Gateshead College

THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL

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

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

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 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification

- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification

- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

Gateshead College

Northern Region

Inspected March 1999

Gateshead College is a medium-sized general further education college on Tyneside. The college prepared a thorough and comprehensive self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses and most of the grades in the report. The process of self-assessment is now central to the college's revised system for quality assurance. It involves governors, students, and staff at all levels and in all areas of the college. The report contained detailed action plans to address the identified weaknesses. These plans were being put into effect at the time of the inspection.

The college was last inspected in autumn 1995. Since then, most of the main weaknesses identified in that inspection have been successfully addressed. The management structure has been revised to make roles and lines of responsibility clear. The financial deficits forecast in that inspection report have been cleared and the college has had an appreciable operating surplus for two years. The quality of computer-derived information available to managers has improved. Links with industry are now strong in most of the curriculum areas inspected. Induction and tutorial processes are more consistent and they are valued by most students. The quality of teaching has risen, and the college has instituted a comprehensive and rigorous programme of lesson observations as part of its quality assurance system. Overall retention is now around the national average for the sector. Considerable rationalisation and refurbishment of the accommodation has greatly improved the learning environment for students. Many of the college's courses still have poor achievement rates, but the increased emphasis now being placed on improving achievements is having some effect. In order to maintain its progress, the college should: continue to strive for improved students' achievements; further encourage the sharing of good practice across the college; improve the rigour of some course reviews; continue to address the poor access at the main site for those with mobility difficulties; and correct inconsistencies in the quality of on-course learning support. The corporation should place more emphasis on monitoring students' achievements.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Computing and information technology	3
Engineering	2
Business	2
Childcare	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3
Art and design	2
Basic education	2

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	2
General resources	2
Quality assurance	2
Governance	2
Management	1

Context

The College and its Mission

1   Gateshead College is a general further education college on Tyneside. In addition to the main site in Gateshead, there are two additional sites: Washington Business College situated 6 miles to the south-east, and Learning World which is a joint venture with the University of Sunderland in a major retail shopping complex 4 miles to the west. The college's main catchment area is the borough of Gateshead. Washington Business College draws students from Washington town and from the north of County Durham. Gateshead is economically and socially diverse. It includes: areas with high population density which experience significant socio-economic difficulties; semi-rural communities coping with the demise of mining and other industries; and some rural areas of relative affluence.

2   In the borough of Gateshead, there are 10 secondary schools maintained by the local education authority (LEA) of which eight have sixth forms, and a city technology college offering provision for pupils aged 11 to 18. In Washington, there are five secondary schools of which one has a sixth form. Seven other further education colleges and four universities lie within a 15-mile radius of the main site. The population of Gateshead was 199,600 in 1991 and it is forecast to decline to 193,600 by 2010; people from ethnic minorities form 1.8% of the population. The year 11 school cohort declined by 2.2% between 1995 and 1998 but is forecast to grow by 6% by 2001. The proportion of students in full-time education post-16 is 58% compared with the national average of 68%. Unemployment on Tyneside was 7.8% in 1997-98 compared with 4.9% nationally.

3   The college offers provision in nine of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the exception being agriculture. Business is by far the largest curriculum area at the college. In March 1999, almost 18% of students were enrolled on full-time programmes and 78% of students were aged 19 or over. The college employs the equivalent of 168 full-time staff engaged in direct learning contact and 147 full-time equivalent staff to support this activity. Some support staff have an enhanced role which includes direct supervision of students in their learning or in practical work. The senior management team comprises the principal, a deputy principal responsible for quality and curriculum, a deputy principal for finance and corporate development, and nine other senior managers each of whom is responsible for a teaching school or a support service.

4   The college's stated mission is 'lifelong learning: regional regeneration'. The mission is supported by the value statement: 'Gateshead College will contribute to the region's economic competitiveness and social well-being by improving the skills of the workforce and creating opportunities for achievement for all members of the community'. The college's key strategic aims are to:
•   widen participation
•   invest in staff
•   invest in infrastructure
•   raise achievement
•   develop products and services
•   exceed sector business benchmarks.

The Inspection

5   The college was inspected during March 1999. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) to the FEFC were used for the years 1996 and 1997. The college submitted data for students' achievements relating to 1998, and these were checked by inspectors against primary sources, for example class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified about two months before the inspection of the sample of provision to be

Context

inspected. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 50 days. Inspectors observed 86 lessons, and examined students' work and a variety of documentation. They held meetings with governors, managers, staff, students and representatives from Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

6   This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

7   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 86 lessons inspected, 70% were judged to be good or outstanding, and 7% to be less than satisfactory, compared with the corresponding averages of 65% and 6% for colleges in the sector inspected in 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	1	9	4	2	0	16
NVQ	3	5	2	2	0	12
Other vocational	9	25	6	1	0	41
Other*	3	5	8	1	0	17
Total (No)	16	44	20	6	0	86
Total (%)	19	51	23	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report
includes GCE A level, basic education, and access to higher education lessons

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8   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national comparators. The average number of students observed in lessons during the inspection was somewhat lower than the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Gateshead College	9.6	77
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

9   The inspection covered specialist courses in computing and information technology (IT). Inspectors broadly agreed with the findings of the college self-assessment report. Insufficient weight was given to weaknesses in students' achievements and to the poor co-ordination of some courses.

Key strengths

- the wide range of courses
- most lessons well prepared and well taught
- retention rates at or above national averages
- high achievements on access to higher education courses

Weaknesses

- missed opportunities in teaching to use IT and other appropriate aids
- insufficient work experience for full-time students
- low achievement rates on some courses
- low retention rates and inadequate co-ordination on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced course

10   The course provision is wide and developing vigorously. This strength was included in the self-assessment report. Progression routes are provided on courses from foundation to advanced level. Attendance patterns and starting dates are flexible. The access to higher education course recruits well and has close links with local universities. A portfolio of short courses is aimed at the needs of local small and medium enterprises. An innovative modern apprenticeship scheme developed in partnership with a major car manufacturer allows students to complete national and higher national certificates in IT alongside their national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in IT. Generally efficient course administration ensures sound monitoring of students' progress. Staff meet regularly to review provision and changes have resulted which match need more closely.

11   About 40 staff teach on the GNVQ courses across two sites. Course teams recognise that poor co-ordination and frequent timetable changes have hindered learning, but their plans to address these problems have not yet been fully implemented. Only students on the GNVQ intermediate course at the main site have opportunities for work experience, much of which is provided within the college. The self-assessment report identified this weakness but did not include the weaknesses in GNVQ co-ordination.

12   Most of the lessons observed were good. Teachers follow clear schemes of work and use lesson plans. The balance of theory and practical work is sound. High-quality learning materials allow students to work at their chosen pace. Working relationships between staff and students are excellent. They lead to effective support for individual students, promote class discussion, assist learning and allow teachers to check students' understanding of work that has been covered. Students studying software design and programming are successfully introduced to methods used in the IT industry. Teaching techniques sometimes lack imagination, even in the better lessons. Visual aids, and IT itself, are seldom used to enhance the teaching and thus opportunities are missed to demonstrate applications directly in practice.

13   On the GNVQ foundation level and the introductory 'gateway to computing' courses, most students complete their studies and achieve their qualification. About three-quarters of students who enrol on the access to higher education course succeed, which is well above

average for the sector, and many then progress to study at degree level. Some other courses with high retention rates and large numbers of students, for example the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 726 modular IT scheme, have achievement rates at or above national averages for the sector. However, several courses have low overall achievement rates. Examples include: GNVQ intermediate; general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) IT; general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) computing; and courses used by many students to gain an additional qualification, for example certificates in IT and computer literacy. Recruitment has increased on the full-time GNVQ advanced course, but the retention rate has dropped steadily. The college has decided not to continue some of the least successful courses. In other cases, teachers have reviewed entry criteria and taken additional steps to improve students' retention and achievements. Data for the GNVQ intermediate last year, and for students currently in college, suggest improvements are being made. The self-assessment report recognised some but not all of the weaknesses in students' achievements.

14   Specialist resources are good, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Teachers are well qualified. They are enthusiastic about their opportunities for the further development of their IT skills. Specialist teaching takes place in suites with modern equipment which is comparable with that used in industry and commerce. More could be done to create displays of computer-generated work in the rooms used for graphics and desktop publishing. Some whole-class teaching takes place in large, open-plan IT suites where the layout, poor acoustics and distraction caused by other users limit its effectiveness. The layout of some rooms prevents group work and hinders the assistance being given by teachers to individual students.

Curriculum Areas

**Examples of achievements and retention rates
in computing and information technology,
1996 to 1998**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	**1997**	**1998**
Cambridge certificate in IT	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	31 100 10	497 95 12	265 97 29
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	454 88 71	574 87 46	560 83 42
C&G IT certificate	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	419 82 62	717 90 43	651 96 51
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	33 73 39	38 79 27	53 87 56
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	28 57 90	33 42 78	46 31 56
Access to higher education	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	26 89 100	24 79 100	32 75 100

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

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

15   The inspection focused in particular on provision for mechanical, production and motor vehicle engineering. The findings of the inspection broadly supported the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- a strong emphasis on practical activities and the application of theory
- good achievement rates on many courses
- the effective management and development of the provision
- strong links with industry
- some well-resourced workshops

Weaknesses

- low achievement rates in the part-time craft provision
- low retention rates for full-time advanced courses

16   The college offers a wide range of courses. Links with industry are strong. Research is carried out with local firms and students to improve the design of courses and teaching arrangements. The recently introduced 'pre-modern apprenticeship' programme provides a highly practical course for students looking for apprenticeship opportunities. In 1998, two-thirds of students leaving this course progressed to apprenticeships. The higher national certificate courses are taught as a series of short modules to help students who are unable to attend for long periods because of other commitments. Engineering teaching teams meet weekly and written records of issues and agreed actions are kept. These strengths in

the organisation and management of the curriculum are recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers and curriculum support staff collaborate closely in the development and teaching of courses, and in the assessment of students. In a workshop class, students worked in pairs on a range of tasks associated with motor vehicle maintenance. The teacher and the support worker formed a team to monitor the progress of the different groups, offer guidance and provide help where needed. Students made full and productive use of workshop time.

17   Courses and lessons are generally well planned. The amount of classroom work, practical activity and tutorial support matches the needs, interests and ambitions of students. Most schemes of work identify a range of teaching methods, the learning objectives, the resources needed and the assessment methods to be used. In practical lessons, students work to clearly-defined briefs, and display confidence and care in the operation of equipment. Teachers monitor their progress and provide support when needed. In classroom-based lessons, there are examples of effective use of demonstration and question and answer methods which successfully help students to learn. These strengths are included in the self-assessment report. In a minority of lessons, the time available for completion of individual tasks is not made clear to students who are thus unable properly to organise and be responsible for their own work.

18   Students' achievements and retention rates in 1998 for many courses are in line with or exceed national averages for the sector. In 1997, the retention rates in some full-time intermediate, part-time advanced and part-time higher education courses dropped compared with the rate in 1996. After the implementation of some new policies for course development and student support, retention figures for these courses have been restored to or improved beyond the 1996 figure. Retention rates for

advanced full-time courses have remained low, though they have improved over the last three years. Achievement rates for intermediate full-time, advanced full-time, and higher education courses in 1998 are appreciably above national averages. Achievement rates for C&G level 2 and NVQ level 2 courses, which are part time or evening only, are considerably below national averages. This weakness was recognised in the college's self-assessment. Students' practical work is often excellent, and much written assignment work is wordprocessed.

19 Teachers, support workers and technicians are suitably qualified. Some teachers have benefited from short placements with local companies. Improvements to parts of the engineering building are awaiting the completion of roofing work. Specialist workshops are generally clean, bright and well planned. The sheetmetal and welding workshops, and the motor vehicle workshops are equipped to a high standard. The specialist rooms for computer-aided engineering have modern hardware and software. Although much of the machinery in the mechanical engineering workshops is old, it is satisfactory for teaching basic engineering skills.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate and precursors	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	41 73 63	41 57 92	58 74 70
First certificates	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	24 92 100	57 98 82
NVQ and precursors	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	340 80 44	304 85 39	262 85 36
GNVQ advanced and precursors	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	32 31 75	31 48 53	37 49 83
National certificate and other part-time advanced	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	57 77 64	48 44 93	47 72 91
Higher national and professional awards	4	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	118 77 60	84 54 48	36 83 80

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*courses not running

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

20   The inspection covered courses in business and professional studies. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. In some instances, strengths identified in the report as generally applicable did not relate to all areas.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- excellent opportunities for progression
- the effective use of modular programmes to raise achievements
- good achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate and higher national certificate courses

Weaknesses

- a poor retention rate on the GNVQ advanced course
- inadequate sharing of good practice

21   Course teams set and monitor targets for performance and recruitment. They calculate the retention rate at frequent intervals. Curriculum managers compare course performance against national benchmarks. The curriculum is delivered to national standards and the college's quality assurance procedures are fully maintained. External verifier reports are generally good, and where issues have been raised actions are taken to secure improvements. For a minority of courses, aspects of management are weak: students' progress is insufficiently tracked, course team meetings are badly minuted or course files are poorly maintained. Work experience is available for all full-time students, thus resolving a weakness identified in the last inspection.

22   The design of progression routes within the business provision is impressive and constitutes a significant strength. Students on accountancy courses can move from foundation through to management level. Business students can progress from intermediate to degree level and benefit from opportunities to specialise in personnel, marketing or sales. Corporate clients have negotiated courses to meet their specific needs. Assessment is based primarily upon work-based practices and materials. The college has successfully identified some niche markets, for example for qualifications for personnel development and for a fast-track accountancy technician qualification for students with good commercial experience.

23   Planning for all programmes is thorough. Schemes of work are detailed, although the quality within teams is uneven. The best schemes identify content, process and outcomes and are adapted to meet unforeseen circumstances. Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report which noted that an appropriate variety of teaching and learning styles are employed. Students are encouraged to investigate a topic thoroughly and present their findings in a number of forms. In one lesson, GNVQ intermediate students held a meeting to determine roles in organising a visit, and created video evidence of the meeting. In another lesson, NVQ management students learned interview techniques effectively by conducting role-plays. Teachers frequently check on the knowledge that is being acquired and the understanding gained by aiming questions at individual students. Their assessment of students' progress is fair, frequent and to an appropriate standard. Marked work is returned promptly. Feedback is supportive and constructive. Key skills are not always identified clearly in GNVQ assignments, and some assignment briefs lack sufficient detail. Students appreciated the support that they receive in collecting evidence for their portfolios. Teachers used IT well to develop high-quality learning materials.

24 Students across a range of courses assemble impressive portfolios. Many students make good use of their place of employment to gather or produce evidence. They demonstrate good IT skills. Some courses have low retention rates, for example the GNVQ advanced. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Many of the courses leading to higher level qualifications are modular and may be taken over an extended time period. Students are encouraged to complete modules at a pace to suit their commitments to employment outside the college. The record of successful completion is good over their full period of study but is not properly reflected in the ISR data. Several course achievement rates are well above national averages for the sector, for example on the GNVQ intermediate in business, the higher national certificate in business and finance and the Association of Accounting Technicians course at foundation level. Some achievement rates are below the national average, for example the GNVQ advanced achievement rate has been low for the last two years.

25 Teachers are well qualified and many have recent commercial and other relevant experience. A lesson on the structure of the criminal court system was conducted by a teacher who is also a practising magistrate. There is little joint staff development between tutors who are teaching on the same courses but working on different sites. Students complain that learning centres have insufficient specialist materials to support their assignment work.

Examples of achievements and retention rates in business, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	9	8	19
		Retention (%)	70	52	73
		Achievement (%)	69	73	86
Association of Accounting Technicians	2	Expected completions	44	38	26
		Retention (%)	91	95	75
		Achievement (%)	54	55	58
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	31	23	37
		Retention (%)	68	63	64
		Achievement (%)	86	66	69
Supervisory management certificate	3	Expected completions	66	25	48
		Retention (%)	90	90	77
		Achievement (%)	72	56	70
Higher national certificate business and finance	4	Expected completions	44	44	45
		Retention (%)	80	73	71
		Achievement (%)	94	83	92

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

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 2

26 The inspection covered provision in early years childcare education. Inspectors were in general agreement with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths
- good teaching
- good achievement recently
- students' work of a high standard
- constructive responses to course review
- accommodation of high quality

Weaknesses
- insufficient demands on students in some classes
- poor retention on some courses
- inadequate sharing of good practice

27   Courses in childcare are generally well managed. Effective systems are employed to record and monitor students' progress. Observations of teaching by peers is routine but the best practice that is seen is not always shared with other team members. Inspectors agreed with the findings in the self-assessment report that links with work placement providers are well established. Some placement supervisors attend team meetings to review course planning and structures. Course reviews and evaluations have a beneficial effect on student experiences. For example, as a result of an issue raised in review, individual placement plans are used on the diploma in childhood studies, and these successfully encourage students to map out their own development. The plan is used in discussions on the students' progress with tutors and placement supervisors. Key skills are integrated well within the courses. Students have sufficient access to computers and some assignments stipulate the use of IT.

A number of additional qualifications are available to students, including first aid and basic food hygiene, which students consider relevant and valuable.

28   Teaching is generally well prepared and effective. Inspectors observed good teaching and learning in the great majority of lessons. Schemes of work and lesson plans are often appropriately detailed. Teachers use well-judged changes of activity to maintain students' interest and motivation. Key learning points are frequently reinforced through illustration and reference to experiences in work placements. One successful workshop session developed students' abilities to design activities to promote children's social skills. Students had an opportunity to sample a number of these activities which could then be applied in their work placements. In discussions, the teacher checked and extended students' understanding. A few lessons lack flair and imagination or are insufficiently demanding on students. Tutorial sessions are effective in supporting individual students' learning needs. In some instances, there is insufficient attention given to the availability of textbooks and other resource materials that are required for assignment work.

29   Students' portfolios are well presented and of a good standard. In one recorded assignment, students demonstrated that they had learned effectively from both classroom and work placement experiences. They were required to make an audio record of an account of children at play. This record was then evaluated with reference to a theoretical framework and possible course of action. Students' achievements are seen as a strength within the self-assessment report and inspectors generally agreed with this judgement. In 1998 in particular, pass rates on the certificate in sessional crèche work and on the diploma in nursery nursing were considerably above national averages for the sector. The retention rate is poor on some courses, for example on the national certificate in childhood studies. It has steadily declined over the last three years on

the two-year national diploma in childhood studies. On completion of their courses, the majority of full-time students progress into employment related to their courses of study.

30   Accommodation for early years education is comfortable, well furnished and well equipped. The teaching environments are stimulating and contain good displays of students' work. These strengths also apply to an outreach centre visited during the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the strength included in the self-assessment report that teachers are well and appropriately qualified academically and professionally.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Certificate in sessional crèche work	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	18 89 57	41 76 94
National diploma in childhood studies (two year)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	49 80 85	27 70 72	34 65 95
Diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	24 100 63	30 50 47	53 75 93
National certificate in childhood studies	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	35 58 47	16 56 78
National diploma in childhood studies (fast-track, one year)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	28 100 89	15 93 100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*courses not running

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 3

31   The inspection covered provision in hairdressing, beauty therapy and complementary therapies. Inspectors generally supported the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not included or given sufficient weight.

Key strengths

- good teaching in beauty therapy
- well-organised and planned courses
- good achievements on part-time courses on complementary therapies
- a flexible and responsive curriculum
- a good standard of students' work

Weaknesses

- poor retention on most programmes
- poor achievements on some hairdressing courses
- insufficient hairdressing clients
- inappropriate teaching and learning strategies in some lessons
- insufficient use of IT

32   The college provides full-time, part-time and short courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and in a range of complementary studies. Students are offered a wide choice and good opportunities for progression. Hairdressing includes programmes leading to NVQs at levels 1 to 3, and in beauty therapy there are short courses accredited by the Open College, and courses leading to the national diploma and higher national certificate. Students can extend their studies through additional certification in related subjects, for example first aid, commercial colouring and ear piercing. All NVQs can be followed in the evenings and on Saturdays. All full-time students participate in work experience.

33   Courses are generally organised and planned well. Teachers use lesson plans and schemes of work, and course teams follow clear operational plans. Students are given assignment and tutorial schedules in advance. Absences are carefully logged and extensive profiles are kept on every student considered at risk of leaving the course. The lack of a clear curriculum framework for some NVQs hampers students' progress because tasks do not occur in an appropriate sequence.

34   Much of the teaching is good, particularly in beauty therapy. In the best lessons, objectives are clearly explained, there is an appropriate variety of activities and each student's learning is assessed. In the weaker lessons, teachers talk for too long and make insufficient demands on students. In all hairdressing practical classes students' progress is hindered by a lack of clients; this weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. In practical hairdressing lessons, students have too few opportunities for open discussion or to contribute their ideas. The use of IT by students in their work and assignments is underdeveloped.

35   Assessment strategies are well structured. Qualified internal verifiers monitor assessments thoroughly. Assessment is consistent and fair. Students' portfolios are regularly checked by tutors and advice is given on how they can be improved. Teachers check work thoroughly, including spellings and grammar, and give detailed and constructive feedback. Students receive good and extensive support from teachers who often find additional time to provide extra help. Every student has a regular review at which progress is discussed and actions agreed. In practical hairdressing workshop lessons, students have individual action plans for the session which have been agreed between their teachers and themselves.

36   Students generally work conscientiously in classes and participate well in question and answer sessions. They often wordprocess their assignments and present them to a high standard. Practical work in beauty therapy is of a good standard and all students work in a professional and competent manner. An NVQ beauty therapy student has just received a national bronze medal award for excellence. More than two-thirds of students from the national diploma in beauty therapy gain jobs in the beauty industry. Achievements in beauty therapy were satisfactory in 1998; there were good achievements in complementary therapies. On part-time hairdressing courses at levels 2 and 3, achievements are poor which was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Retention on all programmes is low, except for

the part-time evening courses for complementary therapies. Policies have been implemented to try to rectify these issues. It is too early to judge their effectiveness. During the inspection, attendance was low at 66%. In a few classes, punctuality was poor.

37   The hairdressing and beauty salons provide professional working environments of industrial standard. When the beauty salon is busy, congestion causes problems for staff and students. The consumable resources used by students are sufficient and of a commercial standard. Teachers are well qualified. Part-time teachers from the industry are used for particular specialisms. Recent staff training has focused appropriately on preparing for the introduction of new industry standards.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ beauty therapy (part time)	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	52 44 70
NVQ hairdressing (full time)	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	21 38 63
NVQ hairdressing (part time)	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	54 26 36
BTEC national diploma beauty therapy (part time)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	26 69 78	21 62 100	12 67 88
International Institute of Holistic Therapies reflexology (part time)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	28 82 91	39 79 71	14 93 92

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

38   The inspection covered provision for art and design, performing arts, popular music and media studies. Inspectors agreed with the provision's strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- good achievement in level 2 and most level 3 programmes
- effective support for students to learn independently
- a strong vocational emphasis
- a positive approach to equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- poor retention on several courses
- poor achievement in level 3 performing arts
- insufficient specialist accommodation to support some courses

39   The provision covers vocational courses in visual and performing arts. The GCE A level and GCSE provision have been withdrawn. The use of professional musicians to support teaching ensures vocational relevance on the course on popular music. Extra-curricular activities are devised to enrich and underpin student experience, for example visits to London theatres, television studios and art galleries. Course evaluations indicate a high level of student satisfaction with the provision. The self-assessment report correctly identified as a strength student opportunities for internal progression. Students of performing arts can progress from level 2 through to degree studies. Equal opportunity initiatives are a strong feature in the courses. The popular music course has features designed to offset gender stereotyping.

Performing arts courses encourage unconventional race and gender casting. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are successfully encouraged to join all programmes. Each course is managed through a structured series of team meetings where students are represented.

40   All staff provided clear schemes of work and detailed lesson plans. Teaching is generally good; an appropriate variety of methods is used. These strengths were recognised in the self-assessment report. Assignments are well designed; the emphasis is on practical exploration and vocational relevance. In all courses, students were successful in working by themselves, and were prepared to take responsibility for their studies. In media studies, students have sole responsibility for broadcasting studio-based programmes in which local celebrities are interviewed, and students of popular music prepare for well-publicised concerts with only minimal guidance from their teachers. Industrial relevance is underpinned by work on client-based briefs. Art and design students are involved in extensive live projects, and media students make corporate videos for local employers. Assignment designs are satisfactory but many lack appropriate assessment criteria. On-course progress is rigorously monitored and an effective tutorial system ensures that individual students are given oral and written feedback on their performance.

41   As recognised in the self-assessment report, the retention rate is below national averages on the majority of courses, and is a particular weakness for level 3 performing arts courses. Policies have been implemented to address the problem but it is too soon to judge their effectiveness. Course pass rates are at or above national averages for the sector in level 2 and the majority of level 3 programmes. Achievements were low on the GNVQ advanced course in 1998 because several students passed all the vocational elements of their course, but had not met the key skills criteria. Most

students who wish to progress to higher education from level 3 courses are successful in finding places. The quality of students' work is mainly good, especially in popular music where students operate at a sophisticated level. Most students are highly motivated and articulate, but teachers have failed to motivate fully one second-year group. Overall, students are not sufficiently disciplined in punctuality and other professional practices, for example wearing appropriate clothing for rehearsals.

42   Teachers are well qualified and there are good opportunities to update their skills through external or in-house development initiatives. Teachers of media and popular music benefit from working within the same building; accommodation for other programmes is spread throughout the college which limits the sense of curriculum identity. Noise from musical activities can affect other courses but most problems are anticipated and solved in advance. Performing arts courses are located in two well-equipped studios. Rehearsal areas, particularly for student-directed work, are insufficient for the number of groups that needs them. The self-assessment report did not include this important weakness but student numbers were considerably lower when the report was written. This issue is tackled in the college's accommodation strategy. The college does not have a suitable theatre, but students sometimes use a local theatre. The art and design accommodation is satisfactory though the designated life drawing area is too small for the number of students using it.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
First diploma performing arts	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 62 75	14 86 92	17 73 82
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	19 58 100	9 89 88	17 71 83
National diploma media studies	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	28 71 70	22 73 81	21 60 92
National diploma performing arts	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	14 36 40	11 27 33	14 41 60
National diploma popular music	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	15 80 67	14 71 70
Foundation art and design	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	9 67 83	20 65 92

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 2

43 The inspection covered the provision of basic education and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified weaknesses which had not been included.

Key strengths

- strong local partnerships
- good use of accreditation
- well-structured basic education programmes
- highly effective personal tuition and support
- good retention and achievement
- a well-trained and effectively-deployed volunteer support team

Weaknesses

- a lack of action-planning, review and tracking of progress in ESOL
- unsatisfactory attendance in some lessons

44 Basic education courses are offered in 17 local outreach centres and at the Gateshead site. ESOL is offered at two levels at the Gateshead site. Inspectors agreed with the strength in the self-assessment report that the curriculum is available to a wide range of learners. The basic education provision has been developed in partnership with community organisations and the local authority to bring in new groups of students. A local project on family literacy brings parents together to support their children's development and to assist the national strategy for a literacy hour. In addition, each parent follows his or her own negotiated learning programme in a structured but informal way within group sessions. A group of unemployed men setting up a food co-operative were keen to study IT, but were reluctant to recognise their need for basic skills support; five weeks later they requested a continuation of the programme. Levels of accreditation have been planned so that tutors can guide students appropriately after they join a class rather than expecting them to enrol on a course with a pre-determined outcome. The many levels of certification mean that students can succeed at one level and move with confidence to the next level. The ESOL provision has not been designed or accredited so appropriately.

45 Teaching was generally good in both the areas inspected. Teachers know their students well and provide them with interesting and relevant learning materials. Individual learning plans for students on basic education courses are developed from an initial assessment of abilities and a review of the students' learning priorities. Plans are regularly reviewed with students to monitor progress, record achievements and agree new goals. Teachers demonstrate skill in planning and managing well-structured lessons where students engage in an appropriate variety of activities and tasks. In a workshop session, one student was practising the naming of letters of the alphabet in preparation for reading number plates in a forthcoming driving test; another was wordprocessing a draft of some personal writing; and another was carrying out a class survey of preferences for take-out foods in order to generate data for presentation in graph or tabular format. The ESOL provision is less well tailored to individual learning, and less responsive to social and cultural backgrounds. Good practice has not been shared across the teams. The college systems for action-planning and review with individual students have not been introduced on ESOL courses. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

46 The retention rate is high across all areas of provision. Attendance is particularly good in

basic education courses at outreach centres and many students progress to higher levels. On average, the attendance observed at ESOL classes was only 50%. Poor attendance was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. The college has made progress in monitoring retention and achievement data on its range of externally accredited qualifications. Levels of achievement in both basic education and ESOL show improvement, and are now good. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students gain considerable personal development from their basic education programmes. The standard of written work produced is good and clear feedback is given on how to improve. Students' portfolios in basic education are of a good standard and clearly reflect how students' own interests are developed through the workshop style of teaching.

47   Over 80 volunteer tutors work closely and regularly with students. Trainee ESOL teachers assist within the ESOL programme. The training and management of this team, which provides particular support for students with disabilities, is a significant strength that was recognised in the self-assessment report. Volunteers are successfully encouraged to train beyond the initial level required by the college. Teachers are experienced and have relevant specialist qualifications. Outreach centres are appropriate for learning and in some cases particularly well equipped. The basic skills learning centre gives students access to a suitable range of equipment and learning materials. ESOL students use appropriate facilities in the college's language centre. Adult education and ESOL students can access computers but there is little appropriate software.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Literacy and numeracy qualifications including wordpower, numberpower, Associated Examining Board tests, and college certificates	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	541* 86 65	498* 94 **	261 91 89
ESOL qualifications including Oxford Preliminary, and Tyneside Open College Network units	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	249 84 96

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*ESOL and basic education qualifications are combined
**data unreliable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

48 The self-assessment report was comprehensive and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the report.

Key strengths

- excellent reception and enquiry services
- informative pre-entry advice
- good careers education and guidance systems
- effective welfare and advice services
- well-organised and effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Weaknesses

- inconsistencies in quality of on-course learning support
- insufficient support for students at Washington Business College

49 The college provides an effective range of advice and guidance to prospective students; this strength was included in the self-assessment report. An informative prospectus with supporting literature is produced in-house to a high standard. The relationships with the 11 to 18 schools in the borough have been difficult historically and remain strained in a few cases. The college works hard to form helpful relationships. For example, college staff help with internal verification arrangements in one school and train teachers in the use of IT in another. Links with six local special schools are particularly strong.

50 Experienced and effective staff run the reception area and create a welcoming atmosphere. The area adjoins a large student services area which contains a careers library, provision of general information, an examinations office and private interview rooms. Reception duties, initial guidance and enrolment work are shared by the staff. These arrangements help to ensure that each case can be dealt with appropriately. Staff work closely with 'call centre' staff who log all enquiries onto a database which is used extensively throughout the college. Enquiries from prospective students who do not subsequently enrol are followed up. Interviews are arranged with curriculum managers and course leaders or with one of the well-qualified guidance staff. Interviewers use a checklist to ensure consistency in the treatment of each prospective student.

51 The induction process for students is well organised. Teachers are provided with a clear framework for induction activity. Students speak positively of their experience. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that students settle into their work quickly. An informative students' handbook contains the key policy statements and details of the college's services and facilities. Effective clinics are arranged between September and October each year so that students who wish to transfer courses can be given appropriate assistance. All full-time students are screened to evaluate whether they need support in basic numeracy and literacy. Since September 1998, this support has been provided through the curriculum areas; previously it had been delivered mainly through the key skills workshop. A programme of staff development is being undertaken which includes specialist basic skills tutors acting as mentors to teachers. This training programme has not kept pace with the implementation of the new policy. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the self-assessment report: there are inconsistencies between student groups in the quality of the support that they receive for basic skills.

52 There are three educational guidance officers, two at the Gateshead site and one at the Washington Business College. Inspectors

agreed with the college's claim that these guidance staff are readily available, professionally qualified and give a high-quality service. A careers education and guidance manual which outlines the framework within which the service operates has helped the guidance staff to train tutors. An audit of the careers guidance given by tutors has been undertaken which has resulted in a more focused careers education and guidance programme for individual courses. Under a partnership agreement, a local careers service organisation supplies up to five staff to work at the college. These careers staff work well with college staff to deliver the careers education and guidance programme. The college is aware that a few course tutors believe the work of the external careers officers is inappropriate for their courses. An effective advice service deals with students' financial, housing and welfare issues. A wide range of external contacts is maintained which enables the college to offer a good referral system for students requiring support that is beyond the expertise of college staff.

53 All full-time students, and those on substantive part-time courses, receive tutorial support. The majority of full-time students have one hour of group work each week. A further hour is allocated to tutors for one-to-one interviews with students. A well-structured student management manual gives clear guidance to tutors about the core elements that must be covered. Individual interviews give tutors the opportunity to discuss the progress students are making and to determine individual action plans. Some full-time students at Washington Business College are not receiving the same quality of tutorial support. For example, they had not received progress reports and individual guidance during the first year of their course. Absenteeism at Washington is not monitored and followed up as rigorously as on the main site.

54 The college has a good support service for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Over 60 students are being supported, most of them on dedicated full-time courses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that careful analysis is made of the specific needs of these students. This analysis frequently involves a number of external agencies such as special schools and social services departments. Individuals with sight or hearing impairments value highly the support they receive. Substantial numbers of additional support staff are employed on the courses. Many of them have obtained experience, and initial qualifications, through a well-established scheme called 'partners in learning' in which volunteer helpers are assigned to individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

General Resources

Grade 2

55 Inspectors generally concurred with the judgements in the self-assessment report, though they identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths
- the effective strategic management of accommodation
- the extensive, high-quality refurbishment of the main site
- the creation of an effective environment for learning
- modern IT provision
- good study facilities in the main learning centre

Weaknesses
- restrictions on access for those with mobility difficulties
- insufficient access for staff to IT resources

- poor resource support for some students' assignments

56   The college's accommodation strategy is closely linked to the strategic plan. The closure of a second site in Gateshead has released land for sale. Parts of this site have been retained, including a sports centre. The buildings on the Gateshead site were mostly constructed in the 1950s. There is also a nineteenth-century building which is used for music and media studies. The steeply sloping main site has inherent difficulties for those with restricted mobility. The college has taken measures which partially address the problem but the language centre and many of the general teaching rooms remain inaccessible. These limitations were acknowledged as a weakness in the self-assessment report. The other two college sites, which are leased, have modern buildings. They provide spacious and well-planned accommodation for a range of courses provided for adult students.

57   The college is committed to investing over £1,000,000 on improvements to accommodation in 1998-99. The buildings at the main site are undergoing extensive refurbishment. Almost all areas of the college are bright and welcoming and provide an attractive environment for study. Corridors and stairways are well maintained, decorated and carpeted. Classrooms have been redecorated and are furnished to a high standard. A checklist for a 'quality learning environment' and a planned maintenance schedule are used to sustain good standards. Housekeeping is effective. Teaching rooms and public areas are generally clean, and free from graffiti or minor damage. External security has been improved, for example through the use of closed-circuit television cameras. These strengths were acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

58   The college has over 500 modern computers for students' use. Hardware is obtained and updated through lease arrangements. Links with a national company ensure that software is co-ordinated and modern. These good features were recognised in the self-assessment report. Almost half the computers are housed in an impressive conversion of a sports hall which has extensive opening hours, including the weekend. Access to internet facilities is good. A modern network links all buildings on the main site and the other two sites. It is used increasingly for internal communication and to provide access to the internet and to CD-ROM resources. All staff rooms are linked to the network and have at least one modern workstation. However, a large number of staff are based in some of these rooms and the resources are insufficient to support all staff satisfactorily in their teaching and administrative roles. There is a research room in the main IT building where technology-based learning methods can be developed.

59   The main learning centre contains library, IT and other learning resources. The centre has adequate private study places, a quiet study area and small rooms for group work. Students on courses in several of the curriculum areas report that stocks in the learning centre are insufficient to support their assignment work. Links between individual curriculum teams and the main learning centre are not used to inform the centre of students' needs, though liaison with curriculum areas was claimed as a strength in the self-assessment report. Smaller learning resource centres support the work of the other two sites but there is no common library catalogue. Large staff rooms place teachers' work areas conveniently close to the relevant administration offices and managers. Social facilities for students are concentrated on the Gateshead site. They include the college refectory, which also acts as a common room, and a shop.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- a coherent framework for quality assurance
- effective attention to students' views
- a comprehensive self-assessment process
- well-developed quality assurance arrangements for support areas
- good charters
- the effective use of performance indicators and benchmarks
- an extensive staff development programme

Weaknesses

- insufficient emphasis on retention and achievement until recently
- a lack of rigour in a minority of course reviews
- shortcomings in the implementation of the internal verification policy

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61   The college is fully committed to continuous improvement. It is made clear in job descriptions that all staff are responsible for assuring quality. The extensive framework for quality assurance, which has been considerably developed since the last inspection, covers all aspects of the college's work. It is well conceived, has good documentation and is supported by staff. A policy and operating manual identifies 14 elements within the framework which assure quality. These include: course review, self-assessment, internal quality audit, academic validation, lesson observations, service standards and charter commitments. Managers identify which elements relate

significantly to their areas of work and make regular reports to a number of quality boards. Clear lines of reporting link the outcomes of quality assurance arrangements to college plans.

62   The overall performance of the college has improved in many aspects since the last inspection. Inspectors identified 70% of lessons as good or outstanding compared with 53% in the last inspection; two of the curriculum areas inspected achieved a higher grade. Retention rates were criticised at the last inspection but benchmarking data published by the FEFC show the college retention rate is now near, or above, national averages in the sector in all categories except level 3 courses for students aged 16 to 18. College data show overall in-year retention improved from 80% in February 1998 to 88% in February 1999. Student achievement rates have remained below national averages according to available public data and this situation was acknowledged as a weakness in the self-assessment report. In 1997-98, the college adopted and vigorously promoted a strategy for raising achievement which has been accepted by all areas of the college. College data for 1997-98 indicate that there has been a significant increase in the proportion of students achieving their primary learning goal compared with 1996-97. Nevertheless, achievements remain poor on many courses.

63   At the end of the year, the majority of course teams produce useful reviews which include references to strengths and weaknesses in recruitment, guidance, teaching and learning, students' achievements and quality assurance arrangements. The self-assessment report recognised that a minority of review reports are superficial or incomplete and make too few comparisons between course performance and targets or other benchmarks. Since the last inspection, issues of retention and achievement have been highlighted through course review processes but until the adoption of the achievement strategy, many course teams did not identify clear actions for improvement.

Most course teams now set annual targets for retention and achievement and all course leaders meet with curriculum managers twice each term to review course performance. Recent action plans give strong emphasis and commitment to effecting improvements in retention and achievements. The quality assurance framework includes policies and procedures for internal verification. Some course teams have not kept to these guidelines and there is no established method for verifiers across the college to share good practice and establish standards. The college did not recognise this weakness in its self-assessment report.

64 Staff value students' opinions. Curriculum and support service managers ensure that the methods used to obtain student feedback are appropriate to students' needs. Processes include questionnaires, student representatives on course teams, focus groups and student review meetings. Students can clearly identify a range of actions taken in response to their views.

65 Clear service standards are specified for support and service areas. Staff are committed to achieving these standards. The views of service users are sought, which has resulted in measurable improvements. The college has two well-written charters: one for students and one for employers. Charter commitments are effectively monitored and result in annual reports to the academic board. Procedures to handle complaints from students work well. The college has recently been awarded the Charter Mark for customer care in public services.

66 The self-assessment process is an integral part of the quality assurance framework and involves all staff. Almost 300 lesson observations have been undertaken by curriculum managers and these have provided accurate judgements on teaching and learning. The profile of lesson grades awarded by inspectors was similar to that awarded in the college's lesson observation programme. The self-assessment report was detailed and used a range of performance indicators to support its judgements. College performance and students' achievements are compared with national data. Partners in off-site collaborative provision are involved in self-assessment processes and they are audited for compliance with the college's quality assurance arrangements.

67 Senior postholders are appraised on their performance in managing their areas in the context of achieving the college's strategic aims. An annual process of staff review applies to all other staff. The focus is on individual development needs, rather than the appraisal of performance. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that staff development is a significant strength. Staff speak appreciatively of the extensive training opportunities they receive. Requests for staff development are carefully evaluated to ensure that training reflects both the college's strategic objectives and the development needs of individuals. The college has recently been successful in the reassessment of its Investor in People award.

Governance

Grade 2

68 The inspection team's judgements were generally in agreement with the college's self-assessment. However, additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- a highly dedicated corporation
- governors' expertise that benefits the college
- a wide range of detailed corporation reports
- the rigorous monitoring of the college's financial position

- significant involvement in determining the college's strategic priorities
- thorough annual assessment of corporation performance

Weaknesses
- insufficient attention to monitoring students' performance
- the failure to monitor the health and safety policy

69   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.

70   The corporation has 14 members, including five women. There are currently four vacancies. The corporation has decided to defer filling these vacancies until the outcome of the government's consultation on accountability is known. The governors have a wide range of skills and these are used for the benefit of the college. Several hold senior posts with large organisations. A search committee has been recently constituted with responsibility for identifying potential new governors. The corporation has also approved a formal recruitment process that includes job descriptions and person specifications. The formal induction programme for new members was rightly claimed as a strength in the self-assessment report. An annual self-assessment identifies governors' training needs. Governors have attended a variety of internal and external training events, including a seminar on the latest issues affecting governance and management which was provided by an external consultant.

71   The corporation is highly committed to the college and to upholding its standing in the community. It undertakes a review of the college's mission and clearly establishes the college's strategic priorities. The corporation meets at least five times each year, but often has additional meetings. Minutes of meetings are produced to a high standard, and governors receive a wide selection of concise, informative papers on important aspects of the college. The corporation has for some years reviewed its own performance annually using a detailed questionnaire. The results of the most recent assessment were used to inform the self-assessment report. A range of performance indicators for the corporation, including an attendance target, have also been determined to assess the board's effectiveness. In February 1997, governors revised the college's health and safety policy. The board determined that the finance and employment committee would monitor the policy through receiving quarterly reports on accidents, dangerous occurrences and safety inspections and present their conclusions to the board annually. This intention has not been realised.

72   Meetings of the corporation and its various committees are well organised and effective. Governors contribute positively in meetings, directing probing questions to managers. The corporation has given a high priority in recent years to ensuring the solvency of the college, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The finance and employment committee meets 11 times a year and closely monitors the college's financial position. It receives detailed management accounts at each of its meetings. The audit committee has operated effectively and has recently assessed its own performance in line with the guidance given in the *Audit Code of Practice*. Governors are conscious that they have paid insufficient attention to the retention and achievement rates of the college's students. They have received reports on retention and achievement but not focused sufficiently on important aspects such as year-on-year trends. As part of the college's

strategy for raising achievement, the corporation has now set demanding targets for these areas of performance.

73   The corporation has approved a policy on access to information. Corporation minutes and papers, the register of interests and the code of conduct are open to public scrutiny. The code of conduct, however, requires some updating to bring it into line with current best practice. The register of interests has been completed by all governors and members of the senior management team. There is a formal complaints procedure, but the corporation does not yet have a 'whistleblowing' policy. In 1997-98, the corporation produced an annual report which included information about the college and details of some aspects of college performance. It provided a range of financial information in a straightforward graphical format.

Management

Grade 1

74   The inspection team generally supported the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths
- successful changes to the management structure
- effective college-wide communications
- well-organised strategic and operational planning
- the many effective collaborative partnerships
- good financial management
- a high priority on equal opportunities

Weaknesses
- insufficient sharing of good practice

75   The previous inspection identified weaknesses in the management structure of the college. A new structure was introduced in September 1996, following an extensive college-wide review. Curriculum schools and support service teams, collectively known as business units, have well-defined functions and responsibilities. The accountability of managers has improved. Individual roles are clear to postholders and other staff. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report. Regular team meetings and clear reporting arrangements have improved college communications and staff participation substantially. The senior management team encourages openness between managers and staff. Morale is now high, and staff work enthusiastically on behalf of the college.

76   Staff contribute well to strategic and operational planning. Strategic planning is informed by extensive market research. Inspectors agreed with the strength claimed in the self-assessment report that the key strategic aims are translated into effective operational plans for the nine business units. Aspects which will most directly support these aims are given priority when allocating financial and physical resources. The process of applying for capital funds is open and transparent. Senior managers are successful in keeping staff well informed on the college's priorities through a regular newsletter, presentations, and through a range of working groups. Most staff are aware of the local and national challenges facing the college.

77   The performance of business units in achieving the college's strategic aims is regularly monitored and reviewed by senior managers. The college's management information system now produces more timely and detailed information to support business units. Some course leaders still lack confidence in these data and continue to keep their own databases. The college emphasises a corporate approach. However, uneven practice is evident in some

areas of college operations. Inspectors noted some duplication of effort and little sharing of good practice between staff operating at different sites.

78   An academic standards advisory group was established in February 1999 to monitor the implementation of the strategy to raise achievements and advise the corporation on issues relating to academic standards. Its membership includes six governors and elected staff members from the academic board. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of its monitoring role, or the full impact of the strategy. Meetings of the academic board have been generally purposeful, but attendance has fallen recently.

79   The college contributes significantly to the promotion of further education at local, regional and national level, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Senior managers have advised the select committee for education and employment, and participated in the curriculum and quality group of the Association of Colleges. The college has also developed or participated in numerous imaginative and collaborative curriculum projects with employers, regional colleges and other partners. Representatives of Tyneside TEC report that the college is highly responsive to employers and other partners in developing collaborative projects and in widening participation. The college delivers the TEC's management training programme both at the college and at the TEC's premises. It is a substantial partner with other local colleges in establishing with employers a centre for engineering excellence. Many staff are involved in curriculum links with other partners, for example in a project to raise the participation and achievement of disaffected school pupils which is supported by Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council and Tyneside TEC.

80   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The deputy principal for finance and corporate development is supported by the finance manager and the group accountant. All three have professional accountancy qualifications. Comprehensive management accounts, focusing on the performance of the business units are produced monthly and reviewed by the senior management team. The commentary accompanying the management accounts refers to the performance of the college against formally determined financial ratios. The accounts contain a cashflow forecast to the end of the financial year but would be further improved through the inclusion of a 12-month rolling forecast. Inspectors agreed with the college's claim that the monitoring of the progress of each school against a range of targets, for example staff utilisation, by the senior management team five times a year is a strength.

81   In 1994-95 and 1995-96, poor financial performance resulted in the college having an overdraft exceeding £1,100,000 and a deficit of £473,000 on the income and expenditure account. Over the past two years, the college's financial position has improved. The overdraft has been cleared and appreciable operating surpluses achieved in 1996-97 and 1997-98. The average level of funding has reduced from £18.62 per unit in 1995-96 to a projected level of £17.33 per unit in 1998-99. The college operates a delegated budgetary control system. Pay and non-pay expenditure are fully delegated to the heads of business units who also have income targets. The college's financial regulations have recently been updated and are comprehensive. The reports of the internal and external auditors do not indicate that the college has any significant internal control weaknesses.

82   The college has a range of well-structured and up-to-date policies. The equal opportunities policy and the accompanying operating manual have clear strategies to implement, monitor and evaluate the achievement of goals at many different levels of the organisation. The arrangements also encompass external liaison activities and partnerships. The equal

opportunities review group includes representatives from the corporation, staff and students. It advises on policy and monitors progress against targets. In addition staff have participated in many developments and briefings relating to inclusive learning, widening participation and equal opportunities issues.

Conclusions

83   The college's self-assessment report provided a detailed and useful basis for planning and undertaking the inspection. The inspection team agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. In some areas, weaknesses had not been recognised. The college's grade profile for lesson observations matched that of the inspection team. In two curriculum areas and one cross-college aspect, the grades awarded by inspectors were lower by one grade than those suggested by the college; inspectors considered that until recently insufficient attention had been given to poor rates for retention and achievement.

84   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 (March 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	21
19-24 years	16
25+ years	62
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (March 1999)

Level of study	%
Foundation	45
Intermediate	28
Advanced	19
Higher education	8
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	283	1,376	21
Construction	14	52	1
Engineering	153	776	12
Business	311	1,550	23
Hotel and catering	104	10	1
Health and community care	319	687	12
Art and design	147	224	5
Humanities	49	1,225	16
Basic education	47	639	9
Total	1,427	6,539	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 42% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (March 1999)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	112	56	0	168
Supporting direct learning contact	16	5	5	26
Other support	118	2	1	121
Total	246	63	6	315

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£11,134,000	£11,691,000	£11,299,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.62	£17.69	£17.75
Payroll as a proportion of income	72%	64%	61%
Achievement of funding target	119%	124%	99%
Diversity of income	21%	25%	23%
Operating surplus	-£672,000	£289,000	£695,000

Sources: Income – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)
ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)
Payroll – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
Diversity of income – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)
Operating surplus – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Expected completions	237	665	798	1,605	1,633	1,453
	Retention (%)	80	81	81	83	86	84
	Achievement (%)	43	36	40	53	47	56
2	Expected completions	1,113	1,203	1,225	1,469	1,472	1,712
	Retention (%)	76	77	76	83	84	82
	Achievement (%)	42	46	49	49	41	54
3	Expected completions	1,150	914	975	1,495	1,451	1,390
	Retention (%)	75	66	68	82	75	80
	Achievement (%)	45	48	60	50	42	51
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	3	3	106	140	227
	Retention (%)	–	100	100	92	95	89
	Achievement (%)	–	0	33	5	17	19
Short courses	Expected completions	338	561	840	4,787	5,471	5,175
	Retention (%)	97	97	94	95	95	93
	Achievement (%)	48	61	61	54	53	67
Unknown/ unclassified*	Expected completions	361	341	343	1,790	1,813	1,138
	Retention (%)	88	79	89	85	88	84
	Achievement (%)	57	52	32	52	47	68

Source: ISR
–ISR data not collected
*includes higher national certificate and higher national diploma qualifications

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