

Hartlepool Sixth Form College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

THE
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COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Hartlepool Sixth Form College

Northern Region

Inspected April 1998

Hartlepool Sixth Form College is the only sixth form college in the new unitary authority of Hartlepool, previously part of the county of Cleveland. The production of the college's comprehensive self-assessment report involved governors and staff at all levels. Action plans arising from the self-assessment report are realistic and progress in implementing them had been made by the time of the inspection.

Inspectors broadly agreed with the curriculum area grades in the college's self-assessment report but concluded that the grades for cross-college provision overestimated the college's strengths.

The college offers courses in seven of the FEFC's programme areas. Provision in four of the areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The main provision of the college is in GCE A level courses for 16 to 19 year olds. Some GCSE subjects, GNVQ courses, full-time courses which provide access to higher education, and part-time provision for adults are also offered. The quality of teaching and learning on most courses is good. GCE A level results are at or above the national average in many subjects. Support for individual students is effective. The college has made good progress in extending the quality assurance processes to cover all aspects of provision. Governors are highly committed to the college and are

thoroughly involved in the well-organised strategic planning process. The style of management is open and staff find it supportive. The college should address: some low pass rates on vocational courses; small class sizes in some subjects; inappropriate target-setting at departmental level; very poor space utilisation; its precarious financial position; and poor deployment of resources.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	2	Support for students	2
Business	2	General resources	3
Art and design	2	Quality assurance	3
English, theatre studies and religious studies	2	Governance	3
Social studies	2	Management	3

The College and its Mission

1 Hartlepool became a unitary authority in 1996, following the reorganisation of the county of Cleveland. Its traditional engineering and maritime industries have declined and have been largely superseded by newer industries, such as electronics, petro-chemicals, nuclear power and automotive products, which are run by major employers. In February 1998, the unemployment rate in Hartlepool averaged 11.7 per cent compared with a national average of 4.9 per cent. The male unemployment rate was 16.8 per cent, compared with a national average of 6.7 per cent. Hartlepool has a general further education college, a centre which is part of the regional college of art and design, five 11 to 16 secondary schools and an 11 to 18 Roman Catholic school. In 1997, 26 per cent of local school-leavers continued in full-time or part-time education at the college. The participation rate of local people over the age of 16 in full-time education is low. In 1996, approximately 57 per cent of pupils of school-leaving age in the borough continued in full-time education compared with 67 per cent nationally. Achievement rates at school-leaving age are also poor: in 1997, 29 per cent of local year 11 students achieved grade C or above in five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects, compared with a national average of 45 per cent.

2 Hartlepool has a population of around 90,000. The representation of minority ethnic groups in the local population is low at 0.7 per cent and this is reflected in the college population. The town has benefited in recent years from economic regeneration, particularly as a result of the City Challenge project and help from the Teesside Urban Development Corporation. The dockland area has been enhanced by the marina development which includes a maritime museum and nearby art gallery.

3 The college provides full-time courses for students in the 16 to 19 age group and some courses for adults. Since 1994, there has been an overall growth in activity in the college of 25 per cent and a reduction of 29 per cent in budget since incorporation. The college offers 27 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects, courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in business, information technology (IT) and art and design, GCSE subjects, access to further education and higher education courses, and childcare training at certificate and diploma levels. A significant growth area over the past three years has been part-time day and evening class courses. In 1996-97, 500 full-time 16 to 19 year olds and 805 part-time students enrolled on college programmes. At the time of the inspection, the college employed the full-time equivalent of 36 teachers, four staff who directly supported learning, and 17 other support staff. The college is organised into 15 subject departments, each of which is managed by a subject head. A vice-principal is responsible for student services and an assistant principal manages quality assurance and funding.

4 The college's mission is to provide high-quality education for the community and to enable individuals to fulfil their potential in a 'caring, supportive and stimulating environment'. This mission is expanded upon in a detailed 'vision statement' within the strategic plan which sets out the college's aim to:

- value and encourage the individual
- be associated with success and achievement and recognised as a centre of excellence in preparing students for their future roles in the world of work and in society
- be self-critical, use its resources well and sustain and improve continuously the high quality of its curriculum and its services to the community

Context

- help to increase the rate of post-16 participation in further education in Hartlepool
- help to implement national and local strategies and work with partners to support social and economic regeneration and development.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week commencing 27 April 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked before the inspection against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected two months before inspection. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors and an auditor over a total of 37 days. It covered aspects of work in four of the FEFC programme areas. Inspection team members observed 55 lessons and examined students' work and college documentation. They met college governors, staff at all levels and students. They discussed the work of the college with representatives from local

employers, partner schools and a representative of Teesside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

6 Of the lessons observed, 76 per cent were rated good or outstanding and only one lesson was less than satisfactory. This is significantly better than the average of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1996-97 according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance during the inspection was 83 per cent, compared with an average of 84 per cent for sixth form colleges recorded in the same report. The average number of students in each class was 9.1 which is below the national average. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	22	8	1	0	34
GCSE	0	5	1	0	0	6
GNVQ	3	4	2	0	0	9
Other vocational	1	4	1	0	0	6
Total	7	35	12	1	0	55

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 2

7 The inspection covered biology, chemistry and physics. Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with the majority of judgements in the college's self-assessment report but considered that the college had been overgenerous in its assessment of teaching.

Key strengths

- thorough planning of lessons and courses
- variety of effective teaching techniques
- constructive reviews of students' progress
- good pass rates at GCSE, and GCE A level in biology and physics
- good retention rates on most courses

Weaknesses

- pass rate in GCE A level chemistry below the national average
- insufficient use of IT

8 The college offers GCSE and GCE A level courses in biology, human biology, chemistry and physics, GCSE electronics and the science components of an access to higher education course. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the planning of courses and lessons is good. Schemes of work are well developed and specify the requisite learning materials. Staff are kept well informed about developments within the college. No member of staff has responsibility for providing leadership in science. Subject departments work in isolation from one another. This can lead to particular difficulties, especially when a department consists of only one member of staff and there is no one to whom he or she can turn to for help or advice.

9 Most teaching is good. Relationships between teachers and students are relaxed. Teachers succeed in stimulating the students' interest in the subjects. Classroom control is good and helps students to learn effectively. Students' work is returned promptly after it is marked. Grading of work is fair but in many instances teachers fail to correct work thoroughly or offer comments on how the students may improve their work. Students' progress is effectively monitored. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that a variety of teaching techniques are used. These include an effective mix of theory and practical work, demonstrations and direct questioning of the students. In some instances, handouts are used laboriously and students spend too much time reading through them instead of identifying issues in them for discussion. Practical lessons are carried out safely. The size of many of the classes inspected was small and there were not enough students present to facilitate lively and stimulating discussion.

10 Students' work is of an appropriate standard for the level of course. Students show particular enjoyment during practical work and speak enthusiastically and knowledgeably about it. In some instances, teachers miss opportunities to improve students' practical skills by correcting some basic errors in students' techniques. Students' written work is well presented and their files are well organised. Students are not given enough scope to exercise initiative and work on their own. They do not develop skills of research and they are given few opportunities to work together in teams. Most of the students on the access course are successful and progress to appropriate higher education courses. In the last two years, pass rates in GCE A level physics and GCE A level biology have been above the national average for sixth form colleges. In particular, the pass rate for GCE A level physics has been excellent at 100 per cent. Retention rates on both the

Curriculum Areas

physics and biology courses have been high but they are declining. Over the past three years, pass rates in GCE A level chemistry and human biology have been at, or below, the national averages for sixth form colleges. The retention rate on the GCE A level chemistry course has varied between 58 and 94 per cent over the last three years. Most students achieve the grades at GCE A level predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE grades when they joined the college. Students' achievements and retention rates on GCSE courses are good, with the exception of chemistry. In some instances, however, students who are repeating particular GCSE subjects fail to make significant improvement on their previous grades. The proportion of students who progress to further and higher education courses are in line with the national averages for sixth form colleges. Information about students' progression is well recorded and thoroughly analysed.

11 Teachers hold appropriate subject and teaching qualifications. The specialist equipment in the laboratories is sufficient but much is in need of refurbishment. Learning resources, such as video recordings and periodicals are well catalogued. There are no modern computers based in the laboratories for use during practical or theory lessons. Space is adequate but it is not used effectively.

Examples of students' achievements in science, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level biology	Retention (%)	97	95	89
	Pass rate (%)	71	92	94
GCE A level chemistry	Retention (%)	94	58	91
	Pass rate (%)	76	86	85
GCE A level physics	Retention (%)	94	88	81
	Pass rate (%)	73	100	100
GCSE science	Retention (%)	75	91	84
	Pass rate (%)	61	36	47

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

12 The inspection covered GCE A level business studies, economics and information business technology and GNVQ advanced and intermediate business courses. Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although they considered some weaknesses were more significant than was acknowledged.

Key strengths

- excellent pass rates in GCE A level business studies
- well-organised GNVQ courses
- good teaching
- excellent teamwork amongst staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of IT on GCE A level courses
- poor links with industry
- underdeveloped resource materials and library stock

13 Teachers of business studies work well as a team sharing resources and expertise. Most courses are generally well planned. The college organises its GNVQ courses to allow students to focus on one assignment at a time, with subject teachers working together as a team. The GCE A level business studies course is organised to allow teachers to make effective use of their specialist expertise. The number of students studying GCE A level business studies is increasing. Enrolments in economics for GCE A level have declined and in 1997-98 the subject was dropped from the GCE A level programme. GNVQ courses recruit low numbers.

14 Teaching is good. Teachers have productive working relationships with students.

They provide students with help outside the timetabled lessons. The best lessons provide a variety of appropriate activities and learning is strengthened by the effective use of resources. Teachers' expositions are clear. In some lessons, teachers draw effectively on the students' experience of part-time employment. In other lessons, the teachers talked too much and gave the students little opportunity to participate in discussion or demanding activities. Assessment is thorough and teachers clearly explain how the students may improve their work. A variety of assessment methods is used. The college's self-assessment report did not recognise that the students are unclear how these different assessment methods relate to each other and that, as a result, it is difficult for them to monitor their own progress effectively. Work placements are offered to students but few take them up. There are few visiting speakers from industry. There is a lack of links with local industry.

15 As recorded in the college's self-assessment report, students' pass rates in GCE A level business studies are excellent and have been 100 per cent over the last two years. Eighty-six per cent of students achieved grades A to C in 1997. The college uses value-added data to compare students' actual GCE A level results with those predicted for them on the basis of their performance in GCSE. Students who took GCE A level business studies have achieved high value-added scores. Pass rates in GCE A level economics have been well below national averages for the last two years. In general, GCE A level students are not given the opportunity to use or demonstrate IT skills in their coursework. The ability of students on GNVQ courses to develop action plans is impressive. Key skills teaching and assessment are well planned and implemented by specialist staff. Numeracy is an integral part of GNVQ courses. Specialist mathematics teachers work closely with business studies teachers to design GNVQ assignments, assess numeracy and provide specialist teaching. GNVQ results are good, and

Curriculum Areas

a high proportion of students obtain merits and distinctions.

16 Teachers have relevant first degrees and appropriate assessor and internal verifier qualifications. Business courses take place at the Elwick Road site. Accommodation is not used efficiently. The shape of teaching rooms causes significant problems of classroom management. For example, in one oblong classroom a large class had difficulty in facing the teacher. Outdated electronic typewriters also took up valuable space in the room. Acoustics in the accommodation at the Elwick Road site are poor because of high ceilings and wooden flooring. IT equipment in the department is connected to the college network. Students use appropriate software and have good access to computing equipment. Each student is issued with a textbook. Students do not, however, have sufficient access to additional current business data. Students believe that they can pass their course successfully using learning materials provided solely by their teachers. They are given little information from external sources, such as local businesses.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	98	79	74
	Pass rate (%)	55	60	90

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

17 The inspection covered all provision in art and design offered by the college, including photography. Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with the majority of findings in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- the strong emphasis on preparatory studies based on personal research
- exemplary project briefs
- good links with practitioners
- excellent results at GCE A level
- the students' successful progression to related further and higher education
- good use of physical resources to produce a creative environment

Weaknesses

- poor organisation of the curriculum and inefficient use of staffing
- the adverse effect of poor course organisation on learning
- insufficient breadth of GNVQ courses
- low achievements of students on GNVQ courses

18 The college is developing provision to meet the needs of adults, unemployed young people and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A 'pathways' project has successfully brought adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and GCE A level students together to work with a visiting artist. At present, staff who teach on different courses work separately from one another. There are no arrangements whereby they can share good practice and discuss ways of ensuring that key skills are an integral part of courses. There is

no mechanism for staff to exchange ideas on the project-based approach to learning which is particularly appropriate to art and design. The college's GNVQ courses have insufficient breadth but this weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The GNVQ courses place too much emphasis on fine art at the expense of vocational studies.

19 Much of the teaching is good. Lessons are well prepared. Teachers begin with a clear introduction of lesson content. They give students a range of appropriate learning activities and they draw clear conclusions at the end of the lesson. A strong emphasis is placed on the importance of preparatory studies based on personal research in a variety of media. There are excellent links with employers and external bodies. The students undertake real assignments and commissioned work for local industry. For example, students have created large sculptures for a local IT company. Key skills are an integral part of GNVQ courses and they have a clear vocational relevance. Key skills are not an explicit component of GCE A level courses. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that there is some poor management of courses and also some inefficient use of staff. For example, some lessons are too short for the type of learning activities students need to carry out. Students find it irksome to have to spend time travelling between sites. The small numbers in some groups restricts the range of creative activities that can be undertaken. There is a lack of clear guidance for students on these courses on assessment methods and some students do not fully understand how they will be assessed.

20 Students talk confidently about their work and they are well motivated. In visual studies particularly, students' work was of a high standard. The self-assessment report identified that GCE A level results are excellent and pass rates have shown improvements over the last three years. Students progress to art foundation courses. Results in GCSE photography are

Curriculum Areas

above the national average for sixth from colleges. Some GCE A level and GNVQ advanced students progress directly to higher education. The pass rates and retention rates for the small number of students on the GNVQ courses are poor.

21 Staff support each other well as a team. The self-assessment process is well established and productive. Teachers are well qualified and most are practising and exhibiting artists. The art and design courses are located away from the main site, at Elwick Road. An appropriate range of specialist resources is available including computers and reference textbooks. Accommodation is well managed to provide an effective and creative environment. The library on the main site has inadequate stock of art and design books. The internet is accessible on the main site but it is used infrequently by students in this programme area.

Examples of students' achievements in art and design, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	79	62	64
	Pass rate (%)	84	81	100
GCSE photography	Retention (%)	67	80	65
	Pass rate (%)	83	42	85

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English, Theatre Studies and Religious Studies

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered GCE A level English language, English literature, theatre studies and religious studies; GCSE English language and English literature; courses leading to GNVQ units at intermediate and advanced levels in communications and an access to higher education course. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum areas which the college identified in its self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the college had overestimated some of the strengths in teaching and learning and in curriculum management.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- good learning support for students
- effective management of the curriculum areas
- excellent pass rates in GCE A level English language
- good development of key skills in religious studies

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on GCE A level courses
- poor pass rates in GCE A level English literature
- narrow range of teaching and learning in some lessons

23 Much of the teaching is good. Teachers plan and prepare their work carefully. They use their subject expertise to good effect and select an appropriate variety of teaching and learning strategies. Teachers place strong emphasis on

oral communication and the effective use of language. In a GCE A level English language lesson, the teacher used an imaginative introduction to some technical terms that included the use of slogans. Teachers know their students well. There is lively discussion in lessons and students enjoy tasks which they find demanding and which challenge them to think and use their skills. In a GCE A level English literature lesson, students acquired a sophisticated understanding of the use of text, form and style by engaging in critical analysis of an essay written by a member of the class. A minority of lessons did not have clear aims. In a few instances, the teacher gave the students unimaginative learning activities and the lesson lacked momentum. In religious studies, students are encouraged to develop key skills. When they return marked work to the students, religious studies teachers append a form to it giving an assessment of the students' performance and level of attainment in key skills. Some classes were too small to allow the students to engage in a wide range of teaching and learning activities such as structured discussion and group work. Students' progress is checked and systematically recorded. The marking of students' work is constructively critical and supportive and teachers provide students with written feedback on ways of improving their performance. Key skills, such as communications, are covered in the schemes of work for GCE A level courses, but they do not feature in the lesson plans or in the students' learning programme.

24 The pass rates on some courses are exceptionally high. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the students' good examination results represent a strength of this programme area. For example, in 1997, 100 per cent of GCE A level English language students achieved a pass and 75 per cent achieved grades A to C. However, the pass rate in GCE A level English literature was 7 per cent below the national average for sixth form colleges. Value-added analysis of GCE A level

Curriculum Areas

English language results in 1997 shows that students obtained higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE achievements. The analysis also shows, however, that students obtained lower grades in GCE A level English literature than those predicted for them. Results in GCSE English are just below the national average for sixth form colleges. There are declining retention rates on GCE A level courses, which the college recognised as a weakness in its self-assessment report.

25 The average class size of the lessons observed was eight, and the attendance rate was 74 per cent during the period of the inspection. Departments across the provision are well managed and communication between staff is effective. Teachers are well qualified. The classrooms in the main building are well decorated and many have attractive displays which aim to strengthen the students' learning.

Examples of students' achievements in English, theatre studies and religious studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCSE English language and English literature	Retention (%)	83	80	85
	Pass rate (%)	53	63	45
GCE A level, all subjects	Retention (%)	92	81	75
	Pass rate (%)	83	82	90

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Social Studies

Grade 2

26 The inspection covered GCE A level geography, history, sociology and psychology; GCSE history and psychology; and Open College units in psychology and sociology. Twelve lessons were observed. The college's self-assessment report included separate assessments for each subject and these are well supported by evidence. The inspectors agreed with the strengths of this curriculum area which were stated in the self-assessment report, but they considered that some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- the teachers' voluntary provision of extra lessons to help students
- good use of a range of resources in the classroom
- well-organised courses
- the teachers' sharing of clear schemes of work with students

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of performance indicators by course teams
- poor pass rates in GCE A level geography and GCSE history
- the teachers' failure to encourage students to undertake wider reading
- low attendance in GCSE groups

27 Full-time students receive effective induction to the subjects they are studying and this is designed to help them with the transition from GCSE to GCE A level. Subject files, schemes of work and lesson plans are well organised. Teachers share their schemes of work, aims and objectives and assessment schedules with their students. The college does

not record this strength in its self-assessment report. A good range of resources are used in the classroom. Lesson plans are linked to schemes of work. Teachers voluntarily provide extra short courses to help students. Examples of such courses include mathematics for geographers and psychologists and thinking skills for historians. Other activities to support classroom work include a geography field trip to Europe.

28 When teaching large groups, staff use a variety of appropriate teaching methods in order to stimulate the students' interest. Teachers organise lessons well. They brief the students carefully on their tasks and ensure that they have enough time to carry them out fully. Teachers relate lessons to previous teaching and learning in order that the students may identify their progress in covering the examination syllabus. Students work hard and are attentive in class. In some lessons, the students failed to grasp fundamental principles being taught. The range of the teaching and learning activities which took place in lessons with smaller classes was severely constrained. When class sizes were small, it was difficult for the students to engage in structured discussion or carry out group work. In many of these lessons with small groups, teachers tended to talk too much and rarely extended the students' learning beyond the requirements of the examination. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly. Subject teachers hold meetings and records of these are maintained. At these meetings, staff do not measure performance against targets, such as those for retention rates.

29 Students' attendance at lessons observed was 85 per cent. Absence levels were high in GCSE lessons. Pass rates have fluctuated across the programme area. The self-assessment report identified poor pass rates in GCE A level geography as a weakness. The proportion of students who obtain grade C or above in GCSE history has declined. Value-added analysis for 1997 shows that on average students studying

Curriculum Areas

GCE A level geography did not obtain the grades predicted for them. Retention rates have declined markedly. Pass rates in GCE A level history and psychology are at the national average for sixth form colleges.

30 Teachers are well qualified. They are keen to update their knowledge and skills and to take part in staff development. The majority of the accommodation is pleasant, well decorated, well equipped and conducive to learning. Teachers welcome the arrangement whereby each room is allocated to a specific teacher. Many rooms are too large for the classes using them. Classrooms have good subject displays which create a suitable subject identity. Psychology rooms lack displays and are drab. Specialist resources for history and geography are adequate but those for sociology and psychology are poor.

Examples of students' achievements in social studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	95	87	81
	Pass rate (%)	83	64	70
GCSE	Retention (%)	88	68	68
	Pass rate (%)	43	53	30

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

31 The self-assessment report relating to support for students was extensive and provided a useful basis for inspectors.

Inspectors judged that some strengths were overstated. They identified some weaknesses in the operation of the tutorial system and the enrichment programme which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- the college's close links with partner schools
- the good arrangements for providing information to prospective students
- the good enrolment procedures
- the effective support for individual students
- the thorough provision of careers education and guidance
- the good programme of extra-curricular activities

Weaknesses

- ineffective elements of the tutorial programme
- some poor aspects of the enrichment programme

32 The inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the procedures for the enrolment and induction of students represent a key strength in the college's support for students. Students speak highly of the advice they receive. Full-time and part-time courses are described well in attractive, informative prospectuses. Link tutors are designated to provide information to the college's five partner schools and give regular feedback about the progress of former pupils. Before applying to the college, most prospective

full-time students attend a well-organised 'taster' day. Each year, the college offers a successful week-long summer school for students who have applied to the college. Students are very appreciative of their induction to the college and to the subjects they will study.

33 Support for students is good. Full-time students have a personal tutor who monitors their progress and is in regular contact with the parents of students aged 16 to 19. Parents receive reports on their child's progress and are invited to parents evenings. All full-time students have tutorials and these are also used as a formal registration session for students. These cover training in study skills, the preparation of applications for higher education and some optional elements about contemporary social issues. Not all students value the content of tutorials. Training in study skills is provided more effectively through subject teaching. Attendance at tutorials is often poor. The effectiveness of tutorials is not monitored. The attendance of students in lessons is closely monitored. After non-attendance on one or two occasions, students, or their parents if the student is aged 16 to 19, are telephoned by the college and asked for an explanation of absence. Students who need support on personal issues are referred to appropriate professional counsellors or social work practitioners. The college provides a free crèche on three days each week for up to 15 children of students.

34 The college's self-assessment report did not recognise that provision of support for students who need help with basic skills is underdeveloped. The college has piloted a test in basic skills for students on intermediate level courses. Of the 80 students tested, 48 were assessed as needing support with basic skills. Although the college has provided short courses in communications and number, it has not identified the progress made by students who are taking these. From September 1998, the college intends to test all students in basic skills. Individual teachers often give students extra

Cross-college Provision

help outside lessons. Not all teachers encourage students to read widely around their subject. The college provides good support for the few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on mainstream courses.

35 Careers education and guidance are good. Careers information is readily available. Students wishing to seek employment can obtain advice from a qualified careers specialist teacher and from Future Steps, the careers service. The programme for students intending to continue in higher education is well organised. It includes visits to regional universities. The library has a well-stocked careers section. Careers education forms part of the tutorial programme. Students may elect to take part in a work experience placement which is organised by the careers co-ordinator. About 20 per cent of all full-time students undertake work placements each year. Such placements are not, however, a mandatory component of all vocational courses. The college collects and makes good use of information on the destination of students. College data show that in 1997, 60 per cent of GCE A level students took up places in higher education. This figure is low for a sixth form college, and shows a slight decrease since the last inspection. The college provides opportunities for religious worship at a weekly meeting, and at services at Easter, Christmas and on Remembrance Day.

36 In its self-assessment report, the college identified the wide range of extra-curricular activities for students offered through its enrichment programme as a strength of the support it provides for students. Inspectors agreed with this judgement in respect of two of the three elements of the enrichment programme but found one element less successful. Although 180 first-year full-time students follow a well-organised and accredited youth award programme only 14 gained the award. The number of second-year students who take GCE A level general studies has increased from 46 in 1996, to 75 in 1997,

including six students on GNVQ advanced courses. Over 16 sports and other activities are available. Records show that attendance for these activities is sometimes poor and that the average group size is small. The college has a number of sports teams which have been successful in regional and national competitions.

37 The student council is proving increasingly effective in involving students in the life of the college. For example, it has arranged a valued series of social events in the town. The student council has also commented on questionnaires about the quality of the college's provision before these are put to students. Twelve of the 24 council members are elected, and one member represents students on the corporation.

General Resources

Grade 3

38 The college's self-assessment report provides a comprehensive assessment of the college's resources but inspectors concluded that it understates weaknesses in accommodation. The standard of equipment and other learning resources has improved since the last inspection.

Key strengths

- excellent sports facilities
- modern IT resources
- good accommodation for teaching staff

Weaknesses

- poor space utilisation and inefficient split-site operation
- unsatisfactory social facilities for students
- the small and under-resourced library

39 The college is on three sites in a suburban area. These are the main site, the Elwick Road site, some 500 metres away, and the Eamont

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Gardens Building close to the Elwick Road site. The main building is an impressive Edwardian mansion with later additions. It houses general-purpose teaching rooms, science laboratories, the library, an assembly hall and administrative offices. Two well-maintained temporary buildings are used as teaching areas. There is also a detached dining block and sports pavilion. These buildings are situated within extensive park land. The Elwick Road and Eamont Garden sites were built as Victorian schools.

40 The inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the excellent sports facilities at the main site represent a major strength of the college's resources. These facilities include extensive playing fields. Hartlepool Borough Council owns a large sports hall and swimming pool on the site and these two amenities are used by the college during the day. A pavilion has been recently converted to a crèche with its own parking area. Communal areas for students are poor. The majority of students do not have a general common room and the refectory on the main site is often used as a social area. There are no communal facilities at the Elwick Road site. A room has been identified as a common room for the adult students on the access to higher education course. Staff common rooms and work areas are spacious and mostly of good quality.

41 The college is in the bottom third of colleges in the sector in respect of the efficiency with which it uses its space. The college's poor use of space was identified in the last inspection report. The college's self-assessment report did not acknowledge that the college has made slow progress in improving its usage of its sites. Many individual staff now have their own rooms. Some unsatisfactory timetabling, however, still results in the inefficient use of rooms across the sites. Most buildings have spaces which are difficult to use for teaching purposes. Since the last inspection, the college has a new reception area which has improved the entrance to the main building. Corridors

around the reception area have displays of students' artwork. In general, the sites are well maintained but some rooms are in need of refurbishment. Many rooms lack uniform furniture and have different styles of seating and tables at differing heights. Wheelchair users have limited access to the buildings.

42 The library is small and has 44 work spaces which are well used by students. The bookstock, totalling about 11,000 volumes, is small and much of it old. The expenditure of approximately £12 per full-time equivalent student is below the £26 recommended by the Library Association. The library stock does not meet the needs of students on new courses. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Most subjects have a small dedicated area in the library and this contains relevant books and other appropriate learning resources. There are four computers in the library, one with a CD-ROM drive, one linked to the internet and two which may be used for wordprocessing. The librarian surveys the internet for appropriate websites, details of which are then listed and circulated to teachers.

43 Since the self-assessment report was written, the college has developed two IT areas and a multimedia area on the main site. This has substantially improved students' access to the internet. The Elwick Road site has enough computers to meet the needs of students on courses there. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to modern computers across the college is good at 6.7:1. More than half the computers are available on a 'drop-in' basis. The college has a policy for replacing equipment.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

44 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in quality assurance which the college identified in its self-assessment report. Some of the strengths relate to recent developments which have not yet been tested in practice. Inspectors identified some weaknesses which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the effective gathering and use of students' views on the quality of provision
- the good use of value-added data
- the consistent and effective use of appropriate performance indicators
- the extension of the quality assurance processes to all aspects of provision

Weaknesses

- the lack of a proven quality assurance system
- some inappropriate targets
- the overgenerous self-assessment of cross-college provision

45 The college's strategic plan commits the college to being self-critical and to continuous improvement. Procedures to enable the college to fulfil this commitment are being established. The college aims to build on its existing good practice. Since the last inspection, classroom practice has improved considerably, but there has been no significant overall improvement in students' achievements.

46 The quality review group, formed in February 1997, is responsible for developing quality assurance arrangements. It consists of the senior management team, a member of the support staff, a governor and co-opted

members. The group's remit is to review all aspects of college activities, agree action for the improvement of provision, and collate information to inform college plans. By February 1998, the group had overseen the development of a new quality assurance system, and had organised and validated the college's first self-assessment report. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report overemphasises the framework as a strength when it has not yet been proved in operation. A quality assurance policy is contained within the framework document. The framework provides quality standards and criteria covering all main areas of the college's activity, including support functions. Standards specified in the college's charter are not explicit as part of the framework and are not formally monitored.

47 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the arrangements for obtaining the views of students are a strength. Students' views are sought through questionnaires which they complete after admission, toward the end of courses, and in relation to particular issues. Responses to the questionnaires are collated and a summary of them is issued to the students. Improvements have often resulted from action taken on the responses. For example, the opening hours of the students' dining facility have been extended. Students also successfully make their views known through the student council. The views of staff are obtained through their responses to an annual questionnaire. The views of parents and employers are not gathered systematically.

48 Each teaching department produces an extensive annual report which reviews students' achievements, curriculum development, staff development, resources, and issues related to quality assurance. In addition to reviewing its work over the previous year, each department sets itself action for improving its performance over the next year. The quality of reports produced by departments varies considerably and in some instances, it is poor. It is difficult

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to make valid comparisons between the achievements of different departments on the basis of performance indicators such as retention rates and examinations results, because the number of students on some courses is small. The targets which departments set themselves for the next year are usually those used across the whole college and they are not differentiated in the light of a department's previous performance. The self-assessment report failed to recognise that some targets are insufficiently demanding or inappropriate for departments which are already performing well. For example, one department which, in 1997 had pass rates of 87 per cent and 82 per cent in its GCE A level subjects had set itself a target of 80 per cent for the next year. The section in the reports on curriculum development includes a subsection on teaching styles but this is often insufficiently analytical. Most of the department reports for 1996-97 are comprehensive. Departments find the reporting process demanding. The most useful reports are those from the larger departments. Support areas do not review their work.

49 The college makes a comparison of the examination results of its students with those predicted for students on the basis of their GCSE grades on entry. All GCE A level and GCSE subject reviews include such a comparison and often make detailed comment on the added value which students have obtained in their achievements. This value-added analysis is used constructively in many of the subject reviews. The predicted results are used in tutorials and tutors encourage individual students to improve their performance and achieve higher results than those forecast for them.

50 Staff have access to a wide range of training and professional development activities. Staff who take part in such activities report back on them at staff meetings or training days. Requests for staff development arise from the

departmental reviews, and through appraisal and planning processes and they are prioritised by the assistant principal. The staff development budget is small, representing less than 0.6 per cent of the staffing budget. However, considerable staff developmental activity takes place in the college. Costs for this are not calculated. The college was awarded Investor in People status in 1997. The current biennial scheme of teacher appraisals started in 1995-96. Teachers choose a colleague to appraise them. They identify specific issues related to teaching and learning which arise from their teaching programme and these form the basis of discussion during the appraisal interview. Teachers have one of their lessons observed by their appraiser. Afterwards, the appraiser discusses the teacher's performance with the teacher concerned in confidence. As part of the college's self-assessment process, senior managers, and some recently retired senior staff, observed at least one lesson by each teacher. Support staff are not yet subject to appraisal. An appraisal scheme for support staff has, however, been drawn up and agreed with them.

Governance

Grade 3

51 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements about governance in the self-assessment report. In general, the section in the report on governance was more descriptive than evaluative. Inspectors found some strengths and weaknesses in governance which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- the governors' high commitment to the college
- the open style of governance

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- the thorough involvement of governors in strategic planning
- the good induction process for new governors

Weaknesses

- the deficiencies in the operation of the audit committee
- the lack of specific financial objectives in the strategic plan
- the failure of governors to address key issues facing the college
- inadequate arrangements for reporting on financial matters

52 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. Actions have been taken to remedy most of the weaknesses identified in the FEFC's audit service report issued in December 1997.

53 The corporation has 18 members, including eight independent governors. Six governors are women including the vice-chair and principal. There are student, staff, parent and co-opted members, and a nominee from Teesside TEC. The corporation conducts its business mainly through its committees which cover employment, audit, finance and premises, employment, health and safety, and remuneration, respectively. All governors serve on at least one committee of the corporation and between them they have a broad range of professional skills. Clerking arrangements have improved and are satisfactory.

54 The self-assessment report claims that governors have an awareness of their duties and responsibilities and that this represents a strength in governance. Inspectors did not

agree with this finding. In their view, the corporation had not responded effectively to the serious financial position facing the college and had formulated inadequate contingency plans to overcome these difficulties. The college's strategic plan does not clearly specify key financial objectives. The corporation approved the 1996-97 financial statements without any evidence of the adequacy of the college's internal control system as the audit committee did not ensure effective internal audit coverage during 1996-97. The difficulties associated with the financial control and audit were not identified as weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Governors receive regular reports on students' achievements. Until recently, many of the other reports they receive contain too much detail and fail to identify clearly key trends in the college's performance.

55 The inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the governors' strong commitment to the college is a strength. Governors help to define the college's mission and the college's 'vision statements'. They participate effectively in the strategic planning of the college. Corporation meetings are clearly scheduled, well in advance. Attendance at meetings is good. Effective induction arrangements for new governors enable them to understand the work of the corporation and their personal responsibilities quickly. Governors receive regular presentations from heads of departments on aspects of the curriculum. They take it in turns to attend meetings of the student council. Students reported that they appreciated the interest shown in them and the college by governors. Governors have recently established more formal links with subject teaching teams in order to gain greater understanding of the curriculum.

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Management

Grade 3

56 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths of management which were identified in the college's self-assessment report. They found some significant weaknesses, however, which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- the well-organised strategic planning process
- the open and consultative style of management
- the good communications across the college
- enthusiastic staff who undertake additional work outside of normal structures
- the strong commitment of staff to promoting equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- the lack of rigour in target-setting at middle management level
- shortcomings in the management structure
- the poor deployment of resources
- slow progress in implementing the accommodation strategy
- the college's precarious financial position

57 Since the last inspection, the college's management structure has been changed. New processes for strategic planning have been introduced and more staff are involved in decision-making. Strategic planning is well organised, comprehensive and informed by analysis of labour market trends, especially that provided by Teesside TEC. Most teachers contributed to the current strategic plan.

Strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of college operations have been less successful, especially in responding to changing demands and in overcoming weaknesses identified in the last report. Information on students' examination results and value-added analyses are distributed to subject areas and are widely used by staff. Some important weaknesses in management were not identified in the self-assessment report. For example, data on the funding units generated by subject areas are not fully used to measure the efficiency of course operation and of staff utilisation. Such information is not disseminated to heads of subject areas to help them in their planning and monitoring of provision and in their efforts to reduce costs. Although the college has a good accommodation strategy, this has not been implemented with sufficient urgency to bring about improvements in the use of accommodation.

58 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that most staff have well-defined roles and clear job descriptions. Communications across the college are good. There are regular briefings of staff and clearly described administrative and organisational policies and procedures. The senior management team operates in a manner which is open and supportive towards staff. It is keen to improve the college's business performance and ensure that the college's academic performance is one of excellence. Senior managers work well together, and with the corporation and staff of the college. Most teachers participate in one or more of the numerous college committees, contributing to discussions and passing their views to senior managers for consideration and action. Support staff are encouraged to join these committees. Equality of opportunity is given a high priority in the college. For example, the achievements of students by gender are monitored effectively. Staff have a good awareness of the needs of the small local minority ethnic community.

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59 Many subject departments are small. The college's self-assessment report failed to identify that there is little co-ordinated activity between related subject departments to ensure that resources are deployed effectively. According to the management structure, subject departments are grouped in faculties. The purpose of such a faculty arrangement is to improve communications across the college rather than to co-ordinate the management of the subject groups. The rationale for allocating financial resources to subject departments is unclear to some middle managers. A recently introduced policy for the allocation of resources has yet to produce measurable results. College statistical returns to the FEFC are on time and accurate. The college's management information system is reliable.

60 Senior managers and staff link with a range of partners to improve the participation of local people in education, employment and training activities. The college, although small in size, has recently broadened its curriculum and it has strengthened links with community groups. For example, it has recently begun work with local adult training centres to develop courses for adults in basic skills and IT skills. More adults now attend the college, including groups who traditionally do not enter further education. The Teesside TEC views the college as supportive of its work and responsive to its needs. It receives reports on students' achievements and on other matters. Although course teams have few links with employers, the college has encouraged local companies to use its internet facilities. A major employer commissioned the college to produce an expansive mural depicting the historical development of local industry. The work of students and teachers on this project was highly praised.

61 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The average level of funding for the college is £21.66 per unit which is above the median for sixth form

colleges. In addition, the college is not in a healthy financial position and operating deficits have been incurred in the last three financial years with the result that the college had net current liabilities and a negative balance on its income and expenditure reserve account as at 31 July 1997. Future financial viability is based on the satisfactory implementation of the accommodation strategy which may not be achieved in the proposed timescale. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. The college's strategic plan does not contain detailed financial objectives. The management accounts do not provide any out-turn forecast information, cashflow information nor any details on the current and projected level of solvency. The financial systems within the college have been recently established following the introduction of a new accounting package. The new operations manager has the task of fully developing the related reporting systems. Following a review of the high level financial controls, the internal auditors expressed concern about the lack of separation of duties within the finance function. The college has exceeded targets for enrolment and funding units in 1996-97.

Conclusions

62 The college's self-assessment processes were thorough and they involved governors and most staff. The self-assessment report served as a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the grades in the report for curriculum areas but considered that the grading for cross-college provision was over-generous. In general, the report underestimated some weaknesses. Inspectors found some significant weaknesses in governance and in management which were not mentioned in the report.

63 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 (February 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	52
19-24 years	12
25+ years	36
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (February 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	4
Intermediate	43
Advanced	53
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (February 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	148	101	30
Engineering	0	25	3
Business	40	73	13
Health and community care	42	7	6
Art and design	41	47	10
Humanities	231	69	36
Basic education	1	14	2
Total	503	336	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (February 1998)

	Permanant	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	30	4	2	36
Supporting direct learning contact	4	0	0	4
Other support	14	2	1	17
Total	48	6	3	57

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£1,865,000	£1,903,000	£1,888,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£24.34	£22.05	£21.66
Payroll as a proportion of income	81%	81%	73%
Achievement of funding target	86%	97%	103%
Diversity of income	4%	6%	4%
Operating surplus	£91,000	£133,000	£44,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

<i>Qualifications</i>		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	196	183	168
	Average point score per entry	4.3	3.9	4.3
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	+	14	17
	Percentage achieving qualification	+	86%	53%
	Position in tables	+	top third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	16	25
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	94%	52%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	bottom third

Source: DfEE

+course not running

**1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available*

College Statistics

Three-year Trends *continued*

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	77	76	81
	Retention (%)	94	86	80
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	50	53	50
	Retention (%)	84	83	81
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	+	93	62
	Retention (%)	+	83	77
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	71	70	56
	Retention (%)	95	75	82

*Source: college data
+course not running*

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