Furness College

Contents

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

Furness College

North West Region

Inspected January 2000

Furness College is a medium-sized general further education college located on three sites in the centre of Barrow-in-Furness. The self-assessment process included opportunities for all staff and governors to make contributions to the report. Each curriculum report was validated by a panel of senior managers and representatives from the college. Inspectors agreed with some judgements in the report but considered that the significance of the weaknesses had been underestimated. Too much weight was awarded to recent developments, the effectiveness of which cannot yet be judged. The significance of the weaknesses identified by the inspectors led them to award lower grades in all five cross-college areas.

The college offers courses that range from foundation to higher levels in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. The inspection covered provision in five programme areas, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Some of the teaching is good, but the proportion of lessons judged to be outstanding and good was below the national average for the sector. On some courses, the rates of achievement and retention of students are weak. Attendance rates are above the national average. The college has been slow to respond to weaknesses identified in the last inspection

report. The grades awarded in the cross-college areas are worse than in the previous inspection. The present arrangements for support for students are new, and are not yet fully effective. There are many useful links with local groups in the area. Major investment has taken place to improve accommodation for the future. There is still poor accommodation and resources at the Whinnerah campus. There have been improvements and investment in IT and the services and facilities provided by the resource centres. Although quality assurance arrangements have improved, there is lack of rigour in the college's quality assurance system. Financial management is weak. Although governors have a strong commitment to the college and its mission, there is insufficient attention to monitoring the college's performance. The college has extensive and effective links with the community and industry and is successful in recruiting students from groups which have not usually entered further education. There has been unsatisfactory progress in addressing issues identified in management from the last inspection. The college should improve: retention and achievement rates; the quality of student support; the rigour of quality assurance; the thoroughness of performance monitoring and collective responsibility at all levels within the organisation; financial management; the monitoring by the corporation of finance; and the quality of teaching.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and information technology	2
Construction	3
Foundation engineering	2
Motor vehicle, fabrication, welding and engineering technicians' courses	3
Health, social care and childcare	3
Basic skills	3

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	4
General resources	3
Quality assurance	4
Governance	4
Management	4

The College and its Mission

1   Furness College is a general further education college in Barrow-in-Furness, south Cumbria. The college is located on three sites, all within walking distance of the town centre. The main campus, Howard Street, dates from the 1950s. The college's Channelside campus is on an industrial development park and was opened in 1992. This campus has modern buildings for construction, engineering and science. The other campus in the town centre houses catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy. The college offers a wide range of mainly vocational provision within nine of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The provision ranges from foundation to higher level courses.

2   The college recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. Barrow-in-Furness is the fifty-fifth most deprived district in Britain and in the top 20 districts showing relative deterioration between 1991 and 1996. The current employment rate is 59.5% compared with the national average of 78.1%. Jobs in the shipyard reduced from 14,000 to 4,600 in 1997, the second worst fall in an employment base in any area of Britain. There are particularly low levels of entrepreneurial activity. Barrow has the lowest rate of employees in micro-businesses in Cumbria and the rate of business development is 3.2% below the national average. In the Education Action Zone schools in Barrow there is significant underachievement. The percentage of pupils who gained five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or above is 37% compared with the national average and the average for Cumbria of 44%. Staying-on rates for students aged over 16 in Barrow have improved significantly over the last few years, but the average at 65% is still below the Cumbria and national figures.

3   The college is an active partner in the Furness Educational Consortium together with the sixth form college, two special schools and six secondary schools. The nearest colleges with a similar range of curriculum provision are more than 50 miles away in Workington and Lancaster. Of the 64% of FEFC-funded students enrolled in 1998-99, 13% were studying full time and 87% part time. Of these, 22% were studying at entry or foundation level, 31% at intermediate level, 16% at advanced level, 9% at higher level and 22% studying leisure and commercial courses. The college no longer offers courses in general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A levels).

4   The college management team comprises the principal, vice-principal and eight directors. Each director has line management and cross-college roles. Responsibilities for cross-college functions have recently been re-allocated. In the college management structure no member of the teaching staff is more than one level removed from the college management team.

5   The college's mission is 'to meet the needs of individuals and client groups for quality education and training'. Its corporate goals for 1999 to 2002 are:

- 'to improve the service to individual learners by keeping the academic, vocational and personal development of the learner as its central purpose

- to improve the service to employers by contributing to the vocational education and training of potential employees

- to improve the service to the community by contributing to partnerships for economic development and regeneration.'

Context

The Inspection

6   The college was inspected during January 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999. The data were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and were found to be generally reliable. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for 49 days. The inspection team observed 71 lessons, examined students' work and scrutinised college documents. They held meetings with governors, managers, staff and students and representatives from local schools, employers, the local enterprise agency and the community.

7   The college is included in the current cycle of joint inspections by the FEFC and Training Standards Council (TSC) inspectorates. Each inspectorate worked within the scope of its own framework and produced its own report. TSC inspectors inspected work-based provision in engineering, hairdressing and foundation for work. They observed 33 trainees. Where it was appropriate in the context of the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

8   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons observed and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed 59% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% less than satisfactory. This result compares with the national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1998-99. The proportion of outstanding lessons was half the national figure.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Basic education	0	5	4	0	0	9
GCSE	1	1	1	0	0	3
GNVQ	0	3	6	0	0	9
NVQ	1	6	3	0	0	10
Other vocational	4	19	8	2	2	35
Tutorials	1	2	2	0	0	5
Total (No.)	7	36	24	2	2	71
Total (%)	10	49	36	3	2	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

Context

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Furness College	10.0	85
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Science, Mathematics and Information Technology

Grade 2

10   Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors broadly agreed with the key strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found one strength and one weakness to be overstated.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching and learning
- effective learning materials
- good rates of achievement on most courses
- good attendance and punctuality
- effective organisation and management by course team leaders

Weaknesses

- poor and declining rates for retention on some courses
- poor achievement on national diploma courses

11   Good opportunities for progression are provided for students studying information technology (IT). There are courses to attract adults who are wishing to return to study, including those with no IT skills. The area has helped to develop and run IT courses for beginners in local community centres and schools to encourage more people to join. The development of a higher national diploma sports studies course in partnership with Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College provides opportunities for progression for students on the national diploma science, specialising in sports studies.

12   Inspectors judged seven out of 12 lessons to be good or outstanding. As recognised in the self-assessment report, lessons are well planned. There are detailed schemes of work and lesson plans have clear objectives which are shared with the students. In an effective human physiology lesson introducing the circulatory system, the lesson started with a revision test on the previous week's work. The objectives for the lesson were clearly outlined. The theory was taught using well-designed workbooks which were supplemented by appropriate discussion and overhead transparencies; key points were written on the whiteboard. Student activities were followed by well-judged questions to check that the work had been understood. Theoretical and practical work combined well in the lesson. In one unsatisfactory lesson students were not encouraged to take part and respond to the teacher. There was little checking of understanding and no well-aimed questioning of students. A handout was distributed but added little to the lesson. As recognised in the self-assessment report, lessons are designed to extend students' knowledge and skills. In one practical class students on the first diploma IT course worked on an assignment which integrated topics from two units. Following research into a business of their choice the students demonstrated good skills in using appropriate technology to produce a presentation. The students effectively integrated photographs from the Internet and recorded sounds as part of the presentation.

13   The learning materials, most handouts and workbooks used in lessons are informative and well designed. In one computer data programming class students used a series of workbooks that provided theory, practical examples, and exercises. All students had to complete at least two of the exercises for that week. Further progressively more complex extension tasks were available to stretch the more able students. Satisfactory completion of the exercises was carefully monitored and recorded.

Curriculum Areas

14   As the self-assessment report states, there is effective organisation and management of courses. Course team meetings are held regularly and supported by agendas and minutes that contain clear action points. Issues over retention and achievement feature as a standard agenda item for these meetings. There is a published schedule of course and programme team meetings which are well attended by teachers. Course reviews have been completed on a regular basis, but there is insufficient use of data for rates of retention and achievement to be used for planning and evaluation.

15   Student attendance and punctuality in observed lessons was good. The average attendance rate was 85% which is above the national average in the sector for the programme area. Students' work is well presented and portfolios of evidence are of a good standard. There is effective use of a broad range of assignments which, where appropriate, include real tasks. For example, students in the second year of the national diploma in IT applications are working in partnership with the local junior school on the design and production of a book, which charts the story of the Barrow Dock Museum. Student assignment work is thoroughly marked; constructive written feedback is given. With the exception of the two national diploma courses in IT applications and science, achievement in most courses is above national averages for the sector. Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that achievement on national diploma courses is poor. The college has taken action to improve this course by redesigning assignment programmes and by increasing the focus in tutorials of review and action-planning of students' progress. There are poor and declining retention rates on some courses.

16   Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that computer hardware and software facilities of good quality are available to IT and computing students. National diploma (sports studies) students have access to a wide variety of industrial standard specialist sports facilities outside of college. General teaching classrooms are well maintained and equipped and have relevant resource materials.

Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement
rates in science, mathematics and information
technology, 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	**1998**	**1999**
OCR computer literacy and information technology (short one-year and two-year programmes)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	725 89 63	894 84 76	803 78 78
GCSE mathematics (one-year course)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	140 81 62	111 84 88	152 75 73
First diploma in IT applications (one-year course)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	17 53 78	24 67 81	20 90 72
NOCN computing	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	121 75 96	126 75 98
National diploma in IT applications (two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	26 85 68	25 48 100	35 55 75
National diploma in science (sport studies two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	29 69 55	15 73 60	15 87 46

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*incomplete data

Construction

Grade 3

17   Inspectors observed 11 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective use of realistic project work
- thorough monitoring of students' progress
- good retention rates on foundation and intermediate craft courses
- good pass rate on advanced craft courses in 1999
- well-resourced specialist accommodation

Weaknesses

- the lack of an appropriate variety of teaching methods
- an insufficient development of key skills for full-time craft students
- poor pass rates on foundation and intermediate craft courses
- poor retention rates on advanced craft courses
- insufficient rigour in programme review and evaluation

18   The construction provision includes a range of full-time and part-time craft courses. Part-time students can join many of these courses at any time during the year. Students from two local secondary schools follow national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 craft courses. The college also offers national and higher national certificate and diploma courses and craft supplementary studies. Inspectors agreed with the strength stated in the self-assessment report that the construction area works well with its local community. Links with local employers have led to the development of short courses such as the first line supervisors

course. Teachers assess in the workplace. Students and employers attend course reviews, but there is insufficient analysis of their views. There is not enough use of national benchmarks at course and programme level to assess performance. Reports of students' performance are regularly sent to employers, but not to parents of full-time students aged under 18.

19   Most teaching is good. Inspectors observed sound working practices in many practical lessons. Safety precautions are enforced in workshops and students are required to wear safety footwear, and use eye protection when appropriate. Students from different craft courses develop a broad range of practical competences through working together on large-scale projects. Bricklaying and carpentry students, for example, have built a two-storey house. Through close links with a local builder, students have built two semi-detached houses as part of a large housing development. Teachers regularly record and monitor students' progress. Wall charts show how students are progressing as a group. In some weaker lessons, activities are not sufficiently varied. For example, in practical lessons, teachers did not ensure that theoretical concepts had been understood. In theory lessons, plans rarely identified the range of resources that could be used. Teachers did not always use questioning techniques effectively. Insufficient attention was given to the development of key skills for full-time students. Students were not encouraged to use IT when preparing portfolios. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

20   Most students produce practical work of an acceptable standard. They undertake some interesting tasks. For example, electrical installation students refurbished and tested lighting and other electrical equipment before it was sent and used to repair Romanian orphanages. Retention rates have been above the national average for the sector in two of the last three years on many foundation and

intermediate level craft courses. However, over the same period retention rates for advanced level craft courses have been consistently below the national average. The pass and retention rates for electrical installation at level 2 were both above the national average in 1999. Pass rates on advanced level craft courses have improved considerably over three years. In 1999, 92% of carpentry and joinery students who completed their NVQ level 3 courses achieved the qualification compared with only 11% in 1997. Pass rates on many foundation and intermediate level craft courses are below the national average. In 1999, the achievement rates for level 2 courses in painting and decorating and carpentry and joinery were 25% and 55%, respectively. Poor pass and retention rates were identified in the self-assessment report. There is good student progression from craft to technician courses.

21 Workshops and two external large project areas provide good training environments and allow teachers to simulate site working. These features were noted in the self-assessment report. There are good stocks of consumable materials, although samples of modern materials are not always available. Equipment is well maintained and readily available. However, apart from the electrical installation workshop, arrangements for the storage and issue of equipment are poor. Workshops are not always kept tidy and there are insufficient storage areas for students' work. There are good displays in classrooms of materials used in the construction industry. Students have good access to IT facilities in the resource centre but few computers are available in workshops. There is a good range of software and surveying equipment used in construction.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Foundation vocational (construction crafts)	1	Number of starters	2	24	33
		Retention (%)	100	100	82
		Achievement (%)	0	50	30
Foundation vocational (technician studies)	1	Number of starters	*	22	14
		Retention (%)	*	77	79
		Achievement (%)	*	77	60
Intermediate vocational (construction crafts)	2	Number of starters	71	92	76
		Retention (%)	86	58	84
		Achievement (%)	16	28	67
Advanced vocational (construction crafts)	3	Number of starters	196	26	72
		Retention (%)	56	58	58
		Achievement (%)	8	13	76
Advanced vocational (technician studies)	3	Number of starters	22	15	*
		Retention (%)	77	67	*
		Achievement (%)	47	40	*

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Foundation Engineering

Grade 2

22   The inspection covered a range of provision identified by the college as foundation engineering. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- excellent attendance rates
- good retention and achievement
- good opportunities for progression
- high-quality specialist engineering equipment and resources

Weaknesses

- ageing computer hardware in computer-aided design
- insufficient rigour in course review and evaluation
- poor working conditions in an electrical workshop

23   Inspectors agreed that there are strong industrial links as identified in the self-assessment. Across the programme area employers contribute to course team meetings and provide regular feedback. For example, a large employer of engineering systems sponsored 80 full-time students on engineering foundation programmes and regularly contributes to course development and projects. The range of courses available is suitable although the college does not enable a flexible enrolment in the computer-aided design programme.

24   Teaching was of a high standard in most lessons. Out of 11 lessons, eight were judged to be good or outstanding, which is above the national average in the sector for the programme area. Lessons are well structured and teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods. For example a lesson on measurement started with a lively discussion followed by effective activities carried out in small groups. Most assignments are appropriate. In one mechanical craft class, students were studying the development of engineering industries. This topic was approached through a clear assignment brief that required students to do relevant research. Students made competent use of a range of resources including books, periodicals, and the Internet to collect the information. In all lessons observed teachers paid attention to monitoring students' progress, giving appropriate guidance and promoting friendly but professional working relationships. Lesson plans are not always sufficiently detailed. Students are generally punctual and have excellent attendance rates. In the lessons observed, average attendance was 95% which is significantly above the national average for the programme area. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors noted that only two women had enrolled in the engineering classes.

25   There is lack of rigour in course review and evaluation. Course teams meet to review their course, but no rigorous evaluation of students' performance is undertaken. The teams do not thoroughly review rates of retention and achievement against national benchmarks, or set targets for improvement or develop action plans. The college has introduced arrangements that are intended to promote process, but the system is not yet established at course team level. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report.

26   The students' personal and vocational skills are well developed. A schedule of European exchanges has been established under the Leonardo initiative to develop the skills of engineering apprentices. Students improved their vocational engineering skills through a project to manufacture a replica water tender for a 100-year-old steam engine. The inspectors

agreed with the self-assessment that rates of student retention and achievement are good. They have steadily improved since the last inspection and are now well above the national average for the sector on all foundation engineering programmes. Progression into employment from full-time courses is very high. Of those students completing courses in 1999, 87% returned in 1999-2000 as day-release students.

27 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that specialist resources are of high quality. An excellent facility for computer-aided engineering has been designated as a Cumbria Centre of Excellence. This facility is now assisting local manufacturing companies to use new technology. Other areas are well organised,

clean and tidy and receiving some investment. For example there is a new milling machine for the mechanical workshop. There are poor working conditions in an electrical workshop. The accommodation is too small for the size of the group using the workshop. There has been some investment in the computer-aided design area, but two-thirds of the computers are unable to run the latest version of software adequately.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 201 basic engineering	1	Number of starters	+	91	62
		Retention (%)	+	92	94
		Achievement (%)	+	25	76
NVQ engineering machining	1	Number of starters	7	28	+
		Retention (%)	86	93	+
		Achievement (%)	50	92	+
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Number of starters	9	88	54
		Retention (%)	78	90	94
		Achievement (%)	71	87	86
NVQ engineering foundation	2	Number of starters	37	62	71
		Retention (%)	78	97	94
		Achievement (%)	34	83	*
C&G 2301 computer-aided engineering and numerical control/computer numerical control	2	Number of starters	9	27	21
		Retention (%)	100	74	100
		Achievement (%)	100	84	90
C&G 4351 computer-aided design and three-dimensional design	2	Number of starters	50	68	68
		Retention (%)	62	82	*
		Achievement (%)	94	90	90

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*incomplete data
+course not running

Motor Vehicle, Fabrication, Welding and Engineering Technicians' Courses

Grade 3

28   FEFC inspectors observed 10 lessons covering motor vehicle, fabrication, welding and engineering technicians. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors from the TSC observed training in motor vehicle engineering for 11 work-based students.

Key strengths

- well-established links with employers
- good links between theory and industrial applications
- good achievement rates in NVQ vehicle maintenance
- well-maintained specialist equipment and resources
- effective use of IT on welding courses

Weaknesses

- poor laboratory practice
- low achievement rates on national diploma courses
- weak course management
- underdeveloped use of IT in engineering courses

29   Inspectors agreed that the college offers a comprehensive range of programmes which meets the needs of the local area. Most provision is developed to respond to the demands of local industry. For example, a unit in a power plant was developed with the direct and active involvement of the local companies. There are good opportunities for students to participate in demanding and exciting high technology projects. For example, the students have successfully worked on a collaborative project with other colleges and companies in Belgium, Sweden and Norway.

30   Most of the teaching is satisfactory. In the better lessons teachers carefully explained theoretical concepts and then related them to a practical application. For example, in a lesson on a programmable logic controller the teacher skilfully used a whiteboard and overhead transparency to develop a control circuit step by step. The teachers effectively draw on their own and their students' experience to illustrate aspects of practical or theory lessons. In a motor vehicle lesson, the teacher successfully used an explanation of his car accident to emphasise the role of a running engine in the operation of a servo-assisted braking system. There is insufficient use of IT for problem-solving and data analysis. In many lessons students are not encouraged to develop their skills in the application of IT in engineering. For example, in a welding lesson students only used IT to research various methods of welding. All teachers have appropriate schemes of work but lesson planning was not systematic. Some of the lesson plans lacked appropriate detail. A few lessons were inadequately planned and ineffectively managed. Practical lessons in the laboratory are poor and students do not benefit from them. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment. In one practical lesson, the worksheet was so unhelpful that the students could not construct a working electronics circuit from a schematic diagram.

31   The college did not identify the weak management of courses in the self-assessment. Teachers meet regularly to discuss course provision, and rates of retention and achievement. In course meetings, representatives from local companies make a valuable contribution to the action plans. However, not all actions decided on in course meetings are monitored and followed through to completion. For example, a tutor identified that

the transfer of a group to another site for computer application was proving unsatisfactory. The problem was not resolved, and as a result, the students lost 15 minutes of their lesson every week while walking from one site to the next. There is an inconsistent approach to the use of course files as working documents. Target-setting and action-planning for the students is not well developed. Not all the students are aware of their assessment plan. There is an over-reliance on giving students instructions and information verbally without subsequent confirmation on paper.

32   There is good attendance, which is above the national average for the sector in the programme area. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the retention and achievement rates on NVQ courses are good and above the national average. Most of the improvements have taken place in the last academic year, for example, the increase in achievement on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) course in fabrication and welding. The self-assessment did not identify the poor achievements in the national diploma, which has declined below the benchmark.

33   Teachers are well qualified and gain additional relevant industrial experience through their close links with the local industry. For example, one tutor had arranged a two-week course in one of the local companies to update skills in instrumentation. The inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the workshops and laboratories have good resources and are efficiently maintained. Health and safety arrangements are well managed. The specialist resources and the industrial links contribute effectively to the development of new courses in the curriculum area.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in motor vehicle, fabrication, welding and engineering technicians' courses, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ in vehicle maintenance	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	13 100 100	20 94 73
NVQ in vehicle maintenance	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	11 82 88	21 60 100
NVQ in vehicle mechanical and electrical	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	29 72 0	31 90 44
National certificate engineering	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	92 97 65	72 88 51	71 83 86
National diploma engineering	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	37 68 62	28 64 56	21 52 50
C&G 229 fabrication and welding	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	27 96 4	23 96 14	18 100 53

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*course not running

Health, Social Care and Childcare

Grade 3

34   Twelve lessons were observed. The inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found that some strengths were overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths
- good teaching on early years courses
- achievements above the national average on early years courses
- attentive and responsive students
- well-managed early years provision
- good development of IT skills

Weaknesses
- poor retention on many courses
- poor achievement on most health and care courses
- insufficient challenge in some lessons
- weak organisation of health and care courses
- underdeveloped range of courses on offer in health and social care

35   Inspectors agreed that the curriculum offers mostly good progression routes for students from foundation to degree level. The programme area has developed different courses and attendance modes in response to demand. The courses include a higher national diploma in health, childhood and early years, and a diploma in counselling. A new part-time diploma in nursery nursing has recruited successfully and retained most of its students. The early years courses are well managed. There are clear policies which are consistently implemented for the teaching and assessment of courses and coursework. The provision for health and social care courses is less coherent. There are few policies to achieve consistency in the conduct of these courses. The need for a review of the overall curriculum was not identified in the self-assessment report. The vocational courses in health and social care have not been successful. The college has not recruited advanced students for the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) for the current year. There is poor transition for some students from the intermediate level to the national diploma courses.

36   There is good teaching on early years courses. Lesson plans and associated learning objectives are challenging. Expectations of students are high and lessons are taught at a demanding pace. This approach was exemplified in a lesson on observation and assessment for part-time nursery nursing students. Teaching was lively and interspersed with the kind of humour which maintained students' motivation. Complex theoretical content on playwork was communicated in language which students could understand and related to their work and life experiences. Teachers constantly check that students understood what was required to undertake their tasks of observation and assessment. In most lessons students were attentive and interested. Some of these strengths in the teaching were identified in the self-assessment report. However, in health and care courses, the structure and also style of teaching restricted the students' achievements. In a few lessons the pace was too slow and students made insufficient progress which became very obvious from their poor responses to questions at the end of some lessons. Tutorials are well planned; there are appropriately detailed schemes of work. Placements are well-organised and supervised on the early years courses.

37   Students generally enjoy their studies. Their work is well presented and of an appropriate standard. Marking of students' assignments is consistently good on the early

years courses and teachers provide helpful comments which help students to improve their work. Standards on health and social care courses are variable, and there is little evidence of any policies to ensure consistency in the quality of feedback given to students. Some marking is too generous. IT skills are well developed and enhance students' prospects for potential employment.

38   Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's analysis of achievement and retention rates. The certificate in childcare and education and diploma in nursery nursing courses have consistently achieved well above the national average for the sector. Most health and care courses have improving achievement rates, including rates on external tests. The GNVQ intermediate level in health and social care had achievements above the national average in 1999. The national diploma in science (health studies) course has been consistently below the national average for the past three years. Retention and achievement are poor on the GNVQ advanced level programme. There are only four students in the current second year. Retention on the GNVQ intermediate level in health and social care and national diploma in caring services (social care) courses has been above the national average for the past two years. Many students on the current GNVQ intermediate course have withdrawn. Destination data are not collected systematically and not used for curriculum development.

39   Inspectors agreed that staff are well qualified. Teaching accommodation is satisfactory. Some rooms are too small for the size of group which hampers some plans for teaching. The lack of screens for overhead transparencies impairs the quality of their reproduction. The library is well stocked but has much outdated material. Recent investment has produced additional books to fill some gaps in provision. Access to the most commonly used texts is helped by the short-term loan system.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health, social care and childcare, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 54 71	19 79 69	14 79 90
Certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 85 82	18 56 90	10 70 100
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	58 59 66	18 44 50	17 65 64
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	53 75 95	39 87 88	32 75 96
National diploma in caring services (social care)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	16 75 45	16 88 86
National diploma in science (health studies)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	23 74 41	14 64 77	16 69 82

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*data unavailable

Basic Skills

Grade 3

40   Inspectors observed 10 lessons across the range of provision. They agreed with most of the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses, but they found some strengths were overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and support
- good support for vocational courses
- effective use of learning support assistants
- good work and achievement by students
- a high level of student involvement

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of IT
- an inadequate range of courses to encourage progression
- insufficient levels of support for large groups
- no evaluation of overall effectiveness of basic skills support

41   The inspection covered courses and support in basic skills. Support for basic skills was inspected in individual or small group lessons. Some students also received literacy or numeracy support by attending the primary basic skills lessons. Support lessons were observed in three vocational areas. At the time of the inspection 136 students were enrolled on the primary programme: 50 were receiving basic skills support for their main programme; and 16 were receiving basic skills teaching as part of a full-time programme for school-leavers which incorporated vocational options. Some students on the primary basic skills courses work towards nationally recognised qualifications. Inspectors were unable to include a table for this area because of incomplete data.

42   Students attending primary basic skills courses are assessed prior to entry. This assessment is used as a basis for developing their learning plans. The best individual learning plans for those receiving support incorporate the literacy and numeracy requirements of the students' main programme and also extend their competences in general basic skills. For students on the basic skills courses, individual plans focus clearly on students' identified needs. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment that the individual plans are a strength of the provision. However, in a minority of cases, the plans focus more on the requirements of the accreditation scheme than on the wider needs of the student.

43   Students' progress against short-term targets is reviewed every term. In the case of basic skills support, an additional review twice each year provides the opportunity for the student, the support tutor and the main course tutor to evaluate the effectiveness of the support provided and to agree further targets. There is a high level of student involvement in developing learning plans in basic skills lessons. Time is allocated in each lesson for students to discuss with their teacher the work that they have done and their plans for the next lesson. However, there is no procedure for evaluating the overall effectiveness of literacy and numeracy support which is identified as a weakness in the college's self-assessment report.

44   Of the 10 lessons observed, five were good and one was outstanding. The most effective lessons are well planned, and take into account the needs and interests of individual students. They offer a variety of activities to enable students to develop their skills. In one of the support lessons, the student was developing reading skills through a range of activities which were related to the catering element of her main programme. Skills of sequencing, oral communication and spelling were checked, confirmed and developed. However, in less effective lessons, an overemphasis on the

requirements of accreditation systems hinders broader skill development. The college did not identify this weakness in their self-assessment.

45   In basic skills courses, achievement is not based on qualifications alone. In most lessons there was a high level of involvement of all students. Most students' written work is of an appropriate standard, sometimes very good. Students are punctual and in some cases arrive early and are keen to start their work. Most students are able to explain the good progress which they have made towards their goals. Students in basic skills classes can progress through a number of levels of nationally recognised qualifications. However, there is an inadequate range of courses to encourage progression to mainstream courses. The college made no reference in its self-assessment to students' achievements on basic skills courses. Attendance in the lessons observed was good. The average attendance was 83%; the average in the sector for this area is 74%.

46   The college provides a range of basic skills support. Students on basic skills courses generally benefit from being members of small groups. However, there are some large groups where insufficient support is available to provide the individual attention required. This shortcoming was not identified in the self-assessment report. Although the college provides basic skills courses on its main sites, there is inadequate provision of basic skills courses in many parts of the college's catchment area where there is significant need of such help.

47   Basic skills lessons take place in two dedicated rooms which are equipped with appropriate displays, materials and equipment. In each room students have access to two computers linked to the Internet. At present little use is made of these computers. When they are used, it is mainly for wordprocessing. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is insufficient use of IT to support learning.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 4

48   Inspectors agreed with a number of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report. One weakness had been addressed by the time of the inspection. The report did not include an evaluation of the key aspect of tutorial arrangements. Inspectors judged several strengths to be overstated and found a number of weaknesses which had not been identified by the college.

Key strengths
- well-managed links with schools
- good personal and financial support for students
- good support for students with physical disabilities and sensory impairments
- successful monitoring of attendance

Weaknesses
- ineffective management arrangements
- inadequate tutorial provision
- ineffective identification of most additional support needs
- lack of social and extra-curricular activities
- insufficient use of careers education and guidance

49   The college has made unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection in improving the arrangements for supporting students. The current arrangements for managing the different aspects of support for students are new and are still evolving. They are ineffective in ensuring provision for all students of the 'available, accessible and appropriate' support that is one of the college's strategic aims. A number of staff are failing to comply with the new requirements placed on them. There is insufficiently close monitoring and evaluation of provision.

50   Inspectors agreed that there are well-planned arrangements for encouraging enrolments from the college's 10 partner schools. Members of the 18-strong school liaison team visit schools to attend careers events and to talk to pupils and teachers about courses and employment opportunities. Imaginative approaches, such as a 'ready, steady, cook' exercise run by catering teachers, are helping to capture the interest of pupils. A recently forged partnership with a health trust is helping the college to develop effective guidance, support and bridging provision for students with mental health difficulties.

51   The well-staffed office for advice on courses handles enquiries efficiently. As the self-assessment report recognises, personal support and counselling services are vigorously promoted, readily available and are valued by students. The college's chaplain is active in support of students and staff and joins in the social life of the college. The college offers a high level of practical help through generous bursaries, and hardship and access funds. The college nursery is well run and provides a service for students with children under five years old which is highly appreciated.

52   On enrolment, all students receive a useful handbook, which includes clear information on their entitlements, rights and responsibilities. The college induction is informative but is not adapted to the needs and interest of different groups. Sessions are run for students who enrol late, but some miss out on this opportunity.

53   Arrangements for identifying and following up students who need additional literacy and numeracy support are underdeveloped. The college is not meeting its target of testing all full-time students on courses at level 3 or below. Testing for part-time students is voluntary. In view of the large proportion of students at levels 1 and 2, the numbers identified as needing additional support are surprisingly low, as is the percentage of take-up. A few curriculum areas

provide the useful supplement of an aptitude test. Learning support assistants and a dedicated technician provide effective support for students with physical disabilities and sensory impairments. Students with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, receive help from appropriately qualified staff.

54   A number of the weaknesses in tutorial provision identified during the last inspection have been addressed, but major weaknesses remain. Part-time students as well as full-time students now have timetabled pastoral tutorial support and a coherent course tutor handbook. The tutorial framework is insubstantial and the college has been slow to address the development of tutorial curricula. With a few exceptions, the curricula developed by subject areas consist of lists of topics. The course tutors are not trained for their role and have too much flexibility in how they use their time. Much of that time is devoted to providing the termly one-to-one tutorials to which students are entitled. There are few group tutorials. The tutorials observed by inspectors were judged to be at least satisfactory, although one bore the characteristics of a subject lesson. The action plans are insufficiently detailed and do not list the actions that are required to address the weaknesses and areas of concern that students identify. Attendance is effectively monitored.

55   Tutorial provision and practice have not been adapted to cater for students aged 16 to 18. Reports on their progress do not go as a matter of course to parents or guardians. There is no enrichment programme or programme of sporting and other recreational activities. This weakness is not recognised in the self-assessment report.

56   Students' entitlement to careers education and guidance is poorly defined. There is a well-stocked careers room at Howard Street, run by the college. Full-time students in groups, but not yet part-time students, are introduced to the contents. Tutorial groups are offered a choice of

five lessons on careers guidance. Tutors have the responsibility of deciding whether or not the offer is taken up, and there is no targeting of individual students who are at risk. There is insufficient promotion of individual careers interviews. In 1998-99, only 100 students were recorded as attending such interviews.

General Resources
Grade 3

57   Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of its general resources. They considered that some strengths were overstated and identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths
- effective linkage of accommodation strategy to the strategic plan
- good access to most college facilities for individuals with restricted mobility
- good provision of the services and facilities by the resource centres

Weaknesses
- unsatisfactory accommodation and resources at the John Whinnerah site
- underused accommodation for teaching and learning
- inadequate catering services, and sport and recreational facilities for students

58   The college recognises that it has significantly more accommodation than it needs. Since the last inspection it has developed a clear strategy to reduce the number of sites, improve its accommodation and use space more cost effectively. Inspectors agreed that the college's estates are effectively managed. A benchmarking exercise carried out in 1998 showed that, although repairs and maintenance costs are high due to the age of some of the

buildings, in overall terms premises costs per square metre were lower than the target comparison by £41,000 and that energy and cleaning costs were well controlled. There are planned maintenance programmes for both estates and equipment. However, because the college's proposed move to purpose-built accommodation at Channelside drives its approach to developing, maintaining and refurbishing existing buildings, only the minimal amount of funding needed to maintain services has been allocated to the estate for some time. Although the older buildings are kept clean and tidy, parts of them are drab and shabby.

59   As the self-assessment report indicates, there has been a significant investment in IT across the college over the last two years. In excess of £350,000 has been spent upgrading the college's computer networks and replacing computers for both students and staff. There are 321 computers available to students, 240 of them connected to the curriculum network. Students can access the Internet on 72 machines across the college. About one-third of computers are available to students on an open access basis. Staff appreciate the high specification of computers and the Internet access available in each staff room. Hardware, with the exception of some in engineering workshops, is up to date and well maintained by technicians. Staff are currently developing learning resources to improve the newly established college intranet. An infrared line-of-sight link connects the Channelside and Howard Street campuses. Specialist equipment includes video-conferencing facilities and facilities to support students with physical difficulties including computers with speech synthesisers, laptop computers and a Braille printer. Some students at Channelside, particularly those in engineering, raised concerns with inspectors about the availability of computers at that site. Currently there are only six open access machines with Internet access which are available to them when the other machines are being used for teaching.

60   Accommodation and resources at the John Whinnerah site are of poor quality. There is no access for students with restricted mobility to the specialist facilities in beauty therapy and hairdressing. The overall range and standard of resources available to students is inadequate. There is insufficient locker space, no showers, lack of networked computers and no library facilities. The college did not recognise the significant weaknesses in accommodation and resources at this site in their self-assessment of resources.

61   As identified in the college's self-assessment report, the introduction of a computerised control system in the resource centres has resulted in a more efficient and effective service. There is a single catalogue for all learning resources in the college, including those held in teaching areas. Well-qualified library staff monitor the use of stock and regularly consult with curriculum areas about the purchase of new books. The resource centres incorporate both library and computing facilities and house large stocks of library books, a wide range of periodicals, videos, audio tapes, CD-ROMS and computer-based information packages. However, inspectors found that many library books were outdated. The college did not identify this weakness. Library staff have begun an audit so that old and outdated texts can be removed from stock. Last year the college added 1,800 books to its stock and spent £14,000 on a new library security system. Students express high levels of satisfaction with the services provided by the staff of the resource centres. There is good access to centres during the day, evening and on Saturday morning.

62   Refectory facilities do not adequately meet the needs of students. Accommodation at Howard Street is too small for the number of students, and the variety of food is too limited. Students go out to nearby shops to purchase food. They use the refectory only for snacks and drinks. Common rooms are also cramped and poorly used. There are no recreational or sports facilities generally available to students. Staff

workrooms on the Howard Street site are overcrowded. Social areas for staff are small and poorly furnished. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

63   Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report but considered that the weaknesses were understated. Action which the college has taken to address some of the weaknesses has only recently been implemented and is not yet fully effective.

Key strengths

- good examples of arrangements to identify and respond to students' views
- good student awareness and understanding of the college charter
- a well-documented and effective complaints procedure

Weaknesses

- inadequate attempts to set appropriate standards
- a lack of rigour in course reviews
- a lack of strategy for quality assurance in support areas
- inadequate use of data and benchmarks to evaluate performance
- insufficient links between the different processes for quality assurance
- an underdeveloped strategy to improve retention rates

64   At the time of the last inspection, inspectors concluded that there were widespread deficiencies in the college's quality assurance system. Several of these deficiencies remain. There is little sign of improvement in student retention and achievement rates. College data indicate a decline in achievements for students aged 19 years and over in 1999. An updated policy and new procedures were introduced immediately prior to the inspection. There is no coherent approach to quality assurance in business support areas. Staff do not have a clear view about quality assurance procedures. A co-ordinator for good practice was appointed in September 1999 but no targets have yet been set for him.

65   A revised framework for course review was introduced in Autumn 1999 to bring together evidence from several sources to help action-planning. It is too early to evaluate whether it will succeed in rectifying some of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The college's practices are characterised by: a lack of rigour in course reviews; little use of benchmarking data to evaluate performance; no comparisons with previous years to identify trends or issues arising; and only a rudimentary use of target-setting. Course team meetings routinely review progress against their action plans but documentation to record when an issue has been resolved often remains incomplete. There is too much emphasis on reacting to problems or issues which arise and too little attempt to setting demanding standards or targets against which to measure improvement. The quality assurance subcommittee of the academic board has been ineffective in monitoring the outcomes of quality assurance processes.

66   Inspectors agreed with the strength in the self-assessment report that the college charter is effective as a statement of what students can expect from the college and what is expected of them in return. Students are knowledgeable about the charter and are aware of the college complaints procedure. Complaints are well documented. They are taken seriously; action follows and reports are issued. Course team responses are recorded and monitored by the quality assurance officer. The college makes

extensive but ineffective use of questionnaires. Their format provides little opportunity for students to indicate why they may or may not be satisfied with different aspects of their college experience. Only recently was one questionnaire revised to include a question that asked students to grade their degree of satisfaction with learning opportunities and experiences. Most tutors have difficulty in completing an action plan as a result of studying the responses to the questionnaire.

67 The college requires course teams to follow a standard agenda for meetings to ensure that key items are routinely discussed. Not all teams comply with this requirement. Only recently was the course team agenda revised to include rates of retention and achievement as standard items. Students' attendance is still not a required item. Curriculum managers do not monitor students' attendance across the various courses for which they are responsible. Although initiatives have been taken in two curriculum areas, only recently did the college devise a cross-college strategy to address student retention issues. There is no effective system for analysing students' reasons for leaving courses early, a weakness which was identified in the self-assessment report.

68 As the self-assessment report recognised, the process of self-assessment did not build effectively on the outcomes of courses review and evaluation. However, inspectors agreed that the current self-assessment report has benefited from an effective validation process. It has helped managers and staff to identify more clearly the strengths and weaknesses in their area and to distinguish them from routine practice. Only recently have staff been able to obtain data from the college information system to enable them to compare their students' performance with national benchmarks. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the updated self-assessment report that an in-house inspection process, introduced in November 1999, helped to raise staff awareness on the benefits of such an approach. In particular the

profile of lesson observations from the college's own inspection team was markedly less generous than those produced by college programme team leaders.

69 Staff identify their development needs with their line managers during their meeting to review professional development. There are only tenuous links between this process and other aspects of quality assurance. Staff performance is not routinely reviewed against targets arising from course reviews or action plans. In this and other respects there are too few links between the different activities which make up the college approach to quality assurance and action-planning.

Governance

Grade 4

70 Inspectors and auditors found that some strengths in the self-assessment report were overstated. They also identified some additional key weaknesses.

Key strengths
- an effective policy of openness

Weaknesses
- inadequate financial monitoring
- inappropriate delegation to subcommittees
- insufficient involvement in target-setting and in monitoring college performance
- no monitoring of equal opportunities or of the statement on disability

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not always conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It does not always fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

72   The corporation has a membership of 17 that includes staff and student members. At the time of inspection two vacancies were in the process of being filled. Governors have a wide range of experience which includes banking, business and personnel. Inspectors and auditors agreed with college's self-assessment that clerking arrangements are efficient. Agendas and minutes are produced to a good standard and sent to governors well in advance of meetings. Standing orders and the operation of the corporation have been revised appropriately to meet the requirements of the revised instrument and articles. The corporation has adopted an appropriate policy of openness. There is a code of conduct, a register of interests with clear guidelines and a 'whistleblowing' policy. In each meeting, interests are declared and the confidentiality of items is discussed where necessary. Corporation minutes and papers are available in college libraries and publicised.

73   There is an extensive range of committees: finance and general purposes; audit; search; steering; quality; remuneration; Channelside project; employment policy; and student liaison. Each committee agrees priorities for its annual work which are approved by the corporation. There is a scheme of delegation and clear terms of reference which have been reviewed recently and approved by the corporation. In one case, a committee has delegated business which is a statutory responsibility of the corporation. The Channelside committee has been given authority to acquire and dispose of land and buildings.

74   A weakness which was not identified in the self-assessment report is the inadequate monitoring of the college's financial performance. Until recently governors have not received sufficient information in their financial reports. The budget for 1999-2000 was not approved until one month after the start of the financial year. This contravenes the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The college has incurred deficits in both 1997-98 and 1998-99 and is projecting a deficit for 1999-2000. The financial forecast indicates a surplus from 2001-02. A consultancy exercise, commissioned by the principal and undertaken by the college's internal auditors, identified serious weaknesses in financial management and control. The resulting report was not presented to either the audit committee or the corporation. The audit committee's annual report did not refer to this critical report. The corporation has not adequately monitored the financial progress of the Channelside capital building project and has allowed the project to proceed through its early stages without first securing the required bank loan. The college has sufficient reserves for the expenditure committed.

75   There is insufficient monitoring of college performance. The self-assessment report acknowledges the weakness of insufficient monitoring of retention and achievement by the corporation. An additional weakness is the lack of monitoring of equal opportunities. The data submitted to governors do not allow them to monitor regularly college performance against national benchmarks. The targets approved by the corporation in 1999 for retention and achievement were based on inaccurate data and were not in the appropriate format recommended by the FEFC. The governors' quality committee receives more detailed information on students' achievements, complaints and self-assessment and their minutes are appropriately noted by the corporation. There have been no reports to governors on the outcomes of the equal opportunities policy or compliance with the disability statement.

76   As noted in the self-assessment report governors are actively involved in college strategic planning. The plan is discussed by the governors' steering group and formally approved by the corporation each year. Strategic issues are considered in meetings and training events. The monitoring of progress towards strategic objectives is less rigorous.

Governors monitor progress through their regular programme of meetings. Each subcommittee sets an annual work plan which is approved by the corporation and includes some issues from the strategic plan. The principal provides regular reports to governors on strategic issues and current developments. However, there is no formal monitoring plan referenced to performance targets and strategic objectives.

77 Governors are aware of the need to monitor their own performance and agreed a process for their self-assessment in 1998. At a training day they worked in small groups to identify strengths and weaknesses. The draft report was then reviewed and approved by the governors' quality committee and the corporation. As a result of self-assessment, action was taken to improve the training and development of governors. Training needs have been identified and an annual programme arranged. Action was also taken to improve the attendance rate of governors. Governors have not set performance indicators for monitoring their own performance. The quality committee and the corporation have reviewed and approved the college self-assessment report.

Management

Grade 4

78 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's assessment of management but identified additional significant weaknesses.

Key strengths
- effective communications
- extensive, purposeful external links

Weaknesses
- lack of rigour in operational planning
- inadequate monitoring of college performance
- weak financial management
- weak monitoring of some aspects of equal opportunities

79 The college management team comprises the principal, vice-principal and eight directors. Each director has line management and cross-college responsibilities. Responsibilities for cross-college functions have recently been re-allocated. Some management processes, for example management information systems, are being developed and refined but at the time of inspection, it was too early to judge the overall impact of these changes. There has been an overall lack of progress on issues identified at the last inspection.

80 Inspectors did not agree with the claim made in the college self-assessment report that the planning process is rigorous. The college mission and strategic direction is influenced by the national agenda for further education but the college does not collate and use all the market research information available from external links to help with its own planning activities. The college sets targets for the achievement of strategic aims but these are not sufficiently specific. There is no clear indication

of how achievement of the targeted outcomes will contribute to the achievement of college aims. Staff are provided with a summary of the strategic plan. They understand their respective contributions to the planning process and the achievement of college goals. Staff find members of the management team approachable and open in their style of management.

81   Performance monitoring by the college management team is inadequate. The college management team has regular business meetings but members do not receive regular, detailed reports on teaching and learning, students' achievements and retention rates. The lack of precision in defining operational targets results in a lack of rigour in monitoring achievements towards strategic aims. Some key agenda items at management team meetings are supported by verbal reports. Items are discussed and verbal agreements are reached. The minutes of meetings do not record the key points made in discussions or clearly describe the basis for the decisions taken.

82   There is insufficient monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy. Although the equal opportunities panel monitors employment practices, the college management team does not rigorously monitor equal opportunities. There is no evidence of equal opportunities monitoring in curriculum areas.

83   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college has recorded operating and historic costs deficits for the past two years and projects a deficit in 1999-2000. The three-year financial forecasts indicate that the position will improve in the year 2000-01 if the move to a single site is achieved. Until recently, the context of management accounts was insufficient to help managers to monitor the financial position of the college. Management accounts are usually produced each month but are not comprehensive and are not in line with current

sector practice. The annual budget has not been supported by an adequate commentary that clearly defined the key assumptions underlying the forecast, and was not comprehensive. Differences between the annual budget and the three-year financial forecasts has not been explained to managers and governors.

84   Budget holders do not receive reports of actual and committed expenditure against budget and rely on their own resources to monitor income and expenditure. Recent developments to the finance system allow improved access to financial information for budget holders but they have yet to make adequate use of the system. The college is currently without a permanent director of finance but seeking suitable candidates. A recent report from external consultants identifies significant weaknesses in internal financial control.

85   Curriculum management is not uniformly rigorous. There are examples of well-managed areas where course performance is good. In other areas curriculum managers are not conscientiously addressing important tasks such as course review. There is insufficient use of student data for course action plans. In some curriculum areas there is a lack of rigour in monitoring the effectiveness of actions to remedy weaknesses.

86   Inspectors agreed with the college that communication systems are effective. The principal holds staff briefings twice each term on each of the main college sites. The principal and vice-principal hold weekly surgeries at the main college sites which individual members of staff use for one-to-one discussions. At the end of each academic year there is a conference for the whole staff which includes information briefings and staff development opportunities. Staff receive regular college bulletins which advertise surgeries, staff development opportunities and contain information on management decisions and college developments.

87   The college has developed purposeful and extensive external links with the local community. College students have designed and implemented an intranet system for a local secondary school. Teachers are currently supporting pupils who are building robots to enter 'robot wars' competitions. Links with major employers in the area have resulted in training facilities being established on employers' premises for the delivery of courses. As part of a collaborative project with the local authority, IT courses have been established in outreach centres. The college recognises the strengths of its external links in the self-assessment report.

Conclusions

88   The college's self-assessment report provided a helpful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, identified some additional ones and considered that some weaknesses had not been given enough significance. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded by the college in all the curriculum areas. The inspection team found that the college had been overgenerous in the grading of all the cross-college provision. It considered that some significant weaknesses had not been recognised. This was partly due to the tendency to accord weight to recent developments, the effectiveness of which could not yet be judged.

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 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	14
25+ years	62
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	35
Level 2 (intermediate)	21
Level 3 (advanced)	23
Level 4/5 (higher)	12
Non-schedule 2	9
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	201	448	17
Agriculture	200	163	9
Construction	331	174	13
Engineering	104	476	15
Business	62	62	3
Hotel and catering	175	140	8
Health and community care	38	255	7
Art and design	18	567	15
Humanities	71	441	13
Total	1,200	2,726	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 27% 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)

	Permanent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	88	28	1	117
Supporting direct learning contact	24	8	1	33
Other support	94	25	2	121
Total	206	61	4	271

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£6,611,000	£6,154,000	£6,366,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.56	£17.24	£16.84
Payroll as a proportion of income	67%	73%	74%
Achievement of funding target	105%	103%	108%
Diversity of income	38%	36%	39%
Operating surplus	-£418,000	-£424,000	-£706,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)
Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
Achievement of funding target - Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	321	537	425	542	647	482
	Retention (%)	89	85	84	85	84	73
	Achievement (%)	51	60	68	85	86	75
2	Number of starters	487	735	582	830	972	633
	Retention (%)	82	77	84	81	79	71
	Achievement (%)	44	77	70	61	86	72
3	Number of starters	316	211	284	738	583	774
	Retention (%)	79	73	73	77	72	77
	Achievement (%)	57	53	73	52	76	63
4 or 5	Number of starters	19	21	2	94	130	81
	Retention (%)	100	100	50	93	79	78
	Achievement (%)	14	n/a	53	54	71	81
Short courses	Number of starters	160	304	163	2,849	3,427	4,254
	Retention (%)	86	92	84	93	92	93
	Achievement (%)	68	87	76	87	95	94
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	25	60	64	270	277	477
	Retention (%)	88	78	98	96	79	84
	Achievement (%)	50	85	59	65	92	88

Source: ISR
n/a not applicable

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