
		Achievement (%)	35	40	74
National diploma engineering/GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	70	83	43
		Retention (%)	91	68	87
		Achievement (%)	56	61	63

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## General Business and Business Administration

### Grade 3

**23 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 1 and 2, GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes, the national certificate in business and finance, and GCE A levels in business and accounting. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements expressed in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- interesting, varied teaching
- good support for individual students
- effective management of courses
- a good range of resources to support learning

#### Weaknesses

- poor achievement on some courses, notably GCE A level
- low retention on some courses
- poor attendance and punctuality
- a failure to share good practice

24 Inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report that lessons are effectively planned and they observed some good teaching. In the best lessons, teachers encouraged critical thinking, organised an appropriate range of suitably demanding learning activities and made good use of case studies to illustrate business concepts. One group of students were using interactive software to test their knowledge of important concepts and were finding this an effective and refreshing way to revise. Teachers develop co-operative relationships with students and students are eager to learn. In a few lessons, greater use of topical economic issues would have helped the students to gain a better

understanding of issues such as monetary policy. Some teachers failed to ensure that all students were working effectively. Induction processes are comprehensive and students receive constructive support in individual and group tutorials. Key skills are being developed successfully within the context of business.

25 Courses are effectively managed. However, GNVQ and GCE A level courses are provided by separate schools of the college, an arrangement which inhibits the sharing of good practice and curriculum development. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Within each school, staff work well as a team. Although teachers are keen to analyse achievement and retention, they find it difficult to obtain accurate data. There is a genuine commitment to continuous improvement across the department and quality processes and procedures are well established. Minutes of meetings, verifiers' reports and other quality assurance documents are readily available.

26 Students are motivated, enjoy their studies and produce some good work. In one lesson, a student gave a very effective presentation, making good use of business terminology and some excellent visual aids, and the feedback from other students was both critical and constructive. Average attendance in the lessons observed was 65%, which is well below the sector average. In many lessons, students' punctuality was also poor. These weaknesses were underestimated in the self-assessment report. Retention and achievement rates vary considerably. Some courses are at, or close to the national average, but retention and achievement rates on other courses, particularly level 3 courses are below sector averages. Rates of progression from year 1 to year 2 on GCE A level courses are also poor. The growth of the commercial development initiative, which links the college to local companies, is beginning to have a positive impact. For example, assessment briefs have been rewritten to incorporate actual business scenarios. A leading

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supermarket chain awards a gift voucher to GNVQ and national certificate students who achieve 90% attendance in a trimester and a local company sponsors prizes for outstanding academic achievement on business courses. Award ceremonies are organised to celebrate successes such as these. Links with companies are leading to good-quality work placements and opportunities for full-time and part-time employment.

27 The quality of students' assignments and portfolios of work is good and it is clear that most students are confident in using IT. Their work is generally well presented, well structured and appropriate to the level of study. Many assignments reflect current business issues and provide relevant and effective opportunities for learning. All the assessed work seen by inspectors was thoroughly marked and had been returned promptly to the students.

28 The standard of accommodation is good. All rooms have whiteboards, overhead projectors and screens and modern furniture which can be adapted to a variety of uses. The IT facilities for students are good. Most computers are networked and some have Internet access. The library and information centre is an excellent facility, which students value greatly. It has a good stock of books and journals, and a wide and developing range of electronic sources of information. The facility is well staffed, and the business department timetables its own staff to the centre on a regular basis in order to support students' learning. The simulated office suite is well equipped and well managed. It offers students valuable practical experience to enhance their administrative and clerical skills. Business teachers are well qualified and there are opportunities for staff development.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in general business and business administration, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ/GNVQ foundation	1	Number of starters	107	103	146
		Retention (%)	68	73	83
		Achievement(%)	49	42	73
NVQ/GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	91	150	116
		Retention (%)	68	72	79
		Achievement (%)	66	55	63
GNVQ advanced/BTEC national diploma	3	Number of starters	78	55	57
		Retention (%)	30	46	49
		Achievement (%)	79	69	68
GCE A levels (business and accounting)	3	Number of starters	101	91	142
		Retention (%)	47	61	65
		Achievement (%)	64	55	43
Higher diploma administrative procedures	4	Number of starters	27	12	14
		Retention (%)	87	75	70
		Achievement (%)	56	92	57

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

# Curriculum Areas

## **Business: Work-based Provision**

### ***Grade 2***

**29 The inspection focused on work-based learning in the business programme area. Twelve 'one-to-one' sessions were observed covering NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 in administration, levels 2 and 3 in customer service, and level 2 in IT. Eleven of these observations took place at the students' workplace. Inspectors agreed with the many of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report. However, they concluded that the report overstated the importance of some strengths.**

#### **Key strengths**

- flexibility in the delivery and assessment of programmes at the workplace
- facilities for students to enrol throughout the year and study at their own pace
- excellent relationships between tutors and students
- excellent support from a well-managed, committed team
- mainly good retention and achievement rates

#### **Weaknesses**

- some insufficiently demanding sessions for students
- inaccurate students' achievements data

30 Work-based NVQs are managed by two of the college's schools. There are programmes in administration, customer service, health and safety, management, school administration, and IT and key skills. Some of this provision is funded by the local training and enterprise council (TEC) or by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The students are employed by both public and private sector organisations.

31 The team working with students in work-based provision is responsive to employers' and students' needs. Students enrol throughout the year and study at their own pace. As well as visiting students in the workplace every six weeks, tutors provide excellent support, on demand, by telephone or electronic mail. Tutors provide detailed written feedback and action plans to monitor progress and evaluate visits. They also provide students with relevant study packs and other written learning materials to meet students' individual needs.

32 Tutors were professional in their approach, knowledgeable and well prepared. They formed excellent working relationships with students. In one well-structured session, the tutor visited a student for the first time in a medical centre. She quickly clarified what the student's job entailed, ascertained what knowledge and skills she possessed in IT and then identified an appropriate IT qualification to aim for. To conclude the session, the tutor worked with the student to develop an action plan. In a few sessions, the work was not demanding enough for the student, particularly at the higher levels. Occasionally tutors concentrated on work designed to meet qualifications and standards, at the expense of checking what students had actually learned.

33 Students' portfolios are of an appropriate standard. They are well organised and work is presented clearly. For some students, the approach to portfolio assessment provides limited opportunities to gain incremental accreditation. Feedback on programmes from external verifiers is positive. Informal feedback from students and employers indicates a high level of satisfaction. Having identified the lack of a formal system to gain feedback from employers in the self-assessment report, the team is now in the process of piloting the use of questionnaires to employers once students complete their programmes. Nominated by employers, the college recently received an award for quality service in relation to their work-based learning provision.

# Curriculum Areas

34 Students' data are unreliable and not available centrally. Indeed, the course team does not assess performance in relation to national averages. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Inaccurate data make it difficult to systematically monitor students' achievements and evaluate the quality of the courses. On most programmes, retention rates for work-based NVQ students are above national averages. Achievement rates are good for those who completed programmes in 1997 and 1998. Data indicate a decline in the achievements of those who completed their courses in 1999.

35 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the team is well qualified and committed. A senior lecturer provides effective management of a team of five part-time teachers, who work well together. As identified in the self-assessment report, members of the team keep abreast of developments in curricula and qualifications, and are enthusiastic about new initiatives. For example, the team is participating in a project to pilot electronic portfolios. The team shares learning resources and exchanges examples of good practice. In recognition of their expertise, members of the team are sometimes invited to contribute to national workshops and seminars on work-based learning. There has been little sharing of resources or good practice with other colleagues in the college who teach business courses.

36 Students on work-based learning programmes are aware of the college's facilities but tend not to use them. Some students, however, take advantage of the Saturday 'drop-in' sessions in the college, at which they can develop their IT skills.



# Curriculum Areas

## English and Access (Social Science)

### Grade 2

**37 Inspectors observed 14 lessons on English and access courses in social science. They agreed broadly with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report but concluded that the report over-emphasised some of the strengths of the English provision, and failed to identify particular strengths in the access provision.**

#### Key strengths

- high standards of teaching and learning
- well-organised courses which meet students' needs
- good levels of achievement and retention in most areas
- good review systems for monitoring students' progress
- management systems which facilitate course planning
- attractive environments for learning

#### Weaknesses

- low attendance and punctuality in some lessons
- poor recruitment and retention in GCSE English language

38 The college offers a range of courses including: GCE A level English literature and language, GCE A level English literature, GCSE English language and GCSE English literature. GCE A levels are offered on a one-year and two-year basis. There are over 130 students on the first year of the two-year GCE A level programme, 260 full-time GCSE English language students, and 60 part-time GCSE English language students. More than 200 full-time students study on the modular

access to higher education programme, which offers a choice of six pathways. Over 100 of these students follow a programme which comprises mainly humanities and social science.

39 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the provision is well managed. GCSE and the GCE A level course management is devolved to individual subject teaching teams who meet regularly and share ideas. The 40 staff involved on the modular access programme meet twice a term in pathway teams. The progress of students' groups is tracked by a performance review process separate from that used to monitor individual students; as a result, curriculum issues can be quickly identified. There are good course handbooks for students and teachers, containing schemes of work, assessment criteria and some include a listing of the learning resources and teaching methods to be used on courses.

40 Most teaching is good. Lessons are well prepared. Learning objectives are shared with students and teachers regularly check students' understanding. Inspectors observed a wide variety of teaching methods, even though most classes were revising for examinations. One class revising a novel, was engaged in lively group work leading to presentations of each group's findings. In another lesson, the study of Seamus Heaney was accompanied by references to paintings by Goya. Teachers have a high level of expertise, and are generous with their time. They offer students extra lessons and prepare learning resources specifically to help students revise. Stimulating out-of-hours activities such as a lunchtime 'Poetry Cafe' reflect the high expectations teachers have of the students. Students on all courses praised the high academic standards and the support of teachers. An enthusiastic, but not untypical, student said that he found their knowledge and teaching skills 'enlightening and inspiring'.

41 Students are encouraged to manage their own learning. They have individual review

# Curriculum Areas

sessions with teachers, at which achievement targets are negotiated. The review process, which links with the tutorial system, is also available for part-time day and evening students. GCE A level students have target minimum grades, based on their GCSE qualifications, at which to aim.

42 Students' achievements were identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. In 1998-99, achievements were at or above national averages in five out of six GCE A level courses, and on the modular access programme. Retention was at or above the national average in five out of seven courses. Value-added information indicates that 90% of GCE A level English students achieved a higher grade than had been predicted on the basis of their GCSE performance. Most access students obtain places in higher education. Last year the University of Oxford accepted its first Croydon access student. The achievement rate for GCSE English language has gradually improved over the past three years and is now in line with the national average, but recruitment to the subject is a cause for concern. Large numbers of full-time GNVQ students this year added GCSE English language to their programme when they enrolled. However, they have been struggling with the workload, and many did not meet the entry criteria the English team would normally set. This issue is identified in the self-assessment report and the team is modifying both recruitment and internal organisation for the next academic year.

43 Average attendance in the lessons observed by inspectors was 70%, which is below the sector average. Students' punctuality was an issue in a small number of lessons. Teachers are well qualified. The teaching accommodation is pleasant and compact and there is easy access to learning resources. The library provision is good, and many GCE A level students use the 'flexible learning area' regularly.

# Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and access (social science), 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English literature	2	Number of starters	27	*	22
		Retention (%)	93	*	86
		Achievement(%)	60	*	63
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	306	*	203
		Retention (%)	73	*	73
		Achievement (%)	35	*	42
GCE A level English literature (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	31	4	31
		Retention (%)	74	71	88
		Achievement (%)	83	83	85
GCE A English language and literature (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	88	99	114
		Retention (%)	51	49	67
		Achievement (%)	78	76	91
GCE A English language and literature (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	42	48	45
		Retention (%)	76	77	80
		Achievement (%)	72	84	89
Access: modular social science	3	Number of starters	34	35	34
		Retention (%)	82	69	69
		Achievement (%)	82	83	83
Access (over 24 weeks)	3	Number of starters	184	211	266
		Retention (%)	71	76	75
		Achievement (%)	53	76	83

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*data not reliable

# Curriculum Areas

## ESOL

### *Grade 2*

**44 The inspectors observed 12 lessons across the five levels of full-time provision and the one part-time pre-access course for adults. The lessons covered numeracy, IT, a tutorial and language support for ESOL students. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but found some additional weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a programme structure which meets the broad educational needs of young asylum seekers
- well-planned and skilful teaching
- thorough diagnostic assessment
- the wide range of opportunities for accreditation and progression

#### **Weaknesses**

- some individual needs not fully met through whole-group teaching
- underdeveloped individual learning plans and reviews

45 The college provides full-time ESOL courses, mainly for young asylum seekers. Provision has expanded rapidly to meet a greatly increased demand. There is also a separate and extensive part-time ESOL programme provided by Croydon's adult education service. A core accredited programme of English, numeracy, and IT, with science offered at the higher levels, effectively meets the needs of young people whose education has been disrupted. There are progression routes into mainstream college programmes and students receive effective language support to help them progress.

46 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that teaching and learning are

effectively structured, build students' confidence and promote achievement and progression.

Lessons are consistently well-planned and based on detailed schemes of work.

Language learning is integrated with study skills and tutorial content. There is a lively, brisk pace to lessons; students contribute well and work hard. Most tutors use questions to ensure that students are learning, summarise material clearly, and monitor individuals closely. Learning materials are well designed and culturally appropriate, but they do not adequately reflect students' current experiences. Students are prepared well for examinations.

Homework is set regularly and marked carefully. Teachers provide constructive feedback on how students might improve their work.

Students have well-organised files of completed work. They are encouraged to use the college's facilities to wordprocess homework or to carry out research on the Internet. The resources available to them to study English language on their own are limited. There is little focus on correcting or developing pronunciation.

Tutors regularly review and update individual action plans, drawing attention to the availability of student support and the 'rules of conduct' relating to punctuality, attendance, homework, and working with others.

Individual action plans, however, contain few language learning targets and do not have a sufficiently clear link with course schemes of work. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

47 All students take thorough diagnostic tests in language and numeracy when they enrol. This ensures that they are accurately placed on programmes and receive an effective induction. The results of diagnostic testing provide a baseline for calculating value-added progress across the year. A separate diagnostic procedure indicates needs that mainstream students may have for language support and offers detailed information on language gaps together with suggested teaching materials.

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The ESOL teaching team provides a caring and supportive learning environment which particularly benefits those unaccompanied young people who live in the care of social services.

48 Students are motivated and enjoy their learning. As identified in the self-assessment report, levels of achievement are high. In 1998-99, all students completing their course achieved at least one qualification; 70% achieved qualifications in both English and mathematics; 71% gained an IT certificate. Four students obtained GCSE science. Some students have gained high grades at GCSE in their mother tongues. Achievement rates are above national benchmarks in Pitmans ESOL examinations and some students obtain qualifications at more than one level within a year. In 1998-99, there was a 76% pass rate in the basic Pitmans qualification and an 84% pass rate at the elementary level. Other achievements are recognised through awards and certificates or through participation, for example, in special careers events. Progression within and beyond ESOL courses is good. In June 1999, 37% of leavers progressed to higher level ESOL programmes, 25% to other further education courses, and 3% to employment.

49 Retention rates are satisfactory and improving, at 73% in 1997-98 and 75% in 1998-99. The ESOL team has developed a strategy to tackle students whose behaviour disrupts lessons. The 'rules of conduct' are rigorously and consistently implemented, and students have responded to the system well. Punctuality in the lessons observed by inspectors, for example, was good. Social workers or family members are welcomed into the college and receive mid-year reports. Tutors follow up unexplained absences promptly using a weekly monitoring sheet.

50 The programme area is well managed and strongly led. The teachers display an energetic commitment to improving the range and quality

of provision locally and through national networks. This was identified in the self-assessment report. The expansion of the provision has been rapid but planned and there are good systems in place to ensure quality, consistent practice and teamwork. Innovative projects have been undertaken through close co-operation both with the adult education service and with schools' multi-cultural services. These projects include summer schools for young people starting college in September and a European Social Fund programme for young refugees. From September 2000, the local education authority (LEA) is funding new provision for under-16s who are unable to gain places in local schools. Work experience is an innovative development in the programme area. It gives students direct contact with the work environment and helps develop skills and build self-confidence.

51 All ESOL staff are employed full time or are on fractional contracts. The teachers are well qualified and experienced. As identified in the self-assessment report, they work well together to develop courses and learning materials. For example, they have contributed to a national resource bank of vocationally related language support materials.

# Curriculum Areas

## Basic Skills

### *Grade 3*

**52 The inspection covered the provision made for literacy and numeracy across the college at entry level and level 1.**

**Nine lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with the majority of judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good progression for foundation for study students
- effectively identified learning support needs
- good use of vocationally related course materials

#### **Weaknesses**

- inadequate screening for basic skills
- poor development of individual learning plans
- inadequacies in co-ordinating basic skills support with vocational courses
- lack of an effective whole-college strategy for basic skills

53 The college's basic skills provision consists of: scheduled and 'drop-in' learning support for students on a wide range of vocational courses; a small number of courses leading to City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) qualifications in communication and numeracy; literacy and numeracy on the foundation for study course, for students returning to study; basic skills as part of an entry level vocational qualification and GNVQ foundation programme. The college's self-assessment report accurately identifies that there is insufficient co-ordination of teaching and learning in basic skills across these areas of provision.

54 Teachers are committed to their students, establish effective relationships with them, are responding to their wide range of needs and offer them appropriate support. In the best lessons, teaching is based on clear objectives to increase individual students' skills in literacy and numeracy. An atmosphere of hard work is quickly established and students are well motivated. Tutors provide sensitive individual teaching to help students with their coursework and to address their specific literacy and numeracy needs. In weaker lessons, teachers fail to take account of the specific learning objectives of individual students, tending to focus on activities rather than on the development of underpinning skills and outcomes. On some occasions, individual students fail to join in group work activities.

55 The learning support provided in the 'flexible learning' area involves the effective use of vocationally relevant course material to help develop basic skills, so that students can cope with the literacy and numeracy demands of courses. The learning support is an important ingredient in ensuring students' successful completion of their courses. For example, a student who was due shortly to take an assessment as part of an NVQ level 1 in carpentry and joinery was helped with multiplication and division. The tutor set the student clear goals and encouraged him to work on his own, only providing help when required. This approach helped the student develop the necessary confidence and skills.

56 All students are screened for literacy and numeracy support needs, either during interviews for their courses or during their induction. Support is negotiated with students and reviewed on a termly basis. There are, however, no clear plans to show how identified needs are to be addressed. Although the college identifies the need to review and develop aspects of its screening procedure, inspectors identified additional weaknesses. The college

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does not have an overview of the appropriate level of basic skills. The screening record is not marked to show which students are at entry level or level 1 in literacy or numeracy. This makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of the learning support students receive. Screening tests are marked by the students' main course tutor and not by specialist basic skills staff, which means that literacy and numeracy needs are not always assessed effectively. In order to assess basic skills needs more effectively, subject tutors require training. At the moment, the take-up for such training is low.

57 The college's self-assessment identifies that many students who attend the foundation for study course, progress to other courses. These students value the opportunity to develop their basic skills. They clearly link the progress they make in basic skills to their ability to progress confidently to more advanced courses. Retention and achievement rates are significantly higher for students who receive learning support. Achievement rates in level 1 Wordpower and level 1 Numberpower are above national benchmarks although the numbers of students taking Wordpower and Numberpower courses are very low. In 1998-99, retention rates ranged from 67% to 100% across the different strands of basic skills provision.

58 The college lacks a whole-college strategy for basic skills provision which means that identification, co-ordination and provision for basic skills across the college is poor. This significant area of weakness was identified in the college's self-assessment report and a basic skills development committee has recently been set up to establish a policy to address this weakness. The individual aspects of basic skills provision are effectively managed. There are regular team meetings, course reviews and lesson observations to evaluate teaching and learning and these contribute to a well-established self-assessment process. Weaknesses identified in the basic skills

provision are tackled effectively. However, there are no formal arrangements to co-ordinate basic skills in learning support sessions with students' needs arising from their main courses. This results in restricted opportunities for developing basic skills. The college has identified this area for development as part of the whole-college strategy.

59 Staff are well qualified though some staff delivering basic skills support in vocational areas do not have basic skills training. Most teaching accommodation is satisfactory and an adequate range of specialist materials is available within the 'flexible learning' area.

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## Support for Students

### *Grade 3*

**60 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Some additional weaknesses were identified; others had been addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective pre-course guidance and admissions
- the wide variety of support for students with learning difficulties
- good arrangements for supporting part-time GCSE and GCE A level students
- comprehensive, well-integrated arrangements for guidance and support
- good information and guidance on careers

#### **Weaknesses**

- inadequate induction for some students
- weak arrangements for ensuring the take-up of identified support
- ineffective strategies to address poor levels of attendance, punctuality and retention on some courses
- some inadequate tutorial support

61 The college has good arrangements for pre-entry guidance and admissions. The well-used information centre contains a wide range of course leaflets and provides a helpful service for those making enquiries by post or telephone, or by calling personally. It also responds to the increasing number of enquiries from students through the college's Internet site. The college has good links with local schools and holds several open days and 'taster' sessions each year, which are always well attended. Students join staff in planning and organising some of these events. For example, hospitality and catering, art and design and business students

are involved in the organisation of the adult open evening for the summer term 2000. As recognised in the self-assessment report, a successful skills check service has recently been added to the college's pre-entry services. This provides adults, contemplating a course at the college, with an individual assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills and guidance on appropriate courses. A high proportion of the students who have undertaken this assessment progress to courses within the college or at centres within the local community. The admissions process is supported by a comprehensive set of guidelines and information. Applications are dealt with promptly. A newly created advice line provides advice and guidance for staff on curriculum 2000 issues. The assessment of students' financial, personal or learning support needs forms an integral part of the admissions process.

62 Students receive an informative college handbook containing the college's charter and other useful information. Staff from the various student support services participate in the induction activities, providing most students with useful training and briefings on the library, the 'flexible learning' area, and the college's provision for guidance, counselling, and advice on finance and careers. Students who start courses after September, however, often fail to receive an appropriate induction, especially to the support services which are available. The college's self-assessment report identified this as a weakness.

63 The college, in partnership with other agencies, supports students with a range of specific learning difficulties. Two signers support students in lessons and a number of the learning support, library and IT staff are following sign language courses in order to be able to offer additional help. A specialist consultant provides assessment and support for students who have impaired vision. Arrangements for the diagnostic assessment of,



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and support for, students with dyslexia are good. Three qualified staff provide a combination of timetabled and 'drop-in' sessions throughout the week. The college has a strong commitment to the use of technology in supporting students with learning difficulties. It is gradually introducing relevant computer software into the IT 'drop-in' centre, including voice-activated software and packages to speak scanned or typed text. Students visiting the centre also receive help from a member of the learning support team.

64 There are comprehensive arrangements for students' guidance and support. As part of their induction, all students are entitled to an assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs. Counselling is available either by appointment or through short 'drop-in' sessions designed to address immediate problems. Financial support is provided to meet a range of needs, the most common being childcare. The college funds a full-time manager to assist the students' association. The association provides a range of facilities including a shop, recreational and social activities and advice and guidance. Additional learning support in literacy, numeracy and ESOL is provided in the library area together with subject-based learning support, offered by specialist curriculum staff. Students speak highly of the help they receive from staff and the resources available in the library and learning support area.

65 Arrangements for ensuring that students with identified needs for additional support take advantage of this support are weak. In some cases, take-up is low. For example, only 32% of students referred for further literacy and numeracy assessment sought an appointment and other students failed to follow up their initial requests for personal or financial support. Furthermore, the college has yet to develop effective procedures for reviewing the appropriateness of students' chosen programmes in cases where students are not

receiving the support they need. This weakness was not identified by the college in its self-assessment.

66 Inspectors agreed with the college that careers education and guidance are good. A well-stocked careers area, situated in the library, is an accessible, high-quality resource for students seeking information and guidance on careers. Staff from a local careers company arrange appointments and a daily 'drop-in' service. A specialist guidance service for adults is also available. Full-time students and many part-time students receive careers education as part of their tutorial programme. There are also effective arrangements to help students applying for places in higher education.

67 The college has a significant number of GCSE and GCE A level students following part-time courses, many of them in the evening. A regular newsletter outlines the support available to them. Two tutors provide daily 'drop-in' workshops and give advice on the telephone. They also follow up students' attendance and progress. Materials are provided to develop students' study skills, to help them revise, and to offer guidance on applications to higher education. This support for part-time students is a strength which was not identified in the self-assessment report.

68 The college has recognised the need to improve the consistency of tutorial provision and to raise levels of attendance, retention and punctuality. Three tutor managers have been appointed and progress has been made in implementing more rigorous and more uniform approaches to these issues. There is still considerable variation in the quality of tutorials, the monitoring of attendance, and the setting of targets for improvement.

# Cross-college Provision

## General Resources

### Grade 2

#### 69 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

##### Key strengths

- effective planning and management of improvements in space utilisation
- good library facilities with extensive access to IT
- well-maintained buildings
- significant improvements in specialist resources

##### Weaknesses

- an underdeveloped IT network

70 Following the closure of its Selhurst and Heath Clarke sites, the college is now based on two main sites in central Croydon, close to the East Croydon Station and the new tram routes. The Fairfield site houses the main further education provision and the library. The Barclay Road building, adjacent to Fairfield is the centre for higher education courses. Both sites provide good access for people with restricted mobility.

71 The relocation from four sites to two has resulted in a 32% reduction in space, substantially increasing the college's utilisation of accommodation. Further efficiency gains are being sought with the aid of a well-managed, centralised timetable. These strengths are recognised in the college self-assessment report. Following the sale of the Selhurst site in 1997, £2 million has been spent on the accommodation and resources at Fairfield. Improvements include new hair and beauty salons, catering facilities, a library and an assessment centre. The centre meets the college's need for a large venue for examinations and major events such as open days, meetings

for college staff, prize awards and other social functions. A major refurbishment programme, costing £1 million, has also been carried out at the Barclay Road higher education centre. The present phase of the college's accommodation strategy has been completed successfully. The college is awaiting the sale of the Heath Clarke site before finalising its new accommodation strategy.

72 The college's buildings are sound and well maintained. Classrooms are carpeted, well furnished and equipped with appropriate teaching aids. The college operates a 'zone management' policy, with curriculum managers overseeing their designated accommodation. There is a rolling programme for redecorating accommodation and replacing furniture. Appropriate security measures are in operation.

73 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the extensive library facility is a strength. The college has invested significantly in the library. The £1.2 million facility was completed in 1998 and provides a high-quality, spacious learning environment. There is an appropriate range of books, periodicals and videos and increasing use is made of the Internet. There is generous space for private study but no group study areas. An extensive open access IT facility is contained within the library, with trainers providing effective support for users. Manuals are also provided for students to work by themselves. The library also houses a media services unit with facilities for off-air recording, video production and editing and photography. Integrated with the library and associated services, are the college's 'flexible learning' areas. A wide range of learners use these areas on a 'drop-in' basis, or by appointment, for help with English and communications, mathematics and numeracy and study skills. Staff operating in the library and the associated facilities liaise with teachers in order to meet the needs of courses and to maintain appropriate, up-to-date resources. The library has extended its opening hours to include Saturday mornings.

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74 As part of its rationalisation and reorganisation programme, the college has centralised the management of IT resources. A reliable college network is in place but it is not yet accessible to all academic staff. In addition to the open access facility in the library, the college has established a further 12 computer suites and provided good technical support. Computers vary in age from almost new to six or seven years old and differences in operating systems and software on machines, mean that students experience some difficulty when moving from one machine to another. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The college has recently established an information learning technology group and produced a draft information learning technology strategy to develop and improve IT resources. The current ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:10.

75 As stated in the college self-assessment report, there are limited social, sport and recreational facilities for students. A new fitness centre is open to students most afternoons but there are no college facilities for indoor sports. Use is made of sports facilities at Crystal Palace and the YMCA. The common room for students at Fairfield is small and inaccessible for students with restricted mobility. The college provides a comprehensive range of refectory services, including a canteen and two sandwich and coffee bars. The accommodation for full-time and part-time staff is adequate. Most staff work areas have IT resources and teachers are offered an effective reprographic service. Video equipment is readily available and easy to book.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

**76 Inspectors agreed broadly with the judgements about quality assurance in the self-assessment report. However, they felt that the report gave insufficient weight to teaching and learning and students' achievements.**

#### Key strengths

- a well-documented framework and comprehensive procedures for self-assessment and quality assurance
- the systematic collection and analysis of students' views
- quality assurance which is integral to the college's planning cycle
- extensive staff development linked to appraisal and strategic planning
- measurable service standards for cross-college functions

#### Weaknesses

- inaccurate data upon which to base judgements about students' retention and achievements
- inadequate evidence to support judgements in some programme reviews
- the inconsistent impact of quality assurance procedures on levels of achievements in some areas of work
- lack of critical comment about the quality of some teaching and learning

77 As noted by the college, the procedures involved in producing the self-assessment report are comprehensive. Staff, students, employer representatives and the local TEC all contribute to the report. Inspectors agreed that the college is committed to the continuous improvement of its provision. Self-assessment and quality assurance procedures are an integral part of programme reviews and cross-college service

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reviews, and the reviews form the basis of the college's quality assurance system. They are informed by internal and external verifier reports, observation of teaching and learning and the systematic collection and analysis of students' views. Service reviews involve assessments of performance against measurable service standards. Many of the reviews are rigorous and evaluative. Others lack critical comment and contain inadequate evidence to support judgements. All reviews result in a development plan, identifying the action to be taken to improve performance and provision, but some plans fail to provide a clear indication of the timescales for actions or the persons responsible for monitoring each action. Actions are agreed with heads of school, checked by school boards of studies and audited by a quality audit team. A team of auditors, drawn from across the college, analyses the evidence used by programme teams. The academic policy and standards committee monitors the reviews and makes recommendations to the academic board about the college-wide self-assessment report. A self-assessment steering group, set up since the last inspection, and including senior managers from other colleges, oversees the self-assessment process and monitors the college's overall quality development plan. The college's self-assessment report was approved by the corporation.

78 Quality assurance is effectively integrated with the planning cycle. A comprehensive calendar of planning and monitoring activities ensures that all staff are kept informed of when their work has to be completed and submitted to relevant managers or committees. A quality assurance policy outlines the college's strategy and its aims and procedures, and these are set out in a quality assurance handbook. Files are used to record information on all aspects of the quality assurance system. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the integration of quality assurance with strategic planning is a notable strength.

79 Managers review the data on retention and achievement and monitor the overall performance of the college against national benchmarks. Targets for students' achievements and retention are agreed and course teams are beginning to make use of benchmarking data. However, accurate data are not readily available and programme managers were uncertain about the validity of their judgements relating to students' attendance, retention and achievements. This was an issue noted in the last inspection report. Despite the comprehensive self-assessment systems and the college's commitment to raise standards, improvements in students' achievements are patchy.

80 The college has thorough procedures for the internal validation of courses. Before any documentation is sent to external validating bodies, new proposals are examined by the executive group comprising the principal and two vice-principals. There is a well-organised programme of lesson observations, that also extends to observation of induction and registration activities. The college has produced useful guidelines on how to observe lessons and on how to give feedback to teachers and reports on the findings from lesson observations are circulated across the college. Inspectors considered, however, that the college overstated the strengths and understated the weaknesses of teaching and learning. There is a lack of critical evaluation in some of the judgements made about teaching and learning.

81 The college operates an annual professional development and appraisal scheme. Staff development is linked to appraisal and to the college's strategic objectives. Over 80% of all staff have been appraised this year. Staff speak positively about the opportunities for them to undertake professional development activities. An extensive staff development programme includes in-house courses, attendance at external events and studying for postgraduate qualifications. Priorities for staff development

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have focused on curriculum 2000, key skills and customer care. A conference on inclusive learning was held at the college in May of this year. The college has recently achieved the Investors in People award.

82 The college's charter is given to all students at induction. The charter is comprehensive and there are separate editions for students, employers and parents. The charter describes students' entitlement to high-quality education and support and makes clear standards against which measurable commitments can be judged. The charter emphasises the college's commitment to equal opportunities. A customer complaints procedure is published in a student guide and the staff handbook. Most complaints are dealt with effectively by teachers and course tutors.

## Governance

### *Grade 1*

**83 The college's assessment of governance was comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements and identified an additional strength. They also recognised that considerable progress has been made in rectifying weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- effective monitoring of college finances
- the good range of skills and experience amongst governors
- the exceptional commitment of board members
- productive relationship between governors and managers
- strong and efficient clerking
- the board's full involvement in strategic development
- rigorous monitoring of senior managers' performance

#### Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

84 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation and its finance and human resources committee receive and consider carefully management accounts, including a report on the funding units, at each meeting. They also receive regular reports on the college's franchised provision. The audit committee has ensured that there are effective internal and external audit arrangements. The committee monitors the work of the auditors effectively and prepares an annual report on its work for the corporation.

85 The current membership of the corporation comprises the principal, two staff, one student, three co-opted members, six business members, two local authority members and two local community members. Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds and their expertise is well used by the college. Their expertise covers business, law, finance and education as well as local community issues. The membership of the governing body does not fully reflect the gender and ethnic balance of the local community. Induction and mentoring arrangements for new governors have been improved and inspectors agreed that they are now effective.

86 Governors demonstrate a very strong commitment to the college. Members are attached to particular aspects of the college, and most attend a variety of events during the year. Reports on their visits are a standing item on the board's agenda. Governors and

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managers clearly understand their respective roles and work well together. Governors form advisory panels to assist the college's executive with major projects such as site disposal or the development of a higher education strategy. The college's self-assessment steering group is chaired by a governor. Attendance at meetings of the board over the past year has averaged over 80%.

87 The board is supported for two days a week by a well-qualified and independent clerk with LEA and college experience. He is also a member of the executive team but with a clear remit only to advise on governance matters and to act as secretary. Members value the regular governor bulletins from the clerk which include college events, the staff and student newsletters, press cuttings and items for action. The governors' register of interests is updated annually.

88 The board meets at least six times a year. It is supported by committees which cover audit, search, remuneration, and finance and human resources. All the committees have clear terms of reference. Members receive well-written reports to support the agenda. The minutes of confidential items are bound and kept separately. All other minutes are available within the college and are distributed to the local press and cable television company. The finance and human resources committee carefully monitors the college's academic performance and is aware of the problem surrounding the accuracy of the college's data. Monitoring reports on this issue are now a standing item at committee meetings and perceived as a key priority by the board. The remuneration committee has an exemplary framework for monitoring the performance of senior management against targets.

89 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the board contributes effectively to the college's strategic planning. At the end of each academic year, governors receive a progress report against the college's operating

statement objectives. Members then consider key themes for the coming year and assist in the formulation of objectives. A draft of the strategic plan is agreed in the summer term. Throughout the year, the board closely monitors the college's performance.

90 The corporation recently undertook an evaluation of its own effectiveness and identified a need for measures by which to evaluate the board's performance. The chair of the board has carried out one-to-one appraisals of most governors including the chairs of the audit, and finance and human resources committees. Criteria for assessment include the effectiveness of decision-making, and meetings, and the extent to which individual governors promote the college in the local community. The clerk is also appraised by the chair. The board is aware of the need to develop a formal framework and is working towards this.

91 Governors recognise the need for a continuous training programme and by the time of the inspection, were beginning to address this issue; individual training programmes have not yet been formalised. Governors have agreed that presentations on key strategic issues should be a regular item at board meetings. The programme for the current academic year includes: curriculum 2000, external partnerships, key skills, and NVQs.

# Cross-college Provision

## Management

### *Grade 2*

**92 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the key strengths and weakness of management identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, they considered that the report understated an important weakness. Some weaknesses had already been addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### **Key strengths**

- the clear management structure and reporting lines
- an open and responsive management style
- effective strategic planning
- effective communications
- productive collaboration with the local community and other external organisations
- good financial management

#### **Weaknesses**

- ineffective systems for retrieving and evaluating management information
- an underdeveloped IT strategy

93 The college is well managed. The senior management group has set a clear strategic direction for the college. The ethos and vision of the college is understood and shared by staff and includes a long-standing commitment to meet the needs and aspirations of the community. In 1998, a restructuring exercise led to the consolidation of courses and improved the effectiveness and efficiency of the college by rationalising resources. The college now has four academic schools and improved service areas. It is continuing to develop its external links in order to widen participation and encourage new students to

join courses. The college is affiliated to the University of Sussex.

94 The college's management structure is well established and effective. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that management roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood and that managers operate within a culture of openness and self-criticism. The principal and the two vice-principals, with responsibilities for academic services and management services, respectively, form the executive group. The vice-principals work closely with other senior managers responsible for academic, business, finance, quality and support services. Management responsibilities have been refined recently and this has resulted in more delegation of authority to middle managers. Staff understand the rationale for such refinements.

95 The mission of the college is understood by managers, and supporting strategies and targets are clearly laid out in the college's strategic plan. Staff at all levels contribute to the development of the strategic plan. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. The current strategic plan includes seven goals covering the development of students' skills and knowledge, participation in local and national initiatives, customer services, equality of opportunity, extending collaborative arrangements with partner groups, staff recruitment and development, physical resources, and financial viability. The academic schools and service operational plans clearly link strategic goals to action plans.

96 Retention and achievement targets are set and assistant principals and programme area teams monitor progress in meeting these targets. There are ineffective systems for the collection of data which are unreliable. The college's self-assessment report underestimated these data problems. A new management information system has recently

# Cross-college Provision

been introduced. Staff report that while data needs are now catered for with greater consistency, there is some lack of confidence amongst staff, about the accuracy of central data.

97 There is a clear published schedule of meetings that is distributed to all staff. An academic committee framework clearly defines operating roles and functions and programme team's action plans are carefully monitored and evaluated. For example, portfolio developments and student target numbers are regularly reviewed alongside objectives for securing cost reductions and efficiency.

98 Communications across the college are exemplary. The principal holds regular meetings for all staff throughout the year and these are videoed. There is a calendar of 'walkabouts' by the principal and other members of the executive group, unannounced visits to all areas of the college and informal monthly meetings with small groups of staff. There is a regular staff newsletter. A separate newsletter is produced for external agencies. Staff appreciate the management team's accessibility and improvements in the effectiveness of communication. The college's IT strategy remains underdeveloped, with many staff unable to gain direct access to the electronic mail system. This problem was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

99 Central to the college's vision is its commitment to the economic regeneration of the local community. The college is highly responsive to the needs of the local and regional community. Since the last inspection, it has considerably diversified its provision, to widen participation and tackle social exclusion. College partners speak highly of its contribution to the community and college staff are represented on various groups. There is a senior management post, for partnership and external relations, to support these

developments. Notable links include work with the South London Learning partnership, the Croydon Lifelong Learning Development Forum, and Foyer developments.

100 The college has a clear and appropriate equal opportunities policy. A more formally constituted equal opportunities committee has recently been formed in recognition of the need for closer monitoring of equal opportunities. The academic board monitors the implementation of the college's policy on equal opportunities.

101 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college's budget-setting process is based on inputs from all budget holders and operates to a clearly defined timetable. The budget presented to governors is supported by a clear explanatory commentary. Management accounts are prepared each month for budget holders, who are required to give written explanations of any variances from budget. Accounts are presented to the corporation's finance and human resources committee six times a year, and to each meeting of the corporation. These accounts include an income and expenditure account, a balance sheet, a 12-month rolling cashflow forecast and a useful commentary on the figures. The college is currently forecasting a deficit in current and future years, following a surplus in 1998-99. However, a benchmarking exercise has identified some scope for savings and increased income. The college has a well-qualified and experienced finance team.

## Conclusions

102 The inspection team found the college to be open and committed to self-assessment. The self-assessment report used for the inspection was the second produced by the college and it provided a sound basis for planning the inspection. It reflected the views



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and experience of staff and governors and presented a clear and comprehensive evaluation of the college's work. It was supported by good evidence, and the development plans for each programme area reflected a commitment to review and improve. Development plans were designed to address key weaknesses and the update to the report produced prior to the inspection, showed significant progress in a number of areas. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report but identified further weaknesses during the inspection. Inspectors also considered that the college had underestimated the significance of some of its weaknesses, in particular those relating to retention, achievement and the accuracy of data. Inspectors agreed with five of the seven curriculum grades awarded by the college and awarded lower grades for two curriculum areas. One inspection cross-college grade was higher and one lower than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

103 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 (July 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	25
19-24 years	23
25+ years	51
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	14
Level 2 (intermediate)	16
Level 3 (advanced)	31
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	27
Level unclassified	11
Total	100

Source: college data

Note: 24% of non-schedule 2 figure relates to the college's higher education provision

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	582	1,326	15
Construction	82	672	6
Engineering	229	470	6
Business	799	2,315	25
Hotel and catering	401	463	7
Health and community care	528	973	12
Art and design	918	150	9
Humanities	627	1,636	18
Basic education	181	79	2
Unknown	53	5	0
Total	4,347	8,084	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 30% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	241	24	4	269
Supporting direct learning contact	81	14	0	95
Other support	183	11	0	194
Total	505	49	4	558

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£27,184,000	£24,575,000	£24,098,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£20.28	£19.65	£18.25
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	72%	59%
Achievement of funding target	100%	100%	100%
Diversity of income	38%	32%	32%
Operating surplus	£2,616,000	-£1,217,000	£515,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Payroll – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	1,077	1,103	1,100	759	927	1,918
	Retention (%)	83	77	80	68	68	83
	Achievement (%)	42	61	51	46	53	40
2	Number of starters	1,862	2,040	1,685	1,579	1,685	2,112
	Retention (%)	77	73	80	80	77	82
	Achievement (%)	48	69	50	59	64	58
3	Number of starters	2,379	1,912	2,137	2,566	2,150	3,015
	Retention (%)	81	67	75	80	77	85
	Achievement (%)	67	68	67	58	59	56
4 or 5	Number of starters	27	7	11	1,356	1,082	955
	Retention (%)	100	86	100	91	90	91
	Achievement (%)	62	100	71	47	50	46
Short courses	Number of starters	820	420	476	4,233	2,588	1,483
	Retention (%)	97	88	95	96	94	97
	Achievement (%)	57	61	56	64	75	67
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,473	2,149	2,880	1,162	763	1,430
	Retention (%)	91	85	83	78	87	89
	Achievement (%)	65	64	50	51	66	65

Source: ISR

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