

East Durham Community College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

East Durham Community College

Northern Region

Inspected February 1998

East Durham Community College is a tertiary college which serves the Easington district of Peterlee in County Durham. The inspection team found the college's self-assessment report useful in planning and carrying out the inspection. It was built up from many contributory self-assessment reports produced by curriculum and support teams. In this process a number of judgements were not given sufficient weight. The inspection team considered the college to be overgenerous in its judgements of much of the provision assessed during inspection.

The college provides a range of courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. A substantial number of courses are provided at centres throughout the district and on the premises of training partners, as part of the college's collaborative provision. Provision in six curriculum areas was inspected together with courses provided on the premises of training partners. The college is working well with communities to widen participation in further education and it has successfully increased enrolments over the last three years.

Courses generally meet the needs of school-leavers, although there are gaps in the provision at foundation level for full-time students. The college has created a welcoming environment and many areas of the college have benefited from redecoration and good maintenance. Most of the teaching is satisfactory or better. Students are well supported by the college: funding is available for students in financial difficulties; the accredited tutorial programme is successful; and students value the support they receive from staff.

The systems for assuring quality are relatively new and have yet to demonstrate improvements over time. The college has good financial controls and it has established a healthy financial position. Governance of the college is outstanding. Governors are conscientious and effective, and they bring a range of experience to their work. Management of the college's performance in many key areas is good.

The college should: improve the overall quality of teaching; raise the levels of retention and achievement of students on many courses; improve the take-up of support for basic skills; strengthen and extend the arrangements for quality assurance; and improve the strategic management of the curriculum.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Health and social care	2	Quality assurance	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3	Governance	1
Humanities	3	Management	2
Basic Education	3		
Collaborative provision	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 East Durham Community College is situated in Peterlee, in the Easington district of County Durham. The college was established in 1984 as the first tertiary college in the north-east of England. In 1995, the college changed its name from Peterlee College to reflect a change in the college's mission. It operates from two centres close to the centre of Peterlee and two others in Seaham, a small town 10 miles further north along the coast. The district of Easington has a population of about 98,000. The district has high levels of unemployment brought about by the decline of traditional heavy industries. The district has been the subject of a number of studies which show significant levels of multiple deprivation experienced by many households. The college plays a key role in partnership activities which are tackling the district's economic and social problems. It works closely with other agencies such as the East Durham Development Agency, Easington District Council and County Durham and Darlington Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to identify and provide new training opportunities.

2 The college is the main provider of post-16 education in the district, which also has five 11 to 16 secondary schools and an 11 to 18 Catholic school. The rate of participation of young persons over the age of 16 in full-time education remains low. In 1997, approximately 46 per cent of pupils of school-leaving age in the district continued in full-time education compared with 67 per cent nationally; the majority joined courses at the college. Achievement rates in partner schools are also poor: the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades C or above in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations in 1997 was 25 per cent compared with 45 per cent nationally.

3 The college provides courses in all of the programme areas of the FEFC. The main focus is on vocational qualifications from foundation to higher level. In 1996, mainly part-time

foundation level courses were followed by over 54 per cent of students. The college also offers 17 GCSE and 28 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects in its A Level Centre. A small number of higher education courses are provided through franchise arrangements, mostly with the University of Sunderland. Student enrolments at the college have grown significantly since incorporation. In 1996-97, the college had 24,781 students on courses funded by the FEFC and a further 179 students on courses funded from other sources. The figure for 1996-97 includes 17,586 students enrolled through collaborative provision. The senior management team of the college comprises the principal, an operations manager with responsibility for finance and resources, and a research and development manager with responsibility for curriculum and marketing. The college has 18 teaching teams organised in three divisions and two departments. College income has grown from approximately £6.6 million in 1993-94 to £8 million in 1996-97.

4 The college mission states:

'The college, committed to its community role, will work in partnership with individuals, groups, schools, and organisations in the local area and wider region to:

- meet needs
- help people
- provide educational and training opportunities which are of high quality, flexible and relevant to local needs.

The college will play a central role in the development and regeneration of the area, providing a responsive training infrastructure which will help improve the levels of skills in the area, will assist in the creation of new businesses and will attract new employment opportunities to East Durham'.

5 At the time of the inspection, the college was involved in discussions with Durham College of Agriculture and Horticulture about the feasibility of merging.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 16 February 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by an inspector against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. It 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 over a total of 47 working days. It covered aspects of work in six of the FEFC's programme areas. Collaborative provision provided on the premises of training partners was graded separately. Inspectors examined representative samples of students' work and college documentation. They observed a total of 67 lessons but did not have access to all lessons as a number had been cancelled during the week of inspection. They met with college governors, staff at all levels and with groups of students. They discussed the work of the college with a representative from the County Durham and Darlington TEC and Durham Local Education Authority (LEA).

7 Of the lessons observed, 54 per cent were judged good or outstanding and 12 per cent were less than satisfactory. This profile of grades is not as good as the average for all colleges inspected during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average attendance in the lessons observed was 73 per cent which is below the national figure of 77 per cent for similar colleges. According to the same report the average number of students in each lesson was 9.2 which is below the national average of 10.8. The following table shows the grades awarded to lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	8	3	2	0	13
GNVQ	1	2	2	2	0	7
NVQ	0	3	7	2	0	12
Basic education	1	3	4	1	0	9
Other (including GCSE)	3	15	7	1	0	26
Total	5	31	23	8	0	67

Curriculum Areas

Science, Mathematics and Computing

Grade 3

8 The inspection covered the full range of courses offered by the college in this programme area. Nineteen lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report although they considered that some weaknesses were either understated or omitted.

Key strengths

- wide variety of learning activities
- good pass rates on some mathematics and computing courses
- detailed records of students' progress on many courses
- effective implementation of responsibilities within teams
- well-maintained accommodation for science

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many courses
- some poor lesson planning
- pass rates below national averages in some GCE A level science subjects
- failure to take account of needs of students in some provision
- some dated resources for computing courses
- inappropriate use of some accommodation

9 In mathematics and computing courses, lessons are well planned and are frequently accompanied by clear briefings on assignments. In mathematics lessons, teachers illustrated assignments by well-chosen examples that progressively built on students' existing

knowledge. The college identified in its self-assessment report teachers' preparation of students for assignments as a strength and inspection confirmed this view. Learning materials for students on the course leading to the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in information technology (IT) applications are available electronically on the college network. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report for science that teachers maintain students' interest by using an appropriate variety of teaching methods. Some science lessons are not planned effectively. They lack clear aims and teachers move from one topic to another without sufficient time for development. Sometimes, teachers do not provide written feedback in enough detail to enable students to improve their work. Detailed records of students' progress are kept on most courses and in GCE

A level subjects, predictions of examination grades are regularly calculated and passed to the students. Some students, mainly on GCE A level courses, do not complete homework regularly. Responsibilities for managing aspects of the curriculum are clearly identified within teams and are carried out effectively. For example, GNVQ co-ordinators in this area hold regular meetings to discuss developments and issues, and deal effectively with course administration.

10 Students on GNVQ programmes study additional subjects, such as mathematics, which improve their opportunities for progression to specialist higher education courses.

In mathematics and computing, progression routes within the college include a course for adults which gives access to higher education. There is no full-time foundation level programme in computing, and no mathematics course offering progression into GCSE. Enrolments to the limited range of science courses running at the college are low.

11 The self-assessment report judges that the college has good pass rates in science and that

Curriculum Areas

students achieve results that are close to those estimated for them on the basis of their previous attainment. Inspection confirmed this view. The pass rates for BTEC national diploma in science in 1995 and GNVQ advanced science in 1997 were good. However, those for GCE A level biology, chemistry and physics have been below the average for two years. GCE A level computing and mathematics courses have pass rates for 16 to 18 year olds that are at or above the sector average over the last three years. However, the retention rates in over half the courses in this programme area are low and the trends over three years are downwards. For example, retention on GCE A level mathematics and computing courses has dropped from about 78 per cent in 1995 to 45 per cent in 1997. In 1997, the GNVQ advanced course in science retained only one-third of the students who originally enrolled.

Some accommodation used for computing theory classes is unsuitable because of the lack of desk space and the distracting noise from adjacent rooms. Some computing software is dated and some computers are unable to cope adequately with some modern applications packages. Inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement in the self-assessment report that the practical environment for computing was a strength.

12 The science accommodation has benefited from a programme of refurbishment and it is well maintained. There are excellent storage facilities for chemicals and new fume-extraction equipment. Mathematics classrooms are conveniently grouped together, contain learning materials and have a subject identity.

Examples of students' achievements in science, mathematics and computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level (two-year course)	Retention (%)	80	68	50
	Pass rate (%)	84	85	80
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	50	90	55
	Pass rate (%)	100	89	32
GCSE	Retention (%)	66	69	64
	Pass rate (%)	51	21	32
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	74	88	65
	Pass rate (%)	82	59	22

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

13 Courses in fabrication and welding, electrical and mechanical engineering were inspected. Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements of the college's self-assessment report, but considered that the college failed to identify some key weaknesses in students' achievements.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching and assessment processes
- effective teaching of theory with links to practical applications
- good opportunities for progression
- well-equipped mechanical engineering and fabrication workshops

Weaknesses

- poor attendance on craft courses
- some ineffective teaching
- poor pass rates on some courses
- low retention rates on some advanced courses
- inappropriate combining of two qualifications on some craft courses

14 The college provides a range of craft and technician courses with an emphasis on mechanical engineering; many lead to national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Good opportunities exist for students to progress from advanced courses to higher national awards. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the curriculum is responsive to the needs of local industry. For example, new programmes in areas such as fabrication and welding have recently been introduced. Full-time students on an intermediate craft course also work towards

another intermediate level qualification; many of these students find the demands of the second qualification too much. Although courses are reviewed each year, the resulting action plans are vague and lack timescales for action.

15 In most cases, teaching is well planned. Assessments are scheduled to avoid bunching and students are clear about the assessment process. The sheets provided for teachers to complete when marking assignments encourage them to give constructive feedback to students on their performance. Teachers create a good environment where students are at ease and do not hesitate to seek help. Teachers set the content of lessons at an appropriate level; they frequently link theory to a practical or to an industrial application. In some electrical engineering lessons, teachers fail to engage students' interest. Students' performance is rigorously monitored and parents and/or employers are regularly informed about students' progress. Attendance on craft courses is low. During the inspection, attendance at all lessons in this area averaged 55 per cent. This figure is typical of the attendance recorded in the weeks leading up to the inspection. The college's self-assessment report did not identify the problems of poor attendance.

16 Students generally performed well in theory and practical sessions, producing work of an appropriate standard. However, pass rates are well below the national averages. The retention rate for two-year advanced courses has remained around 56 per cent over the last three years: only 25 per cent of those who start an advanced course successfully complete. The college's self-assessment report failed to identify poor retention or achievements as a weakness. Students who complete their course are often successful in getting jobs with local employers.

17 Staff turnover is low. Part-time teachers from industry are used to provide specialist industrial expertise in such areas as

Curriculum Areas

programmable logic controllers. A good programme of staff development is provided in the college. The mechanical engineering and fabrication workshops have recently benefited from refurbishment and the provision of industrial-standard specialist equipment. The electrical workshops are dull and uninspiring.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced, national diploma and certificates	Retention (%)	56	57	55
	Pass rate (%)	92	33	46
GNVQ intermediate and NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	*	67	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	42	20

Source: college data

**course not running*

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

18 Ten lessons were observed. Courses in childcare, counselling, health and social care were inspected. The inspection confirmed most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report for this area, but also identified others. The report was brief and did not adequately reflect the key weaknesses identified in the course team's self-assessment reports.

Key strengths

- varied teaching and learning activities
- good integration of some key skills
- clearly-written assignment briefs and constructive feedback
- good pass rates on most courses
- effectively-managed courses
- well-developed links with employers and work placement providers

Weaknesses

- failure of teachers to check students' understanding in some lessons
- poor retention on some courses
- little use of vocational materials to develop IT skills
- slow progress towards the acquisition of appropriate assessor awards

19 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level in health and social care, childcare and counselling. Part-time students are able to join GNVQ advanced and intermediate programmes. Short part-time courses in childcare are run in the community, increasing access for mature students. NVQs in care are available at levels 2 and 3. Students have the opportunity to acquire additional qualifications in IT, first aid and food hygiene. Good links exist with employers and work placement supervisors.

20 Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Students generally contribute well in class. In some lessons, teachers do not provide work which is sufficiently challenging for students and they do not check students' understanding. In a minority of lessons, teachers miss opportunities to ensure that all students are involved. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report did not deal adequately with the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching methods used.

21 The key skills of communication and number are integrated effectively with assignments. For example, a GNVQ foundation assignment on planning a team event included the costing of a party arranged for nursery-age children. However, little use is made of vocationally-related care materials to develop IT skills. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that assignments are clearly written to a common format. Students' work is of a good standard and teachers provide detailed feedback. Teachers and students jointly review progress made and set targets for improvement. The tutorial programme includes a wide range of topics which complement the care curriculum. In one lesson, students identified how they used their time in order to develop better time management skills.

22 Pass rates on most courses are good. The national diploma in childhood studies has consistently achieved a pass rate over 90 per cent over the last three years. However, over the same period there has been a downward trend in the pass rate for the GNVQ foundation course. Staff monitor and follow up attendance regularly, but retention is still poor on most full-time courses. A significant number of students drop out during the first year of two-year programmes. A high proportion of those who complete their course progress to higher levels of study within the college or relevant employment.

23 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that courses are managed efficiently.

Curriculum Areas

Teachers work closely together; many teach on a number of related courses. Course teams have devised clear and effective systems for recording and monitoring students' progress. Internal verification is well organised and documented. Course and unit handbooks give clear information to students. At the time of inspection, only a small number of staff had completed appropriate assessor and internal verifier qualifications. Students have access to good resources, and improvements have been made in the accommodation and in display areas for students' work.

Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced health and social care and national diploma in childhood studies	Retention (%)	74*	68	48
	Pass rate (%)	97*	78	97
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	Retention (%)	58	89	67
	Pass rate (%)	73	74	78
GNVQ foundation health and social care	Retention (%)	63	88	60
	Pass rate (%)	67	53	50
National certificate childhood studies and NVQ level 3 care (part time)	Retention (%)	85	59	58
	Pass rate (%)	73	74	72

Source: college data

*BTEC national diploma figures only

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 3

24 The inspection included observation of 10 lessons across the full range of curriculum provision in this area. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths of the area but judged that it paid insufficient attention to the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching materials
- effective system for monitoring students' progress
- appropriate development of most key skills
- good-quality course documentation

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT
- ineffective teaching in some lessons
- poor retention and achievement rates on a number of key courses

25 The curriculum area has developed over time a range of courses to meet the needs of the local community. The portfolio of courses includes provision at NVQ level 2 for hairdressing and beauty, and at NVQ level 3 for beauty, aromatherapy, reflexology and sports massage. In 1997-98, NVQ level 3 hairdressing failed to recruit sufficient student numbers.

26 Courses are well managed; there is a range of good-quality documentation, including course induction and handbook packs. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report provides an overoptimistic picture of the quality of teaching in hairdressing and beauty and fails to identify some key weaknesses. In many lessons, teachers failed to share key aims and objectives with students. In too many of the lessons inspected teachers failed to maintain

students' interest. Ineffective use was made of question and answer techniques to find out what students knew or to broaden their understanding of the topic.

27 Teachers overlooked opportunities to link theory and practice with students' experiences in the workplace and industrial standards. Course teams have recently integrated key skills with the curriculum. As the college's self-assessment report identified, the hairdressing and beauty team has developed, and makes good use of, some good-quality teaching and learning materials. However, courses did not provide sufficient opportunities for students to acquire the IT skills used in the hairdressing and beauty industry, in areas such as stock control and client appointments. Students did not make good use of IT for the presentation of their written work.

28 Teachers have developed effective systems to monitor and record students' progress. Assessment and feedback by teachers to students on their written work provide clear indications to students about how to improve their work. Pass and retention rates on the aromatherapy course are good.

The self-assessment report failed to identify some key weaknesses in relation to students' retention and achievements. For example, the pass rates on NVQ level 2 hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes are poor and below the national average. Retention rates on hairdressing courses are low.

29 Although the self-assessment report makes no reference to students' written work, inspectors considered that, overall, it was of a satisfactory standard. Some was good; for example, on the aromatherapy course, students' work was well organised and clearly presented. Students' attendance in the lessons observed averaged 67 per cent during the inspection, though checking of registers confirmed that this was lower than usual. In practical lessons, students worked safely.

Curriculum Areas

30 Some full-time teachers have taken opportunities recently to update their industrial skills and experience. The specialist accommodation comprises two hairdressing and two beauty salons at three separate centres. The salons at the centres at Seaham, though small, are appropriately furnished and equipped. The specialist resources at the Howlatch Centre have been the subject of recent improvement to provide realistic work environments for the teaching of practical skills.

Examples of students' achievements in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ hairdressing	Retention (%)	42	46	33
	Pass rate (%)	44	79	50
NVQ beauty therapy	Retention (%)	65	89	77
	Pass rate (%)	33	25	40
Aromatherapy	Retention (%)	77	85	86
	Pass rate (%)	65	100	95

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

31 The inspection of humanities provision included GCE A level and other courses in history, psychology, sociology, English and communication studies. Nine lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and they identified some additional weaknesses. Much of the teaching takes place in the A Level Centre at Howlatch.

Key strengths

- good-quality teaching
- students' well-kept work files
- good pass rates on many courses
- extensive and modern resources in the A Level Centre

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on many courses
- inadequate schemes of work and lesson plans
- poor communication and co-operation between subject areas
- insufficient use of available resources

32 The college's self-assessment report identifies as a strength the use of a wide range of teaching and learning activities and good-quality course materials. The inspection confirmed that these elements of sound practice are a positive feature of the provision. Much of the teaching is good; there is a particular and appropriate emphasis on class discussion. Teachers use up-to-date materials and visual aids effectively. They give clear expositions. Lessons, with a few exceptions, are well planned and organised and sustain students' interest at a high level. Teachers have a sensitive appreciation of the needs of different student

groups as well as those of individuals; this was a particularly impressive feature of teaching on courses providing access to higher education. However, not all teaching reaches this high level of quality. Most schemes of work are insufficiently comprehensive and some lesson plans are inadequate, leading on occasions to lessons which lack a clear purpose or which are poorly organised. There are insufficient opportunities for students to study on their own in some GCE A level courses. This was not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

33 Students generally respond well in class and those who remain on courses show a conscientious attitude to study. They are not afraid to speak during discussion sessions and oral presentations by one communication studies group showed that students were developing appropriate skills. Most written work was of at least satisfactory quality and student work files are well kept. The pass rates on many courses are good. For example, in GCE A level psychology there was a 100 per cent pass rate in 1996, and a 92 per cent pass rate in 1997. The pass rate on the course providing access to higher education was 100 per cent in 1996 and 1997. The self-assessment report acknowledges that students' achievements in public examinations sometimes fall below the national average. For example, the GCE A level communication studies pass rate in 1996 was 14 per cent and rose to only 47 per cent in 1997; the GCSE English pass rate in 1997 was 35 per cent, compared with 48 per cent nationally. Although the issue is not referred to in the self-assessment report, students' retention is a serious problem with, for example, retention rates of 30 per cent for GCE A level English, 52 per cent for psychology and 43 per cent for sociology for students who completed their course in 1997.

34 Individual teachers pay good attention to curriculum review and development. However, teachers in this area do not work as a cohesive unit and co-operation is poor. Although this is

Curriculum Areas

reflected in some of the course team self-assessment reports it does not feature in the overall self-assessment report. Course records and supporting documentation are flimsy and inadequate.

35 Resources at the A Level Centre are extensive. There is a good range and number of computer workstations, many of which give access to the internet. A growing book and journal stock gives good support to staff and students. However, the full potential of these resources is not being exploited in lessons. Teaching rooms present a pleasant and attractive environment, though some of the rooms lack a subject identity.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level communication studies	Retention (%)	56	50	57
	Pass rate (%)	67	14	47
GCE A level English	Retention (%)	52	50	30
	Pass rate (%)	73	100	92
GCE A level psychology	Retention (%)	50	56	52
	Pass rate (%)	83	100	92
GCSE English	Retention (%)	51	88	52
	Pass rate (%)	35	68	35

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 3

36 The inspection covered basic skills provision, including return to learn courses and provision for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Inspectors observed nine lessons. The college cancelled all basic education lessons taught by part-time staff in the college for the week of the inspection. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report overestimated the number of strengths and underestimated the number of weaknesses of this provision. The action plan for basic skills fully addresses the priorities identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons and schemes of work
- learning programmes designed to take account of individual needs
- effective support and encouragement provided by teachers and volunteers
- good range of resource material in the basic skills workshop

Weaknesses

- a lack of strategic direction
- insufficient links between this area and other course teams
- inconsistent use of planning and recording documentation
- poor retention and pass rates
- the effect of dispersed accommodation and resources
- narrow range of foundation level courses for full-time students

37 The college offers a range of programmes leading to nationally-recognised qualifications. Literacy and numeracy programmes are offered

from pre-foundation to pre-GCSE level. There are some gaps in provision. For example, opportunities at pre-GCSE level are few; there is little community-based and no employer-based provision. The full-time members of the basic skills team meet regularly and communication is good, but individual roles and responsibilities have not been clearly defined. Links with course teams in other divisions are underdeveloped. While the team has contributed to curriculum and the college's strategic planning and to its self-assessment, there has been insufficient strategic direction for this area of provision. The college recognises this and has recently established an inclusive learning task group with the remit to determine the nature of basic education provision, and its relationship with community-based provision. The self-assessment report largely identified the strengths but overlooked the weaknesses in this area.

38 Lessons are well planned; schemes of work incorporate a variety of activity and action has recently been taken to increase opportunities for oral work. Accreditation goals have been identified for all students and many students are following individual learning programmes which take account of their needs. While the standardised planning and recording documentation is well structured, its use is inconsistent. Some action plans lack detailed targets with the result that not all learning goals are tightly focused. Teachers and volunteers provide effective support and encouragement to students in learning environments which are informal and purposeful. The inspection findings confirmed most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but the report overstates the extent to which students' needs are met.

39 Students have gained confidence and many have improved their language and number skills. Students' files were generally well organised, students' work was well presented and some work provided evidence of significant

Curriculum Areas

progress. The self-assessment report failed to identify poor pass rates and retention levels as a weakness. In 1996-97, although 80 per cent of ESOL students and 61 per cent of return to learn students completed their courses, only 56 per cent of students enrolled on Wordpower and Numberpower courses did so. Attendance of students at lessons observed averaged 61 per cent. Few students achieve their primary learning goals; in 1996-97, only 34 per cent achieved ESOL qualifications and 14 per cent achieved Wordpower and Numberpower qualifications.

40 The basic skills workshop has a good range of resource material which includes a variety of printed materials and some computer-based software. Resources are not organised in a way which makes them easily accessible to staff and students. Basic skills accommodation and resources are dispersed, space is limited and access to clerical support is hampered by split site arrangements.

41 In an area of educational underachievement, the college lacks sufficient foundation level provision for students who wish to study full time. Less than 5 per cent of all full-time students are studying on foundation level courses in areas such as care, horticulture, brickwork, joinery, painting and decorating. Many students combine foundation and intermediate courses when it would be more appropriate if they took courses which related more to their specific needs.

Examples of students' achievements in basic education, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Numberpower/Wordpower	Retention (%)	50	56	56
	Pass rate (%)	16	13	14

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Collaborative Provision

Grade 3

42 The self-assessment report includes comments on the full range of business services provided by the college, of which collaborative provision is a substantial component. Inspectors were unable to corroborate some of the evidence used to support the judgements in the self-assessment report, particularly relating to students' achievements. They concluded that some additional weaknesses were not identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good standards of training and assessment in the provision observed
- high standard of students' achievements on short courses
- regular programme of visits to monitor programme organisation and delivery

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory levels of NVQ achievements
- inadequate mechanisms for assuring standards in teaching and assessment
- insufficient verification of the use of contracted guided learning hours
- inconsistencies in completion of course details and training plans

43 Collaborative provision accounts for about 20 per cent of the college's FEFC income. This substantial provision is managed by the economic and business services division of the college. Programmes cover a wide range of vocational areas, including electronic assembly, cabling and wiring, management, first aid and food hygiene. Most students are on short courses: over the past two years, for example, over 18,000 students have been registered for first aid courses which have an average duration

of two days. The more substantial programmes lead to NVQ qualifications which range from level 1 in cable and wiring to level 5 in management. The college has substantially reduced the amount of short courses over the last year, concentrating instead on programmes which contribute to national targets for education and training.

44 A pre-contract meeting is held with all prospective clients to outline the terms of any agreement. Subsequent contracts are detailed and based on the model provided by the FEFC. The contract specifies that providers should comply with the college's quality assurance arrangements; insurance and health and safety checks are also undertaken as part of the agreement. Regular visits to providers are made to monitor programme organisation. This involves completing a checklist which includes, for example, verifying that registers are kept up to date and that training facilities are adequate. The monitoring process does not require comments on the quality of the training and assessment being provided and, for example, copies of external verifier reports are not seen by the college. In addition, the learning agreement provided at the start of a programme does not specify the expected completion period, and the use of guided learning hours is not monitored to ensure that they conform to those stated in the learning agreement. The self-assessment report recognises that greater collaboration is required between staff working in this area and those contributing to other areas of the college's work.

45 For those providers visited, students' work was of a good standard and assessment was well planned. In the case of one provider, a detailed policies, procedures and assessment manual had been produced containing a training plan which included an individual assessment plan and an assessor's checklist as well as separate lesson plans. On short courses, for example, those leading to first aid certificates, materials provided by the awarding

Curriculum Areas

body are used to provide an appropriate balance of practical and theoretical activities. Course details were not available for all contracts, a shortcoming not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. One recent contract did not specify the programmes to be delivered but only outlined a commitment that outcomes would be linked to national targets.

46 Students' achievements on short courses are good. Pass rates on two-day first aid courses are close to 100 per cent, which is in line with national achievements. Students on other short courses which are well subscribed, for example, on basic food hygiene and the Royal Yachting Association 'competent crew' and 'day skipper' programmes, achieve similar levels of success. Results on the more substantial NVQ programmes are generally less satisfactory and they are not indicated in the self-assessment report. Results are good on the NVQ cabling and wiring contract where there is 82 per cent successful completion, but on the four other main programmes successful completion rates are below 50 per cent. Retention rates for NVQ programmes vary from 94 per cent on one engineering course to 62 per cent for an electronic assembly contract. The college attributes the lower retention rates to personnel leaving the company.

47 The trainers working on collaborative provision are appropriately qualified and have assessor and verifier awards for NVQ programmes or possess relevant vocational qualifications for short courses. At the organisations visited, accommodation and resources for training were of a good standard.

Examples of students' achievements in collaborative provision, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ cabling and wiring	Retention (%)	**	**	67
	Pass rate (%)	**	**	82 *
NVQ management	Retention (%)	**	**	84
	Pass rate (%)	**	**	39 *
NVQ engineering	Retention (%)	**	**	94
	Pass rate (%)	**	**	45 *

Source: college data

*24 month completion period

**course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

48 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths relating to services for customers and the personal welfare of students identified in the self-assessment report, but identified further weaknesses which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- effective liaison with local schools
- well-structured systems for guidance, interview, enrolment and induction
- accredited tutorial framework
- the central location of a good range of services for students
- flexible and responsive arrangements for childcare
- extensive support systems that develop in response to student demand

Weaknesses

- low take-up of basic skills support by students
- weak links between individual learning needs and the provision of support for basic skills
- variation in provision of careers education and guidance

49 A number of support facilities have been brought together in the customer services area located at the entrance of the college's main town centre site. The area is easily accessible and welcoming; it accommodates staff who provide college information, guidance, student welfare advice, personal and financial help, and administer examinations. The community development team and the nursery and support workers are also managed from this office. Communication between these services is very good. The customer services area is open

during the evening and Saturday morning. Enquiries are dealt with promptly. In centres at a distance from the college, there are less comprehensive services but reception staff deal effectively with enquiries. Inspection confirmed many of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report for this area.

50 The college effectively provides information to pupils at local secondary schools. The college has a schools liaison officer who arranges a number of events to encourage pupils and parents to visit the college. Not all schools have agreed to procedures and dates for application and this leads to occasional difficulties in the college's planning process. The college is involved in some innovative and responsive projects. A youth project supports pupils at risk of exclusion from school by providing a negotiated timetable of vocational options supported by close personal involvement by youth workers. GCSE revision sessions are arranged in college, and pupils at local schools are invited to attend. The college enjoys well-established links with local special schools which enable pupils to progress smoothly to courses at the college.

51 Entry procedures for students joining the college are good. However, the prospectus for full-time students is simply a list of courses with no supplementary information about the college. Individual course leaflets are more useful but they have to be requested. The publications which give information about the college's courses are being redesigned for 1998-99 to make them more accessible. Pre-entry guidance is generally informative. The interview process aims to ensure impartial and realistic advice. Most students and staff found this informative and helpful, though some students did not receive enough information about all aspects of their courses. This was recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Enrolment is well organised. Induction provides a good balance of activities and students felt that they were well supported during this time.

Cross-college Provision

52 All full-time students have a named tutor; part-time students are allocated a tutor on request. The personal support provided by tutors is excellent, and it is highly valued by students. There is an accredited framework for the tutorial programme which provides a structure that is welcomed by staff and which motivates students. The framework allows students to link work in the curriculum areas to the development of personal and key skills. Staff training is needed to equip staff with the skills necessary to deal with some of the topics in the programme. Subject teachers use an effective 'concern note' system to raise concerns about students with their tutors. Although many individual tutors provide high-quality careers advice and support for university and employment applications, work in this area remains unco-ordinated and some students do not have access to good advice. Many students do not make use of the independent advice provided by the careers service.

53 The take-up of support for basic skills remains low. A well-organised screening procedure for full-time students identifies those who may have difficulties with basic skills. Although 46 per cent of screened students are deemed to need support, only 38 per cent of these actually received it. There is a need for a wider range of strategies to encourage more students to take up the support available. In workshops for basic skills, the lack of detailed identification of individual students' learning needs or of systematic review of short-term goals prevents detailed recording of students' progress. Instead, records are limited to broad statements about students' achievements and attendance. Physical or other learning support needs of students are met on an individual basis by support workers. There is a need for more specialist training for all support workers, particularly in relation to the provision of general support and support for students with dyslexia.

54 Inspection confirmed that the college provides good care for its students. Students with pre-school-age children may use the free nursery provision, recently endorsed by Ofsted inspection, that is located in a primary school near the centres in Peterlee. Students at centres at a distance from the college make use of existing local nurseries. The college supplements the amount of money available to help students in financial difficulties. It has also made additional funds available through an annual bursary for full-time 16 to 19 year old students who maintain good attendance and progress. The active students' union which is valued by students also provides financial and pastoral support.

General Resources

Grade 2

55 Inspectors generally agreed with the college's judgements in its self-assessment report about the strengths and weaknesses of its general resources.

Key strengths

- high-quality rooms and circulation areas
- good security arrangements for college sites
- attractive, welcoming and well-resourced learning centres
- accessible facilities for IT
- good sports and recreational areas for college and community use

Weaknesses

- poor exterior fabric of buildings at the Howlatch Centre
- poor access in one building for those with restricted mobility

Cross-college Provision

56 The college is based in four centres. Burnhope Way and Howletch centres are close to Peterlee town centre and approximately a mile from each other. A large stone house, Londonderry Dene House, and the Church Street Centre, a high street building, are located in Seaham town. Entrances to the college have been improved considerably since the last inspection. The entrance to the Burnhope Way centre is welcoming and is shared with the local library and the college's theatre. It contains an exhibition area that often shows local artists' or students' work. All centres have good car parking facilities with good security arrangements, including new fencing and closed-circuit television coverage.

57 The college is well cleaned and maintained. The college has a large maintenance team that also undertakes a substantial amount of refurbishment work. Most of the internal decorating, plumbing, electrical and small construction work is carried out by this team as part of an extensive 10-year maintenance schedule. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's judgements that room refurbishment is good. Most rooms and circulation areas are tastefully decorated. Much of the expenditure on the external fabric of the buildings is committed to maintaining and improving the large areas of flat roofing. The Howletch Centre has significant problems associated with an aluminium framed building and some unsightly wall cladding.

58 Inspection confirmed that catering facilities and learning centres are well managed as claimed by the college. The Burnhope Way and Howletch learning centres have large areas devoted to computers that are used on a drop-in basis, as well as books, audiovisual, reprographic facilities and quiet study areas. Londonderry Dene House has a small learning centre that contains up-to-date IT and audiovisual equipment. A computerised, integrated library system is operational at the Burnhope Way centre and this will be

extended to other centres by September 1998. This system gives useful reports on the use of resources, analysed by courses. Staffing of, and expenditure in, the learning centres is better than that quoted within Library Association guidelines: the college has one member of staff to every 203 full-time equivalent students where guidelines quote 1:330; the projected library expenditure for 1997-98 is £32.55 for each full-time equivalent student, where the guidelines figure is £26.00. Room utilisation is monitored carefully. Regular reports go to the governors. The college has some large areas such as the theatre and sports hall which adversely affect the calculations of room utilisation. Returns made to the FEFC for 1996-97, based on the minimum number of workplaces required for the number of learning hours needed by students, show the college to be in the least efficient third of users of space in the sector.

59 Recreational and sports facilities for students are good. Student common rooms are equipped with comfortable seating and a television. The college's self-assessment report identifies that the new sports hall, gymnasium, fitness areas and playing fields available at the Howletch Centre provide good sports and recreational facilities which are well used by students and the local community. The main building at the Howletch Centre is on a number of different levels which makes access difficult for those with restricted mobility.

60 The college has a number of minibuses and vans which are used for transporting students and equipment between sites and community centres. Some of the equipment at these community centres is provided on a permanent basis by the college but other equipment, such as computers, is delivered each week. This is logistically complicated but well managed.

61 The IT facilities are accessible, well managed and well maintained. The college is currently updating its IT strategy, including the

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standards in its IT charter. The college has a ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers of 9:1. Staff have good access to computers; the ratio of staff to computers is 5:1.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

62 The college's most recent framework for quality assurance is well thought out, though it has not been in place long enough to demonstrate its effectiveness. The inspection team considered that the self-assessment report overstated the strengths and underrated the weaknesses of quality assurance.

Key strengths

- a well-conceived framework for assuring the quality of provision
- thorough evaluation of the college's community-based provision
- prompt response to students' concerns
- an effective and well-regarded staff development programme

Weaknesses

- failure of a number of curriculum areas to implement fully quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient rigour in analysing performance data
- omission from quality assurance framework of collaborative provision
- failure of quality assurance arrangements to secure sustained improvements in retention and pass rates

63 The college's mission and charter emphasise its intention to provide high-quality education and training for local people but it has yet to fulfil this commitment. Since the last inspection, the grades awarded to lessons have

deteriorated and are below the national average for all colleges. During the inspection, the college expressed its concern that the social and economic climate of the area it serves limits its capacity to improve its performance, especially in relation to students' achievements. Inspectors acknowledged the college's circumstances. However, the college was unable to show that it had taken steps to measure and record the achievement of students relative to their previous attainment. This was most evident on vocational programmes.

64 The quality assurance framework for the college was changed in August 1996 to encourage staff to take more responsibility for continuous improvement. The quality assurance framework is comprehensive and detailed. It incorporates all the quality statements outlined in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Teams of staff have established their own performance indicators linked to the quality statements. The college's first annual report on the quality of its provision using this framework was produced in June 1997.

65 In September 1996, all key areas of the college's operations were reviewed by the quality assurance manager. He randomly observed and assessed a wide range of lessons and took account of students' views of their experience. Following this, all teaching and support service teams carried out a review and graded their provision, resulting in a self-assessment report. The quality assurance manager and senior managers then determined a grade for each area and established an action plan for improvement which was shared with teams. Curriculum areas did not carry out these self-assessment activities at the same time or with the same amount of detail and, as a result, some reviews and action plans were not effective. Contrary to the claim in the college's self-assessment report, inspection found that few teaching teams rigorously analyse trends relating to students' retention and examination

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pass rates and few take appropriate actions to improve performance.

66 Most staff enthusiastically support the new quality assurance process, although some are unclear as to how the overall grades for curriculum areas were determined and subsequently amended. Some grades do not adequately reflect the judgements expressed in course or other team reviews. Few team reviews rigorously consider the quality of teaching and learning. Action plans in the college's self-assessment report do not relate to the weaknesses outlined in the report. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students are encouraged to raise concerns regarding the quality of provision. These generally result in prompt action and improvement by the college.

67 The college operates other well-established quality assurance procedures for provision offered under contract from County Durham and Darlington TEC and the services provided for employers through the college company. It seeks and responds to the views of employers on the quality of provision. The college company was accredited by the ISO 9001 in 1994. There is little integration of these procedures with the college's quality assurance framework.

68 The team managing the college's rapidly-developed community provision makes good use of the college's quality assurance framework and monitors its provision well. The team regularly audits and evaluates the complex provision. The assurance of quality in collaborative provision is less effective. Little of the college's quality assurance framework is used to measure or evaluate the quality of training and assessment in this provision. Additionally, the college has not determined whether the collaborative partners' quality systems adequately conform to the college's standards, as required by FEFC guidelines. This was not identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness.

69 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that it has an effective staff development policy and programme of staff development activities. The college gained Investor in People status in March 1997. The staff development budget is 1 per cent of the payroll, though this has been increased to 1.5 per cent to support a major development programme for college managers. All staff can study, at no cost, one course each year from those provided in the college. Course teams identify training needs related to the curriculum. Staff development activities are well linked to the college's strategic plan and they are fully evaluated.

70 The college's self-assessment report is extensive and concise. It results from the wide-ranging self-assessment exercise launched in August 1996. Governors, managers and all staff participated in its development. The procedures used to produce the report are now an integral part of the college's main quality assurance system. The college does not make effective use of lesson observations to inform its self-assessment. In deciding grades, the college did not always base its judgements firmly on the evidence of the various self-assessment reports and inspectors considered that it had overstated the strengths of curriculum areas and cross-college provision.

Governance

Grade 1

71 The inspection team agreed with the college's own assessment of the strengths of governance.

Key strengths

- extensive financial and personnel expertise within the corporation
- effective clerking and conduct of meetings

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- high level of involvement in developing the mission and strategic plan
- close monitoring of the financial and other performance of the college
- strong commitment to the college
- participation in training and self-assessment

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

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

The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

73 The corporation comprises eight business members including a nominee from the County Durham and Darlington TEC together with two co-opted members, one staff member and the principal. A nomination committee identifies and recommends new members to the corporation. Business members have particularly strong expertise in finance and personnel. The corporation takes external legal and estates advice when appropriate. Arrangements exist for corporation members to seek individual independent professional advice on their duties should need arise. The college's self-assessment report acknowledges that the corporation has adopted a code of conduct which incorporates the seven principles of public life expounded by the Nolan committee. The college has prepared a register of interests which has been completed by all governors and by staff with significant financial responsibilities. Standing orders facilitate the corporation's business.

74 The corporation holds 11 meetings each year which are conducted briskly and efficiently. All members contribute to discussion. The size

of the corporation is small but good attendance by members has led only once to a quoracy issue. Meetings are well supported by clear and comprehensive agendas and papers which are issued in good time. The minutes clearly record business transacted. The corporation has established an audit committee, a remuneration committee and a nomination committee. These committees are supported by clear terms of reference. The corporation excludes members of the audit committee when it is considering the financial performance of the college. Members of the corporation have a clear understanding of the corporation's role. The chair of the corporation, the principal and the clerk meet each week to discuss the agenda for coming corporation meetings and emerging issues. This weekly meeting is well known to staff and it is open once a month to any member of staff for direct consultation with the chair. These considerable strengths of the corporation are correctly identified in the self-assessment report.

75 Corporation members were closely involved in drafting the mission statement and setting the strategic objectives of the college. They monitor the performance of the college closely. At each meeting, members receive suitably detailed management accounts supported by appropriate commentary; a member of the finance team attends for this item to answer queries. They also receive appropriately summated monthly data on a range of performance indicators, including enrolments, attendance, student:staff ratios and room utilisation. Members have recently requested that retention rates be included in these indicators. They receive regular reports on a range of the college's activities such as the students' union and marketing activities. At the time of the inspection, the accounts of the college subsidiary training company were not considered by the corporation. The annual performance of the college is reviewed through the performance appraisal of the principal by the chair.

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76 Members are highly committed to the college and many attend events and functions in addition to the frequent business meetings. The self-assessment report identified that links between governors and students were not sufficiently developed. This has been addressed through reports to each board meeting from a recently appointed student liaison officer. Governors are also concerned about perceived limited links with staff but inspectors concluded that this was not a significant weakness. New governors receive a thorough but compact information pack and are invited to the weekly meetings between principal, chair and clerk. Governors have two annual training events. They monitor their own attendance closely and members have been replaced when they found they were unable to attend regularly. They examine their own performance against a range of performance standards and this formed the basis of their self-assessment report.

Management

Grade 2

77 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses contained in the college's self-assessment report but identified further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- distinctive management style emphasising delegation and achievement of goals
- varied and successful channels for communication
- effective financial management procedures supported by good training
- improving financial health
- strong partnerships with business and community groups
- good information for managers
- a vigorous, well-informed marketing function

Weaknesses

- weaker management performance below senior management level
- inadequate development and monitoring of equal opportunities issues in the curriculum
- need to improve the strategic and performance management of the curriculum

78 The college's strategic plan is a clear, concise document which analyses the college's current position and gives a clear direction for the future. The draft was shared with staff for consultation before being produced as a high-quality commercially printed publication for wide distribution. The County Durham and Darlington TEC were consulted on the plan, as were community organisations. The plan has also been shared with some significant local employers. The college did not formally consult with the LEA about its strategic plans. The strategic objectives of the college do not explicitly address some issues which are particular features of the college and its community, for example, the low achievement and continuation rates of school-leavers.

79 The principal delegates responsibilities for carrying through the strategic plan to the operations and the research and development managers through targets set as part of their performance appraisal. Each of these senior managers further delegates responsibilities to their divisional managers through a set of more closely defined personal goals. The divisional managers and the senior management team meet monthly as the college management team and share the progress they have made towards achieving their goals. All managers clearly understand their responsibilities and how their goals relate to the mission and the strategic plan. Inspectors agreed with the strengths of the management of institutional performance recognised in the self-assessment report.

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80 The results of the curriculum area inspections show that the process of management through delegation related to performance goals is not yet showing benefits to the quality of the learning experience of students. The divisional targets, which relate to institutional performance such as enrolments and widening the curriculum, are generally well understood by course leaders and tutors. However, they are not always translated into quantifiable targets which relate directly to the teaching functions. This important failure to address the management of the curriculum with the same rigour as the institutional performance was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

81 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that a variety of strategies are employed successfully to ensure that all staff are well informed on college matters. The principal holds monthly whole-staff information meetings which are supported by summary papers for those unable to attend. The college calendar sets out a schedule of regular meetings for divisions, the teams within them, and major cross-college groups. Staff comment that managers, including the principal, are directly accessible for individual discussions. The senior management team, in particular the principal, are seen regularly in all parts of the college. They join staff in their work, for example, by sitting in on lessons.

82 The academic board was reconstituted in September 1997 to create a more effective management tool for providing academic advice to the principal. It has four committees: marketing and liaison; quality assurance; curriculum development; and performance indicators. They are led by managers and have appropriate membership, though any member of staff may attend their meetings. Formal recommendations from the committees are taken to monthly academic board meeting. Membership of this is limited to managers and a representative of the students. It considers the

recommendations, and a clear decision is made on each by the principal. Although the revised board had only been in operation for a few months before the inspection, recommendations have already resulted in some significant changes to the college's operations.

83 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The operations manager and the head of the finance department are both qualified accountants. The budgets delegated to divisional heads include staffing and non-staffing costs and are monitored regularly. The finance team and budget holders receive appropriate training. The management accounts, supported by detailed commentary, are produced to a timetable which integrates with corporation meetings. The senior management team considers financial issues as a formal agenda item at their weekly meetings. Auditors and inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that financial management and controls are of high quality. The college has successfully improved its financial health over three years. For example, the operating surplus has improved from a deficit of £794,000 in 1994-95 to a surplus of £477,865 in 1996-97; staffing costs have been reduced from 77 per cent of the expenditure to 51 per cent over the same period.

84 Managers are supplied with timely and accurate information to support their work. A wide range of reports is available by request, most designed in the college to suit college needs. Registers are scanned electronically every day and continued absences generate withdrawal status automatically. Recent installation of a college network covering all sites gives all managers direct access to the central information records. Course co-ordinators and tutors cannot yet access information directly from the computer network but have to work through the office of the divisional manager. The self-assessment report

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recognised the strengths of the management information system but it did not indicate its current limitations.

85 The college's marketing function is strong and is the direct responsibility of its research and development manager. Good use is made of local marketing information using County Durham and Darlington TEC sources, internally-generated statistical reports and other data. The high college profile is maintained in the region through an astute use of college-based activities and issues to provide media coverage.

86 The college works well in partnership with the County Durham and Darlington TEC; the chief executive attends the main strategic planning events and college staff take part in various joint working groups. The County Durham and Darlington TEC regards the college as forthright and open. Links with the business world are good and growing. The principal is a member of several important local fora for business leaders. In line with its mission, the college is a growing and valued presence in local East Durham communities. The principal is on the East Durham Town and Parish Council Committee and is a governor of one local secondary school and two special schools. The college is establishing an increasing number of links at curriculum level with the schools.

87 Responsibilities for equal opportunities policy and practice lie with the personnel team. The equal opportunities statement, signed by the principal, is publicised to both staff and students through their respective handbooks. A disability access group meets regularly and informs college decisions on resources and other matters. The tutorial handbook issued to all full-time students mentions equal opportunities as a suggested topic but the subject is not explicitly mentioned in the induction checklist or the accredited tutorial programme. The extent to which equal opportunities is dealt with as part of the course curriculum is not monitored.

Conclusions

88 The college assessed the quality of its provision more generously than inspectors in more than half the curriculum and cross-college areas. The significance of weaknesses in the curriculum areas relating to students' retention and achievements were frequently underestimated. The college overstated the strengths of the quality assurance system. Nevertheless, inspectors considered that the self-assessment report provided a useful tool for planning and carrying out the inspection.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	19
19-24 years	11
25+ years	66
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	54
Intermediate	25
Advanced	18
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	140	694	16
Agriculture	10	14	0
Construction	81	42	2
Engineering	87	221	6
Business	44	1,145	23
Hotel and catering	119	114	4
Health and community care	237	545	15
Art and design	58	342	8
Humanities	186	750	18
Basic education	88	320	8
Total	1,050	4,187	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	60	30	0	90
Supporting direct learning contact	37	11	1	49
Other support	72	23	2	97
Total	169	64	3	236

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£6,623,000	£8,352,000	£8,022,971
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£15.02	£12.21	£16.14
Payroll as a proportion of income	77%	48%	51%
Achievement of funding target	105%	160%	178%
Diversity of income	34%	32%	17%
Operating surplus	-£795,000	£1,093,000	£477,865

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

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

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

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

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	86	108	113
	Average point score per entry	3.2	3.1	3.2
	Position in tables	middle third	bottom third	bottom third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	102	124	151
	Percentage achieving qualification	79%	60%	66%
	Position in tables	middle third	bottom third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	116	114
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	58%	61%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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