

Doncaster College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 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

Doncaster College

Yorkshire and Humberside Region

Inspected March 2000

Summary

Doncaster College is a large general further education college serving the metropolitan borough of Doncaster. Many of its students are from areas of substantial economic and social deprivation, and the FEFC has identified the college as one which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. The college's self-assessment report was detailed and comprehensive, and all staff were involved in its production. The college conducted a rigorous validation of the report, with the assistance of external consultants. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. The college had made good progress in implementing its action plan by the time of the inspection. The grades the inspectors gave for some areas were higher than those awarded by the college.

The college offers courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. The inspection covered work in seven of these areas, together with basic skills provision across the college, and aspects of cross-college provision. A concurrent inspection of work-based training was undertaken by the TSC. The college is well managed, and its financial position is strong. It has extensive links with a range of collaborative partners, with whom it works energetically for the regeneration of the local community and increased participation in education and training. It provides a good counselling and guidance service for students. The quality of accommodation and learning resources are good. A self-critical culture has been developed as a result of effective self-assessment and quality assurance procedures. High priority is

given to the professional development of staff. Governors are well informed and are fully involved in setting the college's strategic direction. Much teaching is good and almost all is satisfactory. The provision in hotel and catering is outstanding. Overall, students' achievements compare well with national averages. Student retention and achievement rates show a steady pattern of improvement over the last three years. Retention rates for 16 to 19 year old students, however, are below the national average. The college should: strengthen aspects of operational planning; ensure that all students receive the additional learning support and pre-course guidance they require; improve the co-ordination of basic skills provision across the college; improve recreational facilities for students; continue to develop quality assurance procedures for support services; and increase student retention rates in some curriculum areas.

Summary

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Horticulture, floristry and environmental studies	2	Support for students	2
Construction	3	General resources	2
Engineering	2	Quality assurance	2
Business and administration	2	Governance	2
Hotel and catering	1	Management	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2		
Social sciences and teacher education	3		
Basic skills	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Doncaster College is a large general further education college. It was established in 1990 following a merger between Doncaster Metropolitan Institute of Higher Education and the Don Valley Institute of Further Education. It is the only provider of further and higher education in the borough of Doncaster. The college has four sites. Its main site is at Waterdale, which is in the centre of Doncaster. The Church View and Bessacarr sites are close to the town centre. The site at High Melton is 6 miles away and has residential accommodation as well as teaching facilities. The college also provides adult and community education at 35 venues within the borough. There are 17 secondary schools in Doncaster, 14 of which have sixth forms. Four further education colleges are located within a radius of 22 miles.

2 Doncaster is geographically the largest borough in England, and has a population of 290,000. It is in a region which has recently been accorded European Union objective 1 status because of its low level of economic activity. Since the collapse of the mining and engineering industries in the 1980s, the borough has experienced considerable social and economic decline. Doncaster has an unemployment rate of 8.8%, compared with the national rate of 5.9%. On the government index of local deprivation, Doncaster is ranked 39th out of 353 local authorities. In 1999, the proportion of year 11 pupils leaving school with grade C or above in five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects was 36.2%, compared with a national average of 47.9%. The participation of students aged 16 to 19 in full-time education and training in 1998 was 64%, compared with the national figure of 78%. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has identified the college as one of a group which recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas.

3 The college offers provision in all FEFC programme areas. It works collaboratively with schools, other colleges and universities to provide a wide range of programmes, including a substantial amount of higher education. The range includes courses on employers' premises, tailored to their requirements, and a programme of distance learning. The college is the largest provider in the area of the government's New Deal programme, with a contract for 300 clients. In November 1999, 19,051 students were enrolled at the college, of whom 17% were full time, and 19% were aged under 19. The proportion of students at the college from minority ethnic groups was 2.8%, compared with 2% of persons from these groups in the population of the borough.

4 The college is divided into four faculties: art; business and professional studies; management studies and business enterprise; and technology. The college's adult and community provision and its sixth form centre are managed separately from the faculties. The sixth form centre, at the Waterdale site, provides general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCSE programmes mainly for full-time students aged 16 to 19. The Dearne Valley Business School, part of the faculty of management studies and business enterprise, is based at the High Melton site and caters mainly for higher education and income generating courses. In November 1999, the college employed 317 full-time equivalent teachers and 359 full-time equivalent support staff.

5 The college's mission is to raise expectations and achievements through lifelong learning. It aims to do so 'in an accessible, welcoming and high-quality learning environment dedicated to the needs and success of all its students'.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in March 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information 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 data on students' achievements for 1999. These were checked against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and were found to be accurate.

7 The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 61 days. Inspectors and auditors held meetings with college governors, managers, staff and students. They consulted representatives from the Barnsley and Doncaster Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Doncaster Council, the Doncaster Regeneration Partnership, other local partnerships and the head teacher of a local school. The FEFC inspectors were joined by eight inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) who inspected work-based training in the occupational areas of business administration, construction, engineering and foundation for work. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by the TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading the college's provision.

8 The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 68% were judged to be good or outstanding and 3% were less than satisfactory. This compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1998-99.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	3	5	0	0	9
GNVQ	0	3	3	0	0	6
NVQ	12	20	14	2	0	48
Other vocational	8	17	6	0	0	31
Other*	2	13	5	2	0	22
Total (No.)	23	56	33	4	0	116
Total (%)	20	48	29	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 higher education, basic education, GCSE, and group tutorials

Context

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The attendance rate varied from 89% in hotel and catering to 76% in basic skills.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Doncaster College	10.6	82
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

Horticulture, Floristry and Environmental Studies

Grade 2

10 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering the provision in horticulture, floristry and environmental studies. Inspectors broadly agreed with the findings in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the strengths of provision in this curriculum area had been overstated.

Key strengths

- flexible timetabling arrangements to meet students' needs
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- good teaching
- students' high retention and pass rates in amenity horticulture

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on floristry courses
- shortcomings in teaching accommodation

11 The college offers courses in amenity horticulture at national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 1 and 2. Provision in floristry includes courses leading to NVQs and other professional qualifications, as well as National Open College Network (NOCN) courses in community venues. Many floristry students progress from NOCN courses to NVQ programmes. GCE A level environmental studies is offered in the sixth form centre. Teachers have good industry and community contacts and are quick to respond to changes in the industry. As a response to declining enrolments on day-release NVQ programmes in horticulture, the college has developed more work-based programmes. Enrolments on these are increasing. However, some specialist options have been discontinued, reducing the range and breadth of provision for students. Course teams

keep the quality of provision under rigorous review, making good use of targets and taking students' views into account. Students and employers speak highly of the learning opportunities the college offers. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that a strength of this curriculum area lies in the high degree of flexibility in timetabling arrangements for students. For example, students on floristry NVQ programmes may enrol or complete their programmes at any time, and attend at times to suit their circumstances.

12 The quality of teaching and learning is good. Nine of the 12 lessons observed were good or outstanding. Activities are well planned. The floristry team has devised a comprehensive programme of demonstrations, seminars, workshops and tutorials which is repeated on different days to ensure that all students can attend. The materials for students to use on their own in the 'drop-in' workshops include a comprehensive range of workbooks which are of excellent quality. Teachers ensure that students are made aware of best practice in industry and commerce. They emphasise the importance of observing health and safety regulations in practical work. In theory lessons, teachers relate theory to practice effectively. They monitor students' progress and attendance closely. Students are entitled to one formal tutorial a term, but more frequent informal tutorials take place as a result of the close working relationships between teachers and students. Upon enrolment, all students receive comprehensive induction to the college and their courses. They are also assessed in order that their needs for additional learning support may be identified. Those requiring support receive this from a designated tutor. During their course, students receive no assessment of their progress in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology (IT). Teachers organise visits and field trips to enrich students' learning experience. For example, students of GCE A level environmental studies go on an

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annual field trip to Tenerife to participate in 'Whale Watch'.

13 Students work to industry standards and to a high level in their practical work. Floristry students have their work displayed in the college regularly. They undertake commissions for weddings and funerals and keep a file of testimonials from delighted clients. NVQ horticulture students maintain the grounds on the campus and the college golf course, to a high standard. Floristry students are involved in the weekly purchase, conditioning and care of flowers. Many of the activities enable students to develop personal as well as practical skills. For example, horticulture students meet the public and develop customer care skills. Students demonstrate excellent skills of teamwork, and advanced students often provide help and guidance to those with less experience. The quality of GCE A level projects is good and many students make good use of IT. Pass rates are

high in GCE A level environmental studies and NVQ level 1 horticulture. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, retention rates on some NVQ floristry programmes are low. The college has made some progress in addressing this weakness.

14 Full-time teachers are well supported by a dedicated team of experienced part-time teachers. Teachers are enthusiastic and entrepreneurial, and generate income through commercial activities. The surplus is used to support teaching and learning. Resources for horticulture are good. Floristry accommodation simulates a real working environment, but as the self-assessment report recognises, its location, furniture and design are poor. Staff and students have insufficient access to IT.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in horticulture, floristry and environmental studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G certificate in gardening	1	Number of starters	26	32	35
		Retention (%)	81	66	83
		Achievement (%)	76	62	69
NVQ amenity horticulture	1	Number of starters	15	20	70
		Retention (%)	93	90	99
		Achievement (%)	71	83	86
NVQ floristry	2	Number of starters	33	30	33
		Retention (%)	52	63	55
		Achievement (%)	88	69	88
NVQ floristry	3	Number of starters	2	15	18
		Retention (%)	50	53	61
		Achievement (%)	0	33	73
GCE A level environmental studies	3	Number of starters	10	19	30
		Retention (%)	40	89	77
		Achievement (%)	75	53	86

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

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Construction

Grade 3

15 Inspectors observed 13 lessons on construction courses. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- students' high retention and achievement rates on most craft courses
- success of the curriculum centre in helping school pupils to gain GNVQs
- well-managed courses
- provision of learning support as an integral part of courses

Weaknesses

- some teachers' failure to vary teaching methods to meet students' particular needs
- low retention rates on level 3 technician courses
- some poor workshop practice
- insufficient updating of teachers' industrial knowledge

16 The college provides a wide range of construction courses and these offer the students good progression routes to employment or further study. The college offers courses in all the major construction crafts to NVQ level 3, including brickwork, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, plumbing, and electrical installation. Specialist courses are offered in plastering, shop fitting, sign making and interior design. Technician courses are available in building and interior design. The college also provides an extensive range of updating courses for industry, some of which are available through distance learning. Some distance learning courses are offered

internationally. The college has a well-established construction curriculum centre which offers general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation courses to local secondary schools and 'taster' sessions to local primary schools. Pupils have been successful on the GNVQ programme, part of which is taught in school. The schools have been appreciative of the college's GNVQ programme and at one secondary school, it is now offered to all year 10 pupils. Since the college has offered the GNVQ programme to school pupils, enrolments on the college's courses in construction have increased. The college also has good links with two special schools. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff have developed extensive links with employers. Through these links, staff have been able to keep abreast of current developments in the industry and they have taken these into account in curriculum development. Links extend to other countries and visits to France are planned for this year. The curriculum area is well managed, and staff work together effectively. The systems for monitoring students' progress and planning the learning activities are well co-ordinated.

17 Most teaching is satisfactory, but only five of the lessons observed were good or outstanding. In the better lessons, teachers ensured that the different learning needs of students were taken into account. The lessons were well planned and followed coherent schemes of work. In plumbing, students undertook a variety of tasks competently and received encouragement and support from their teacher. Some assignments were based on actual working drawings brought from students' workplaces. Inspectors did not agree with the finding in the college's self-assessment report that teaching methods were varied and constituted a strength of the provision. In the weaker lessons, the teacher failed to take sufficient account of students' different levels of ability. In some workshop sessions, students were kept waiting too long for the teacher's

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assistance, and were insufficiently occupied. Other weaknesses included poor lesson planning and students' lack of punctuality. All full-time students are required to undertake a period of work experience during their course of study. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the provision of additional learning support is good. All craft students are assessed in order to identify their learning support needs. Those requiring learning support receive it as an integral part of their course.

18 In 1998-99, student achievement and retention rates on most construction craft courses were above the national average for the sector, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Retention rates on level 3 technician courses have been below the national average for the last three years. Students on NVQ courses develop the key skills of IT, communication and numeracy within the context of their vocational subjects. In many lessons, students work well together in pairs and groups, and make appropriate connections

between their college work and their experience of working in the construction industry.

19 Teachers are appropriately qualified and suitably experienced and many have assessor and verifier qualifications. Several teachers have developed advanced IT skills to extend their teaching methods. The arrangements for staff to update their industrial knowledge are insufficiently well developed, and last year only one member of staff undertook a placement in industry. The classroom and workshops provide an effective learning environment. Many rooms have posters and examples of students' work on display. Good-quality, computer-generated, teaching aids are used in many lessons. The library provides a sufficient range of written and computer-based materials to help the students on the courses offered. Students' access to the Internet is limited to one terminal in the library.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ construction crafts	1	Number of starters	*	106	192
		Retention (%)	*	92	84
		Achievement (%)	*	38	81
NVQ construction crafts	2	Number of starters	79	165	238
		Retention (%)	62	61	82
		Achievement (%)	80	52	50
NVQ construction crafts	3	Number of starters	119	103	178
		Retention (%)	85	90	91
		Achievement (%)	58	77	73
Technician studies	3	Number of starters	159	37	35
		Retention (%)	46	32	49
		Achievement (%)	88	83	75

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

20 Inspectors observed 14 lessons in mechanical and electronic engineering. They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but found some additional weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- close monitoring of students' progress
- enthusiastic response of students to the teaching
- the high standard of students' log books
- high pass rates on most courses

Weaknesses

- insufficient practical work on technician courses
- no work placements for full-time students
- below average retention rates on most courses

21 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a wide range of provision which provides good progression opportunities for students. Technician students have the opportunity to take additional craft courses in order to broaden their skills and enhance their employment prospects. The curriculum area has experienced a significant decline in full-time student enrolments in recent years. Provision below level 2 is underdeveloped. Full-time students do not undertake work placements, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report.

22 Overall, the standard of teaching is good and no teaching was judged unsatisfactory. Most lessons are well planned. Students carry out a wide range of assignments and these are

carefully designed. Attendance rates are high. In the better lessons, teachers make good use of learning resources such as the overhead projector and handouts with gaps for students to complete. Teachers also make skilful use of questioning to provoke discussion and check on students' understanding. In the workshops and laboratories, assignments are skilfully structured which allow each student to progress at an appropriate rate. The instructions for assignments inform students of grading criteria and how they may develop key skills. In a few lessons, teachers do not give the students activities which challenge them to think and use their initiative, or else they merely require them to copy an excessive amount of notes. On some technician courses, students undertake little practical work, and there are no extended practical assignments to enable them to link theory with practice. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses in teaching. Action has been taken to rectify certain weaknesses relating to the monitoring of the students' performance, which were identified in the self-assessment report. For example, students' attendance and progress are monitored carefully. All full-time students receive individual tutorials. Reports are sent to the parents of students under the age of 18, and to employers. Parents evenings are held.

23 Pass rates are at or above national averages for the sector on most of the major programmes. They have been particularly high on the NVQ level 2 courses for the last three years, and on the national diploma courses for the last two years. Students' retention rates on most courses are below the national average. Nevertheless, the proportion of students who complete their courses and achieve a qualification, is at, or above, the respective national average. Many of the full-time students who leave their course early do so to take up a modern apprenticeship or to go into employment. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge how low some retention rates are.

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The section has taken steps to improve retention rates. For example, it runs a summer school for potential full-time students. Students report favourably on this initiative. It has established procedures for the closer monitoring of students who give cause for concern. At the time of inspection, the students' retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate and the national diploma courses were much higher than they were at the same stage last year. Students respond well in both theory and practical lessons. They answer the teachers' questions promptly, make steady progress and many produce written and practical work of a good standard. The log books which students keep to record details of their practical work are of a particularly high standard. Some of the students' written work in tests is poorly presented.

24 Teachers are appropriately qualified. A high proportion hold degree level qualifications and there are sufficient qualified assessors. As the self-assessment notes, too few teachers hold internal verification qualifications. Some of the equipment, such as the computer-aided design facilities, is particularly good. Much of it, though old, is well maintained. In a few areas, there is not enough equipment to meet the needs of all the students in some of the larger groups. There is no engineering science laboratory. The workshops do not have suitable areas adjoining where students may carry out written work. The layout of the fabrication and welding workshop does not allow for easy supervision of students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ engineering	2	Number of starters	32	92	98
		Retention (%)	59	70	69
		Achievement (%)	88	76	86
C&G engineering (mechanical and electronic)	2	Number of starters	287	234	250
		Retention (%)	77	79	67
		Achievement (%)	63	59	59
First certificate engineering	2	Number of starters	52	40	48
		Retention (%)	90	100	88
		Achievement (%)	59	51	83
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Number of starters	20	21	16
		Retention (%)	70	62	67
		Achievement (%)	57	85	70
National certificates (mechanical and electronic)	3	Number of starters	70	76	121
		Retention (%)	67	85	85
		Achievement (%)	85	82	80
National diplomas (mechanical and electronic)	3	Number of starters	23	29	21
		Retention (%)	60	39	56
		Achievement (%)	50	90	83

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

Curriculum Areas

Business and Administration

Grade 2

25 Inspectors observed 22 lessons in business and administration. Many of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- wide variety of courses at all levels to meet students' needs
- effective teaching methods in administration
- close monitoring of students' progress on administration courses
- good pass rates on administration courses

Weaknesses

- too much assessment under simulated work-based conditions on NVQ administration programmes
- unsatisfactory pass rates on GNVQ foundation and intermediate business
- less satisfactory teaching on lower level GNVQ programmes

26 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that courses cater for a diverse range of students. Students may join courses in administration at any point during the year, including the summer months. The curriculum is kept under constant review and modified to ensure that it enables students to gain appropriate qualifications and progress to higher level courses. For example, some students were performing poorly on NVQ level 2 courses and the college therefore introduced courses at NVQ level 1. A one-year 'gateway to business' programme leads to single subject qualifications and provides a bridge between intermediate and advanced programmes. Business IT courses are expanding significantly.

Students' enrolments on some other courses, for example GCE A level accounts and GNVQ intermediate business, are small and declining. The curriculum is well managed, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. Most course files are comprehensive and include appropriate assignment schedules, internal verification arrangements, annual reviews and action plans. The GNVQ intermediate course file is less detailed. In June 1999, 74% of students responding to a questionnaire about the quality of provision stated that this course was not well organised. Course team meetings are held at times to suit part-time staff, and student representatives attend them.

27 Teaching on administrative programmes is particularly good. The students learn effectively and achieve high standards of work. In a level 1 lesson, students worked competitively in groups to establish rules for filing documents. They responded well to the task and gave confident presentations of their findings. Typewriting and IT lessons are well organised. Teachers maintain a detailed record of students' progress and achievements. They provide the students with guidance on how they may improve their performance and motivate them to succeed. Work experience is provided for all full-time students on courses at level 2 and above. Students, and particularly those on courses leading to NVQ level 1, gather a disproportionate amount of portfolio evidence of competences demonstrated under simulated, rather than actual work-based conditions. There is insufficient evidence of internal verification in students' portfolios, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report. The more effective teaching in business studies took place on advanced programmes. Teachers gave the students well-presented handouts and successfully probed their understanding of business concepts. Less satisfactory teaching occurred on GNVQ courses at foundation and intermediate levels. All too often the teacher talked too much,

Curriculum Areas

failed to ask the students questions and left insufficient time for discussion of key learning points.

28 Student retention and achievement rates on administration courses have improved and in many cases are above national averages. The pass rate on the NVQ level 2 programme has risen by nearly 30% over three years and is now 8% above the national average. The pass rate on the NVQ course in integrated business technology at level 2 is also above average. Student achievement rates on GNVQ intermediate and foundation programmes are unsatisfactory and these were not fully acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Following poor retention rates on the GNVQ advanced programme, a pilot course leading to a single award was introduced in 1998; student retention rates have since improved. The pass rates on the GCE A level business studies modular course for students aged 16 to 18 have averaged 88% over the past three years. The pass rate for part-time students studying the same subject on a linear programme is, however, much less satisfactory. The portfolios of students on administration courses are carefully organised and well presented. On GNVQ courses at advanced level, students demonstrate that they can apply business principles in their work effectively. Their IT skills, however, are underdeveloped.

29 A business office provides a simulated working environment for NVQ students. Business IT courses are taught in a large computer suite with 160 workstations. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that students can be disadvantaged by distractions and noise in this open plan environment, especially if they are trying to work when a whole class is also being taught there. The GNVQ base room is appropriately furnished and sufficiently equipped with modern computers, some of which give access to the Internet. Other classroom accommodation is enhanced by

displays of students' work. About half the part-time staff who teach on administration courses possess a teaching qualification. The college is providing training to enable more staff to become qualified assessors and internal verifiers.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	17	13	18
		Retention (%)	76	77	88
		Achievement (%)	63	0	20
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	160	229	77
		Retention (%)	63	72	80
		Achievement (%)	53	51	82
Integrated business technology	2	Number of starters	110	140	246
		Retention (%)	83	84	91
		Achievement (%)	67	49	62
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	17	25	23
		Retention (%)	53	56	83
		Achievement (%)	100	46	11
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	55	55	45
		Retention (%)	55	49	49
		Achievement (%)	50	79	71
GCE A level business studies (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	69	44	51
		Retention (%)	67	84	71
		Achievement (%)	67	49	48

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

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering

Grade 1

30 Inspectors observed 16 lessons on a range of hotel and catering courses. They mainly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found one weakness the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- exceptionally good teaching
- high standard of students' assignment work
- good specialist resources
- students' high retention and achievement rates
- effective 'introduction to catering' course
- flexible enrolment arrangements for NVQ programmes
- students' high levels of practical skills

Weaknesses

- some poorly managed lessons

31 The college offers a broad range of hotel and catering courses from levels 1 to 3. Provision includes courses leading to NVQ levels 1 and 2 in food service, food preparation and cooking, and a national diploma course in hotel and catering. Students can also work towards qualifications in pastry cooking, sugarcraft, cake decoration and modern cookery. Short courses are offered in primary and intermediate food hygiene and innkeeping. The college also runs work-based courses in food preparation and cooking for disaffected school pupils. There are good arrangements for helping students to choose courses which are suitable for them. A three-week 'introduction to catering' course, accredited by the NOCN, acts as a 'taster' session for all potential full-time students before they commit themselves to NVQ or national diploma courses. Students may enrol on NVQ

programmes at eight-week intervals throughout the year, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. Increasingly, students on NVQ courses are assessed under work-based conditions. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that courses are well organised and rigorously reviewed. Course teams hold regular meetings at which action points are addressed. Staff have good links with local employers and use these to good effect. Students benefit from industrial visits and presentations by external speakers. Work placements are provided for all full-time students.

32 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the teaching is of particularly good quality. The proportion of outstanding lessons was significantly higher than the national average for this programme area in 1998-99. Teachers give individual students a great deal of support and encouragement to help them develop their practical skills. The lessons are well structured and provide students with a good range of learning opportunities. In practical sessions, students' roles and responsibilities are clearly spelt out, and the teachers carry out effective demonstrations. They ensure that students are fully engaged in the activities. In a lesson on cake decoration, the teacher expertly demonstrated how to make flowers out of sugar paste, identifying the tools required and passing on tips for better results. Students referred to books of designs to assist them in their work. In theory lessons, teachers make all students answer questions, and skilfully draw out their knowledge. Teachers give students constructive feedback on their performance in practical sessions and when they return marked work to them. Students' absences are followed up rigorously, and rates of attendance are high. Some lessons are not managed well. In these, the teacher fails to ensure that all students work constructively, and gives students insufficient support in dealing with unexpected situations.

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33 In 1998-99, student retention and achievement rates were well above national averages on all programmes except NVQ level 2 in serving food and drink. Student achievement rates on level 1 programmes are particularly high. A significant proportion of students in this curriculum area have modest achievements at GCSE and postcode analysis shows that over half are from disadvantaged areas. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students achieve high levels of practical skills. Students work professionally and competently in kitchens, the restaurant and the food retail outlet. They display high standards of work organisation and hygiene, and competently undertake tasks in teams. They demonstrate good communication skills when dealing with the public. Students produce assignment work of a high standard, and in this they demonstrate good application of the knowledge gained on the course. In particular, the assignment work of

national diploma students is of a particularly high standard. Over 50% of national diploma students progress to higher education.

34 Teachers are appropriately qualified, and over 90% have a teaching qualification. Technician staff are given training to enable them to carry out some teaching. Specialist accommodation is of a high standard and creates a realistic work environment. It contains a range of modern commercial equipment to industry standards. Kitchens and the restaurant are well equipped. The accommodation has recently been refurbished and is well decorated. The catering bookstock in the library is up to date and extensive.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hotel and catering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ food preparation and cooking	1	Number of starters	41	54	37
		Retention (%)	78	77	92
		Achievement (%)	71	78	83
NVQ serving food and drink	1	Number of starters	42	36	48
		Retention (%)	90	89	85
		Achievement (%)	77	100	97
NVQ food preparation and cooking	2	Number of starters	26	18	22
		Retention (%)	65	76	86
		Achievement (%)	93	54	86
NVQ serving food and drink	2	Number of starters	22	24	31
		Retention (%)	91	88	77
		Achievement (%)	50	81	71
BTEC national diploma	3	Number of starters	13	17	15
		Retention (%)	62	71	80
		Achievement (%)	100	83	83

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

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 2

35 Inspectors observed 10 lessons on courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy . They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- particularly good teaching
- good pass rates on most programmes
- provision of learning support as an integral part of full-time programmes
- flexibly arranged courses to enable students to work effectively on their own

Weaknesses

- students' poor achievements on level 3 hairdressing
- insufficient opportunities for students to be assessed through work with clients

36 The college offers a range of courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy leading to NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. Provision includes courses in aromatherapy and a course leading to a specialist beauty diploma. Students on full-time programmes are offered the opportunity to work towards additional qualifications in design and IT. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, courses are designed to enable students to attend at times to suit their circumstances. In hairdressing, students can enrol at different times throughout the year. Arrangements are made for them to work on their own with specially designed materials and appropriate support from teachers. Such flexible arrangements have not yet been extended to students on beauty therapy courses.

37 Teaching is particularly good. It is well planned and teachers take account of the needs

of individual students. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' motivation is maintained by the teachers' use of imaginative teaching methods. In a lesson on electrolysis on a beauty therapy course, students were divided into small groups and set specific tasks. Each group then had to report back to the rest of the class on conclusions drawn from the tasks. The presentations from each group prompted lively discussion. In a hairdressing lesson, teachers explained hairdressing techniques by reference to the hair styles of rock musicians and footballers. In a few lessons, students were not kept fully occupied. For example, students who finished a practical task earlier than others were not then given further useful work to do. Effective learning takes place in the college's hairdressing salon. In one hairdressing lesson at level 1, students were practising on school pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and they were successful in creating an appropriately friendly but professional atmosphere. All full-time students learn key skills, but these are not sufficiently related to the vocational context of hairdressing and beauty therapy. Students who need additional learning support receive this from learning support staff who work effectively alongside specialist teachers. In one lesson in which students were working on assignments, the hairdressing teacher helped students with vocational aspects of their tasks, and a member of the learning support staff helped them with spelling and numeracy. There is a shortage of clients in both the hairdressing and beauty therapy salons and opportunities for students to have their practical skills assessed under realistic work-based conditions are severely limited. The college is trying to attract more clients through special promotions such as those related to Mothers' Day. Most full-time students have work placements in commercial hairdressing salons. They are not assessed, however, in their work placements.

38 Student retention and achievement rates on most courses are above the national average for

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the sector and on the beauty therapy courses, are excellent. Student achievement rates on the hairdressing level 3 programme, however, are significantly below the national average. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, student retention and achievement rates on the additional studies programmes in design and IT are poor. Students carry out practical work confidently and competently, and display excellent care skills when dealing with clients. Students' portfolio work is of an appropriate standard. Some students use IT to aid the presentation of their work, but most do not. Many students are successful in progressing to employment or higher level courses. In 1998-99, 69% of hairdressing students gained permanent employment with the provider of their work placement.

39 Staff are well qualified, and most possess appropriate vocational and assessor awards.

The provision is based on three sites. Teachers work on all sites in order that their students may have continuity in terms of teaching styles and learning methods. In most respects, the hairdressing and beauty salons are well designed. On one site, however, there is no soundproofing material between the hairdressing and beauty salons and the consequent noise disrupts the students' learning. Some specialist equipment is of a good standard. Hairdressing students use digital cameras to take photographs of their work which they present as evidence in their portfolios.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy , 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Hairdressing	2	Number of starters	59	63	52
		Retention (%)	68	73	67
		Achievement (%)	56	82	81
Beauty therapy	2	Number of starters	28	23	28
		Retention (%)	50	96	85
		Achievement (%)	75	100	100
Beauty therapy	3	Number of starters	*	17	16
		Retention (%)	*	88	88
		Achievement (%)	*	93	100
Hairdressing	3	Number of starters	*	18	21
		Retention (%)	*	53	67
		Achievement (%)	*	56	58
Epilation	3	Number of starters	*	17	16
		Retention (%)	*	88	75
		Achievement (%)	*	93	92

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Social Sciences and Teacher Education

Grade 3

40 Inspectors observed 10 lessons on psychology, sociology and teacher education courses. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report, but found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the encouragement of a critical approach to the subjects
- attentive and responsive students
- good-quality learning resources

Weaknesses

- some poor retention and pass rates
- insufficient variation of activity in some lessons
- some insufficiently detailed course documentation

41 Psychology and sociology are offered to full-time and part-time students as part of the college's extensive programme of GCSE and GCE A level courses, and as part of an access to higher education course in social science. Teacher education courses are provided by the faculty of business and professional studies. During the inspection, a substantial proportion of teaching in psychology and sociology was undertaken by part-time staff who were replacing full-time staff who were on sick leave. Course management is satisfactory. Targets are set for recruitment, retention and pass rates, and their achievement is monitored. The self-assessment report acknowledges that course documentation varies in quality. The best is well focused and informative, but some is insufficiently detailed.

42 There was some good teaching on the psychology, sociology and teacher education courses, but the quality of lessons varied widely. The rapport between students and teachers was good and students were attentive and responsive in class. Teachers give clear expositions, summarised in well-designed handouts. They encourage students to adopt a critical approach to their subjects. In the better lessons, teachers had high expectations of their students, conveyed their enthusiasm for the subject, gave students opportunities to consolidate their knowledge and practise their skills, and checked that students were learning. The less successful lessons were poorly managed. Some lesson plans failed to specify what students were expected to learn and their weakness was noted in the self-assessment report. Sometimes the same activity went on for so long that students found it difficult to maintain their concentration. In a few instances, students were given information through dull and undemanding activities, such as the taking down of dictated notes or the reading aloud of handouts. In some lessons, opportunities for checking students' learning were missed. In one instance, a teacher addressed a series of questions to the class as a whole but these were answered by a minority of students only. Students' written work is carefully marked. Errors in written English are almost always corrected. Teachers' written comments usually make it clear to students what the standard of their work is, and give helpful guidance on how to improve it.

43 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, student retention and achievement rates on GCSE and GCE A level courses vary widely, with some above, and others below, the national average for the sector. Retention and pass rates have steadily improved on GCE A level psychology courses, but on GCE A level sociology courses, they have fluctuated considerably but have not improved. Students' examination results on one-year GCE A level courses are poor. The retention rate on teacher

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education courses is high, but the student achievement rates are slightly below the national average. The student achievement rate on the social science access course is high, but only eight of the 19 students who completed the course successfully in 1999 went on to higher education. Of those students who successfully completed the two-year GCE A level programme in 1999, 69% progressed to higher education. The quality of students' written work varies widely. The best work is exemplified by well-argued essays which draw on a good range of evidence. The most common weakness is a poor command of written English.

44 Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that students benefit from good provision of library materials for psychology and sociology. The stock of books, periodicals and computer materials is well chosen and up to date. Students have ready access to computer resources including the Internet at the social services curriculum centre, where teachers are often available to advise students. This facility is well used. On occasions, however, when two lessons are timetabled in the centre, they can disturb one another, and the scope of the learning activities for each group can be severely restricted. Most specialist teaching accommodation is of good quality, and contains a good range of teaching equipment. Relevant wall displays help to give rooms a subject identity. Lessons timetabled in some classrooms in an older building on the main site are adversely affected by noise from the corridor and adjacent rooms.

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A summary of retention and achievement rates in social sciences and teacher education, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE sociology (grades C or above)	2	Number of starters	94	70	58
		Retention (%)	61	79	64
		Achievement (%)	51	64	25
C&G 7321 learning support	3	Number of starters	43	20	44
		Retention (%)	98	100	100
		Achievement (%)	98	80	95
C&G 7306/7 further and adult education teachers' certificate	3	Number of starters	47	57	48
		Retention (%)	81	91	96
		Achievement (%)	45	45	66
Access to higher education (social science)	3	Number of starters	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	96
		Achievement (%)	*	*	86
GCE A level psychology (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	137	118	81
		Retention (%)	53	76	77
		Achievement (%)	41	38	63
GCE A level sociology (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	126	79	84
		Retention (%)	52	76	70
		Achievement (%)	51	45	31

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

*figures do not distinguish the social science course from other courses in the access programme

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Basic Skills

Grade 2

45 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in literacy and numeracy below level 2. They agreed with most of the judgements about basic skills provision given in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the self-assessment report was insufficiently comprehensive.

Key strengths

- effectiveness of basic skills provision as a means of widening participation
- wide range of courses and venues
- effective course management and planning
- clear progression routes for students
- strong commitment of teachers to helping students to succeed

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT as a learning resource
- the poor quality of learning materials in some locations
- lack of co-ordination of basic skills provision across the college

46 The college sees basic skills provision as a key strand of its strategy for widening participation and in its support for the regeneration of Doncaster. It has a partnership with the local education authority (LEA) to offer family literacy programmes, and is involved in an 'access to opportunity' project, funded by the European Union, to improve the basic skills of people in the most deprived wards of the borough. The college employs community development workers to identify unmet needs. Basic skills are taught in the basic skills centre, located at the Waterdale site, and at other college sites and community venues throughout

the borough. All basic skills courses offer students opportunities for their achievements to be accredited, mainly by the NOCN. Students are encouraged to progress to further courses. Additional learning support for literacy and numeracy is provided in the key skills centre, and in some curriculum areas. This learning support provision does not lead to accreditation. The provision of basic skills has recently diversified and grown, but it remains unco-ordinated. The lack of co-ordination of basic skills provision across the college was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

47 Teaching and learning are well managed. The quality of course documentation is good and there are thorough records of students' learning, progress and achievements. All students have individual learning plans and teaching is mostly on a one-to-one basis. Selected tasks and learning materials are ready for each student on arrival at the lesson. The valuable contribution of support workers such as signers, carers and volunteers in helping the students is included in the learning plans. Most teaching is good. In the most effective lessons, teachers gave students demanding and relevant tasks which engaged their concentration. They identified and took account of students' preferred learning styles and they helped the students to work on their own effectively. In some weaker lessons, the teacher focused narrowly on work which met the requirements for accreditation, and failed to ensure that the students' personal learning needs and broader aspirations were satisfied. In the literacy lessons, oral skills were not sufficiently identified and recorded. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that minimal use is made of IT as a method of learning.

48 Teachers mark the students' work with sensitivity. They provide the students with feedback in which they acknowledge the students' strengths, suggest ways in which the students may improve their performance, and

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offer justified praise to boost the students' self-esteem. Course files contain examples of witness evidence of students' achievements and unsolicited testimonials from students about the benefit and success they have obtained through the basic skills provision. Parents completing the last session of a family literacy course celebrated each others' achievement when, together with their children, they formed the audience for the public reading of the books each had compiled for reading with his or her child. The benefit to the students of basic skills learning support is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Following a careful review of accredited basic skills provision, and of the initial guidance given to students, student achievement rates for literacy and numeracy qualifications have risen.

49 On most sites in the community, the accommodation is well furnished and well decorated. At two of the venues, IT equipment is not available in the classroom. Some venues are well stocked with a variety of learning materials. However, others have a narrow range of materials, and at some venues, the materials are

not easily accessible to the students. Some worksheets are of poor quality or are inappropriate, and some textbooks are in poor condition. It is college policy that students will only be taught by staff who hold nationally recognised qualifications in teaching basic skills. Of the teachers who teach basic skills, 36% have or are working towards the initial certificate in teaching basic skills, and 24% have or are working towards the certificate in teaching basic skills. The college's staff development plan identifies further staff who are expected to achieve these awards.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in basic skills, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Basic tests in numerical skills (long)	1	Number of starters	32	33	55
		Retention (%)	59	67	87
		Achievement (%)	74	86	91
NOCN (short) basic education – English	Mixed	Number of starters	2	82	73
		Retention (%)	0	84	75
		Achievement (%)	0	58	79
NOCN (long) basic education – English	Mixed	Number of starters	16	176	181
		Retention (%)	69	86	68
		Achievement (%)	100	68	93
NOCN (long) basic education – mathematics	Mixed	Number of starters	*	27	39
		Retention (%)	*	81	62
		Achievement (%)	*	74	91

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

*course not running

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Support for Students

Grade 2

50 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Action had been taken to rectify some of the weaknesses by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- attractive and informative publicity material
- effective welfare and counselling services
- well-managed advice and guidance service

Weaknesses

- failure to meet some students' needs for learning support

51 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college's publicity materials are informative, attractive and extensive in their range. These specify course entry requirements and details of the costs students are likely to incur. Leaflets explain the different support services available to students. Much of the information is available in different languages. In order to help those with impaired sight or hearing, it is also presented in Braille and on audio tape.

52 As the self-assessment report states, staff across the college have developed effective links with local schools in order to raise pupils' awareness of the opportunities at the college. For example, pupils in year 9 at one local school have the opportunity to attend a residential weekend at the college which is designed to raise their aspirations and encourage them to set their sights on progressing to higher education. Disaffected pupils who are at risk of expulsion from school benefit from opportunities to undertake practical vocational training which enables them to build on their strengths and interests.

53 Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that its guidance centre provides comprehensive information and advice to prospective and current students. The centre is managed effectively. Staff are well qualified and the centre is based in accommodation which is attractive and welcoming to students. The centre is well publicised but few students take advantage of the advice and guidance it offers. The centre has provided training in diagnostic interviewing techniques to staff who are involved in community work. Staff at the centre have also checked whether students on courses with low retention rates have received adequate advice and guidance before enrolment. In catering, construction and engineering, students attend short introductory courses which help them and their course tutors to decide whether the course is appropriate for them.

54 The college has negotiated a comprehensive and detailed partnership agreement with the local careers service. As a result of this, the college's careers staff are able to make good use of the resources available from the careers service. A careers consultant from the careers service is allocated to each programme. The tutor for a programme and the careers consultant are required to establish a formal agreement about their respective roles. Staff and students speak highly of the support they receive from this arrangement. Course tutors provide effective support for students applying to higher education. Job vacancies are advertised within the guidance centre.

55 As part of the recent restructuring of the college, tutorial co-ordinators have been appointed in each of the faculties. The co-ordinators have surveyed tutorial provision. They have determined tutorial objectives related to the promotion of students' personal, academic and vocational development. These tutorials are well matched to the needs of the students, but their quality varies across the college and in some cases is poor. Students value the individual tutorials

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they have during which their progress is reviewed. Arrangements for reporting students' progress to their parents vary between faculties. Within the sixth form centre, where most students are aged between 16 and 18, progress reports are not routinely sent to parents. The college has introduced several strategies for improving poor retention rates on some courses. For example, clerks have been allocated to each of the faculties to follow up promptly unauthorised absences by students. Overall, students' absenteeism is declining and retention rates are improving.

56 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college provides a wide range of effective welfare services. The counselling service is well publicised throughout the college. Counsellors work to the standards prescribed by the British Association for Counselling and are able to respond promptly to referrals from staff and students. The counsellors have provided useful training for tutors and other staff who are involved in supporting students. The free childcare places provided by the college are much appreciated by students, many of whom would not be able to attend college without this support. The college's access fund is well managed and the allocation of funds has enabled many students to remain on their courses and achieve qualifications.

57 The college is aware that its arrangements for the provision of learning support are underdeveloped. It has taken action to improve them but it is too early to judge its effectiveness. This year, for the first time, all full-time students have undertaken an initial assessment of their learning support needs during their induction to the college. Although some students receive good learning support, the college does not yet have systems and procedures to ensure that all students who have been identified as needing support, subsequently receive it. Much of the learning support is

provided by part-time staff. It has proved difficult to bring them together in meetings to plan the co-ordination of learning support provision across the college.

General Resources

Grade 2

58 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report but considered that some weaknesses had been overstated. By the time of the inspection, the college had already rectified some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- attractive and well-maintained accommodation
- extensive and particularly good IT facilities
- well-planned learning centres

Weaknesses

- underuse of some accommodation
- inadequate recreational facilities on the main site

59 Most of the college's buildings are maintained and decorated to a high standard, and provide a welcoming and stimulating environment. The walls of corridors and general areas carry pictures and extensive display materials, including work by students. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that some accommodation is underused. It is implementing an accommodation strategy for the more efficient use of space. It intends to sell two of its main sites and move work from them to premises in the centre of the town. For reasons of economy, the college has decided to maintain at a very basic level, the buildings scheduled for disposal. These buildings, together with some of the older ones in community

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locations, are uninviting, and some are in disrepair. Students value the good learning environment the college has created for them and they treat it with respect. Classrooms and workshops are well organised, well equipped with the resources to support teaching and learning, and of an appropriate size. The college provides good-quality furniture for students to use. In general, signposting in and between buildings and facilities is poor.

60 The college's IT resources are good, and students comment favourably on them. Students have access to 688 computer workstations located either in the IT centres on each of the main sites and in principal community buildings, or in the learning centres on the four main sites. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is good at 1:8.4. The college's IT staff design and assemble most of the computers to ensure they meet the students' learning needs on particular courses. Computer performance specifications are set by the college and expressed in its hardware policy. The IT centre on the Waterdale site is fully used by lessons during most of the day and students comment that it is seldom available to them for private study. Some students, however, are unaware of other IT facilities available to them elsewhere in the college. All the main sites are connected to the college intranet, and the community centres are locally networked. The IT centres provide induction sessions and publish clear explanatory leaflets. On-line support is available from the helpdesk and a help telephone line 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Computers are maintained to a high standard and failure rates are low. Only about a quarter of the workstations give access to the Internet.

61 The learning centres are widely used and highly regarded by students. They are designed to support the curriculum on the site where they are located. Seven tutor librarians are each attached to a specific curriculum area and provide support for staff and students in that

area. The centres provide extensive computer software as well as books and periodicals. All the centres are open at times to suit students and are in easily accessible locations. The good quality of the resources reflects the high level of spending, at £27.85 per full-time equivalent student.

62 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that whilst the college has made considerable progress in improving the accessibility of its buildings to people with disabilities, access for them to several areas of the college remains difficult. In 1998-99, the college commissioned a local organisation which represents the interests of people with physical disabilities to undertake a review of the premises. A group of senior managers was formed to take action on recommendations in the ensuing report. Considerable progress has been made since then. The college now calculates that currently 90% of its floor area is accessible to people with mobility difficulties. The layout of some older buildings, however, presents problems for those who are physically disabled.

63 The standard of most of the college's catering facilities is high. All the main sites contain refectories which are well designed, clean and inviting. They are popular with students who consider them to offer good value for money. Catering facilities in the community venues are not as good. The college has recently provided temporary social facilities on one of its more popular community sites where previously no such provision was available. Most of the college's recreational and sporting facilities are at the High Melton site, which is several miles away from the main site and not easily accessible to most students. Students comment unfavourably about the lack of such facilities, which is also mentioned as a weakness in the college's self-assessment report.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 2

64 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. The updated self-assessment report acknowledged that there had been steady improvements in the quality assurance procedures.

Key strengths

- strong commitment of staff to continuous improvement
- recent effective developments in quality assurance procedures
- successful action to improve student attendance, retention and achievement rates
- well-managed and effective staff development
- systematic response to students' complaints

Weaknesses

- few well-established standards for support services
- inconsistencies in the quality of course reviews
- insufficient use of the outcomes of lesson observation

65 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff display a strong commitment to improving the quality of provision. Since the last inspection, the college has developed a comprehensive quality assurance system. A full-time quality assurance co-ordinator works effectively with quality assurance teams in all areas of the college to identify good-quality provision and best practice. The teams submit termly reports to the cross-college quality assurance team. These reports identify key issues, the extent of progress in making improvements, and further action plans.

Teams bid for and receive funding to implement the action plans. The cross-college team reports to the senior management team and the academic standards and policy committee. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements for quality assurance.

66 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the college has made good progress in improving student attendance, retention and achievement rates. Quality assurance teams from each faculty have shared good practice such as the 'cause for concern' system developed by the sixth form centre, whereby particular students, thought to be at risk of giving up their course, are carefully monitored. In lessons observed during inspection the average attendance was 82% compared with 60% at the last inspection. Overall college pass rates have improved by 9% in the last three years.

67 A lesson observation system has been carefully developed. Most teachers are observed annually by trained observers, and effective action is taken to help them rectify weaknesses in their work. The proportion of lessons graded good or outstanding in 1998-99 was higher than that found by inspectors. The college took the findings of lesson observations into account in its judgements in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report failed to identify certain weaknesses associated with the lesson observation system. For example, the college does not make sufficient use of all the information derived from observations. There is no summary or analysis of findings by types of lesson, or category of course. The observation system does not extend to the provision of learning support. Only a few tutorials have been observed.

68 All courses are reviewed annually. The best reviews record performance against targets for enrolment, retention and achievement, and

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against national averages. However, some reviews do not sufficiently take into account the findings of lesson observation, the views of students or employers or trends in students' achievements. The college carries out little value-added analysis of students' achievements. It has no systematic process whereby the GCSE grades students have on entering college are compared with their final examination or assessment results, in order to calculate the extent of the students' achievements. Course teams are required to complete a self-assessment report during the year and to produce action plans to rectify weaknesses as they arise. Quality assurance teams monitor progress in implementing the plans. The new arrangements have already led to improvements, such as the early identification of students in need of learning support, who had not been diagnostically assessed. The setting of standards for support services is new in some areas. Staff comment that their use has helped them increase their sense of accountability, but there is no monitoring of performance against the standards. Targets for reaching the standards are not systematically set. Action is taken on the recommendations in external verifiers' reports. In some instances, however, internal verification of assessment is not carried out promptly enough. The college's internal validation panel only considers courses above level 3.

69 The complaints procedures are clear and work well. Complaints are summarised annually for governors. The students' charter has been recently revised. Some of its stated commitments are measurable, such as that for tutors to provide feedback on assignments within 20 working days. However, the college's performance against its commitments in the charter is not monitored. Students answer comprehensive questionnaires three times each year. The proportion of students who respond to the questionnaires is low. A summary of their responses is not made promptly and it is

not fed back to the students. The views of employers are not gathered systematically by all faculties.

70 All full-time and many part-time staff are appraised annually, and staff consider the appraisal process supportive. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff development is well managed. Training activities are carefully planned and evaluated thoroughly. The college spends 2% of its annual budget on staff training and development. Staff development needs are identified through the appraisal and teaching observation processes, and the faculty and college strategic plans. Training leading to NVQs in management and in customer service and the diploma in educational management is available to all staff across the college. All staff receive a training voucher to use on any college course. The college was re-awarded Investors in People status in 1999.

71 Self-assessment is an integral part of the college's quality assurance procedures. The quality assurance teams have had considerable success over the last year in establishing a self-critical culture within the college. Many staff have received training in lesson observation and self-assessment, and staff were fully involved in the production of the self-assessment report. The college validated the self-assessment report during a 'quality review week' in autumn 1999. The validation process was thorough and involved staff, senior managers and external consultants. As a result of this process, the college changed some of the grades in the self-assessment report.

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Governance

Grade 2

72 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- governors' involvement in setting the strategic direction of the college
- the productive working relationships between the corporation and senior managers
- governors' close attention to the curriculum
- governors' knowledge about college developments

Weaknesses

- insufficiently rigorous self-assessment of governance
- insufficient analysis of governors' training needs

73 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. 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.

74 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the corporation plays an active role in shaping the future direction of the college. Governors and senior managers meet formally each year to discuss the strategic plan, review the college's mission and agree corporate goals. They have a shared commitment to the aims expressed in the mission statement, and, in particular, to helping the college to widen participation. Before approving franchised

provision the corporation carefully assesses its benefits to students. The corporation regularly considers progress in implementing the strategic and operating plan. Governors are well informed about the college. They receive regular presentations from college managers, college newsletters, FEFC publications and have consulted with other colleges to identify best practice.

75 The self-assessment report identified several strengths in governance. For example, governors have productive working relationships with college managers and play an active role in the college. They frequently visit the college to attend social events, exhibitions and presentations. They have also held surgeries to enable them to meet staff. The corporation allocates governors to specific areas in the college to promote effective links between the governors and staff. The recently established standards committee has begun to monitor the college's performance against standards and receive reports from section heads on curriculum matters. Governors attend college development sessions and external training events. However, there is no effective analysis of governors' individual training needs and therefore, no plan to meet these.

76 The corporation currently has 16 members and there are two vacancies. It is seeking nominations for a parent member and a local community member. Between them, governors have a wide range of appropriate experience in business, hotel and catering, education, personnel, transport and manufacturing. The audit committee includes two co-opted members with appropriate expertise and the search committee has two co-opted members to assist with the selection of new governors. Following the recent resignation of a governor, the corporation does not currently have a member with an accountancy qualification. The corporation includes a staff and student governor, and a governor who is from a local minority ethnic group. The corporation has not

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undertaken a formal skills audit. Members do not sign an annual statement of eligibility.

77 The independent clerk has responsibilities set out in a job description. A timetable of corporation and committee meetings has been established and a plan of business has been introduced. The corporation has an open style of operation. A register of interests is maintained and the agenda for each corporation meeting carries a statement reminding members of the requirement to declare any interests. The register is updated by each member as circumstances change and is completed by senior members of staff. It is, however, not formally updated each year. Currently, four members have not submitted a return. The corporation has standing orders and a code of conduct, which was recently updated and a 'whistleblowing' policy. Corporation papers and minutes are freely available and there are very few issues deemed to be confidential. The corporation has recently decided to place corporation and committee minutes in the public library.

78 The corporation meets twice a term. Attendance averaged 66% last year, which falls below the 75% target set by the corporation. On one occasion, the search committee failed to achieve a quorum. The corporation is supported by a large number of committees with clear terms of reference; these cover, respectively, audit, search, standards, employment policy and finance, remuneration, and health and safety. The employment policy and finance committee, contrary to its terms of reference, did not review the 1999-2000 estimates and the three-year financial forecast 1999 to 2002, before they were approved by the corporation. The employment policy and finance committee reviews the management accounts at each of its meetings and, since February 2000, the corporation has included the management accounts as a termly agenda item. A copy of the management accounts is also distributed monthly to each member of the

corporation. The audit committee has submitted its annual report to the corporation. The corporation has not separately reviewed the annual internal audit report and management letter for 1998-99. The audit committee has not implemented a process for the frequent review and monitoring of progress in implementing outstanding recommendations.

79 Governors validated the college's self-assessment report. They also produced their own self-assessment report and assessed their performance against a list of requisite standards for governance, which the clerk provided. Inspectors and auditors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that, in order to measure the corporation's performance effectively, governors need to identify performance indicators and set themselves targets.

Management

Grade 2

80 Inspectors agreed with the college's overall assessment of management, but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- purposeful and positive management
- well-established and effective lines of communication
- good financial management
- effective collaborative partnerships
- consultative strategic planning process

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped management information system
- some aspects of operational plans
- insufficient monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities

Cross-college Provision

81 The college is well managed. There are clear lines of accountability, effective team structures, useful short-term working groups and a range of cross-college committees. The management structure is clearly understood by staff. In September 1999, the senior management team was enlarged to 14 members, in order to involve more staff in decision-making and reflect the college's strategic priorities. Staff were fully consulted before these changes in management roles and responsibilities were made. Staff welcome the open and accessible management style and they find it supportive. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that the management of some cross-college areas is underdeveloped. For example, it did not identify weaknesses in the co-ordination of basic skills and learning support provision across the college, and of provision in the sixth form centre.

82 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that communications are effective. Staff are well informed about national and local priorities. There are regular section, faculty and site meetings, and electronic mail is widely used. Newsletters with contributions from staff are frequently produced and widely distributed. Part-time staff are invited to attend all meetings and many do. Morale is high and staff work effectively as members of teams. By their own example, senior managers encourage all staff to value and respect one another. For example, a brochure celebrating achievements by members of staff was recently distributed throughout the college.

83 The strategic planning process is thorough and well organised. Governors, managers and staff are consulted on the planning process. They have opportunities to contribute to the production of the plan. Staff understand and support the college's mission and goals. Within the planning cycle, there are clearly defined times when managers meet formally to review progress and consider action plans. Reports are also presented to the corporation. A helpful

summary strategic plan is distributed to all staff and governors. The college has been successful in meeting and exceeding targets for income and enrolments. It has also reduced its dependence on FEFC funding. Operational plans are compiled to a common format. However, some plans do not make appropriate reference to corporate goals or reflect the outcomes of self-assessment. Some include few targets. These weaknesses in planning were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

84 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has made significant operating surpluses in the last two years of £325,000 and £1,240,000, respectively. Despite this, the financial forecasts are prepared cautiously. The college's investments of £6,750,000 at the end of July 1999 have contributed to the surplus by producing £378,000 in investment income for that year. The finance team of 20 includes seven staff who have professional financial qualifications. Monthly management accounts are produced for review by managers and governors. The management accounts do not provide separate results for the current month and do not include a 12-month rolling cashflow forecast or ratio analysis. Budget holders receive appropriate monthly reports. Financial regulations are comprehensive and include a policy on fraud and irregularity. Internal and external auditors' reports indicate the college has a sound system of internal control. Financial data returns are submitted to the FEFC by the specified deadlines.

85 The college is committed to promoting equal opportunities. There is an equal opportunities committee that has updated the policy and produced a useful action plan. However, as the self-assessment report recognises, there is insufficient systematic monitoring of the implementation of the policy.

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86 The college's self-assessment report acknowledges that the college has had problems with its computerised management information system. In September 1999, the college introduced a new system to improve data collection and reporting. Some developments, such as the management information register system, are at an early stage of implementation. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the system requires further development to be fully effective. Staff reported that they have greater confidence this year in the accuracy and reliability of the data the system produces. Some managers have access to data on their desktops, and there are plans to extend this to section leaders.

87 The college is committed to working in collaboration with partners in order to widen participation and promote the regeneration of the local community. It has a wide range of productive links with other organisations. Representatives of these organisations speak highly of the college's good standing in the community. The college has a number of collaborative ventures with local schools to attract more young people into education and training. It has close working relationships with the Doncaster Regeneration Partnership and the LEA, which have resulted in a number of successful projects. The college also provides many courses funded by the TEC. A newly established marketing team has produced a detailed marketing strategy and action plan to help the college continue to respond positively to its environment.

Conclusions

88 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was comprehensive, succinct and detailed. The judgements in it were supported by sound evidence. The report drew effectively on students' views and the findings of lesson observations, and evaluated performance against national benchmarks. It included a

well-structured action plan to rectify weaknesses and build upon existing strengths. A self-assessment progress report, published shortly before the inspection, contained evidence of identifiable improvements resulting from the action plan. It also identified progress made as a result of the quality review week held in November 1999, to validate the self-assessment report. Some of the grades were revised as a result of decisions taken during the review week. Inspectors agreed with nine of the 13 grades. In one curriculum area and three cross-college areas, the grade inspectors awarded was one grade higher than that given by the college.

Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	19
19-24 years	13
25+ years	66
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	41
Level 2 (intermediate)	21
Level 3 (advanced)	16
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	21
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	417	3,737	22
Agriculture	107	251	2
Construction	165	1,158	7
Engineering	228	683	5
Business	613	3,645	22
Hotel and catering	123	1,083	6
Health and community care	504	1,105	8
Art and design	575	1,609	12
Humanities	427	2,039	13
Basic education	35	547	3
Total	3,194	15,857	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 51% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	252	65	0	317
Supporting direct learning contact	83	8	0	91
Other support	264	3	1	268
Total	599	76	1	676

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£21,568,000	£21,686,000	£22,161,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£20.36	£18.16	£17.51
Payroll as a proportion of income	66%	60%	61%
Achievement of funding target	113%	106%	110%
Diversity of income	42%	44%	44%
Operating surplus	-£52,000	£1,240,000	£325,000

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		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	642	1,152	1,428	2,515	3,332	3,596
	Retention (%)	73	76	76	78	78	77
	Achievement (%)	63	50	64	74	66	73
2	Number of starters	1,523	1,482	1,535	2,218	2,390	2,836
	Retention (%)	67	72	73	73	79	77
	Achievement (%)	45	51	68	62	64	71
3	Number of starters	1,172	1,164	1,429	1,590	1,675	2,044
	Retention (%)	60	73	71	71	78	79
	Achievement (%)	57	62	64	57	55	68
4 or 5	Number of starters	11	28	44	403	367	1,264
	Retention (%)	73	79	66	76	77	88
	Achievement (%)	86	75	55	60	68	76
Short courses	Number of starters	1,238	1,385	244	8,898	9,224	1,785
	Retention (%)	90	92	63	95	94	66
	Achievement (%)	74	65	73	85	85	86
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	699	322	1,389	4,012	2,747	7,295
	Retention (%)	77	68	92	79	81	91
	Achievement (%)	83	67	65	81	69	86

Source: college

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