

High Pavement Sixth Form College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
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FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 5

Curriculum areas

Science, computing and mathematics 8

Business studies 15

Modern languages, history, government and politics
law, economics and geography 22

Cross-college provision

Support for students 27

General resources 36

Quality assurance 44

Governance 51

Management 60

Conclusions 71

College statistics

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

High Pavement Sixth Form College

East Midlands Region

Inspected April 1998

High Pavement College is a sixth form college in north Nottingham. The college produced a thorough self-assessment report and inspectors agreed with the majority of the college's grades and judgements. Since the report was written, considerable progress has been made in improving the weaknesses in management which had been identified by the college.

Courses are offered in seven of the FEFC's programme areas. Three of those, together with aspects of cross-college provision, were inspected. The majority of the college's provision is for full-time students aged 16 to 19 who are studying on GCSE, GCE A level, and GNVQ advanced, intermediate and foundation courses. Links with schools are productive. There are useful procedures to help students make an informed choice of course. The induction programme for students is effective. There is a practical and well-planned careers guidance programme. The quality of much of the teaching is high. Programmes of study are well organised. Students' pass rates are mostly above the national averages for sixth form

colleges. Results in most GCE subjects indicate that the students have gained added value in their achievements. Accommodation is well maintained. Students make good use of the college's playing fields. Governors are committed to furthering the success of the college and they have a wide range of skills. The corporation has addressed weaknesses in management and action taken has begun to produce positive results. The college's financial situation is improving. A new management structure has been introduced but this is not yet fully operational and effective. The corporation has not established procedures for the appraisal of the principal. The college should: ensure that its quality assurance system covers cross-college activities and support services; address issues related to the development of the strategic plan; improve some poor tutorial practice; ensure that structured learning support is available to all students; improve arrangements for identifying and addressing students' individual needs; and improve some unsuitable teaching accommodation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science, computing and mathematics	2	Support for students	3
Business Studies	2	General resources	3
Modern languages, history, government and politics, law, economics and geography	3	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	3
		Management	3

The College and its Mission

1 High Pavement Sixth Form College was founded as High Pavement School in the Lace Market area of Nottingham in 1788. It became a sixth form college as part of the comprehensive reorganisation programme of post-16 education in Nottingham in the early 1970s. It is now situated on a large campus in north Nottingham and has a small annexe in a neighbouring school, within five minutes walk of the main campus. The college draws its students mainly from the Greater Nottingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) area. This has a population of about 600,000 and accounts for more than 60 per cent of the population of the county. In February 1998, the unemployment rate in the TEC area was 6 per cent, compared with 9.8 per cent for Nottingham City, and with 6 per cent for the whole of the United Kingdom. Nearly 20 per cent of students are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 6 per cent of the population in the Greater Nottingham TEC area.

2 There is a great deal of competition between providers of post-16 education in Nottingham. Within a five-mile radius of the college there are five other general further education colleges, a tertiary college, another sixth form college and 12 schools with sixth forms. The college draws about 45 per cent of its students from within the city of Nottingham, with the majority of students coming from surrounding areas of Greater Nottingham and beyond. According to Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) figures, 38 per cent of students had postcodes relating to areas of social deprivation. The achievements of pupils in schools within the city of Nottingham are below the national and regional averages. Only 19 per cent of school pupils achieved grade C or above in at least five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects, compared with a national average of 45 per cent.

3 Following the recommendations of a consultant commissioned by the corporation in May 1997, a major restructuring of the college was rapidly put in place by July 1997. This restructuring coincided with the departure of the former principal. An acting principal was appointed, who was in post at the time of the inspection. A new principal has been appointed who will be in post from 1 June 1998. The college now has five directorates, comprising 34 curricular teams and six non-curricular teams. A number of staff also hold cross-college responsibilities. The management team comprises the principal with the five directors, including one who has responsibility as deputy principal. In the absence of a permanent principal at the time of the inspection, however, the number of directors had been reduced to four. The college employs 83 full-time equivalent staff. Of these 28 per cent are support staff.

4 The college mission is 'to provide high-quality education for full-time students of 16 to 19 years of age and to those returning to education and training'. The college has concluded that the fulfilment of its aim would be best served by close collaboration with other colleges in the area. In December 1997, the corporation made the decision to merge with New College Nottingham. New College is to be formed by the merger of Basford Hall and Clarendon Colleges in September 1998.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 27 April 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college was asked to provide data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. These data were checked by an inspector against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Approximately two months before the inspection, the college was notified of the sample of its provision which was to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 10 inspectors over 28 days, and by an auditor over four days. Inspectors observed 55 lessons and examined students' work and a variety of college documents. They evaluated the extent of consultation which the college has held with external bodies such as the Greater Nottingham TEC, local employers and community groups. Meetings were held with governors, college managers and other staff and with students.

6 The college subscribes to an independent, external service which provides an analysis of the value added to students' achievements by comparing their actual performance at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) with their predicted performance based

on GCSE achievements. This analysis is referred to in the following sections on curriculum area provision.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 71 per cent were graded good or outstanding and 7 per cent were judged to be less than satisfactory or poor. This profile compares favourably with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all lessons observed in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 81 per cent which is above the average level of attendance for all sector colleges but below the average level of attendance for sixth form colleges according to the same report. The average attendance rate in science and humanities lessons was 80 per cent and in business studies lessons, it was 82 per cent. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	6	22	9	3	1	41
GCSE	2	1	2	0	0	5
GNVQ	1	4	1	0	0	6
Other vocational	1	2	0	0	0	3
Total	10	29	12	3	1	55

Curriculum Areas

Science, Computing and Mathematics

Grade 2

8 The inspection covered GCE A level and GCSE subjects in science, mathematics and computing and the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) course in information technology (IT) applications. Twenty-four lessons were observed. The self-assessment report evaluated subjects separately. Inspectors agreed with the college's identification of strengths and weaknesses. They found some weaknesses, however, which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good examination results
- the significant value-added factor of many students' achievements
- the carefully planned and managed curriculum
- effectively planned and managed teaching
- high standards of coursework
- the opportunities for students to develop key skills in all courses
- the regular and supportive assessment of homework and coursework

Weaknesses

- insufficiently wide range of sources of information for students' research purposes
- attendance and retention rates below college targets on a few courses
- dated science accommodation

9 The college offers GCSE and GCE A level biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and computing, GCSE electronics and a GNVQ course in IT applications. It does not offer a GNVQ

course in science. Students from across the college can study for the Cambridge IT certificate to gain accreditation for IT skills. They can also continue to study mathematics beyond GCSE by studying on the foundation of the advanced mathematics course. Mathematics staff help students on GNVQ courses in different curricular areas with the key skill of application of number. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the range of science, computing and mathematics courses is appropriate to the needs of most students.

10 Inspectors agreed with the college's assertion that teaching is effectively planned and managed. Teachers review schemes of work regularly. They maintain comprehensive records of students' marks and progress. All lessons have a well-written plan. Almost all lessons achieve their stated objectives. There is an appropriate balance between the amount of time spent on whole-class activities and individual work. Most students enjoy their studies. Students carry out practical work competently and pay appropriate attention to matters of safety. During revision lessons in preparation for examinations, practice papers and mock examinations are used effectively. Individual students receive appropriate feedback on their performance. In mathematics, the revision programme is well planned and it is explained to students. Additional workshop sessions provide individual students with opportunities to resolve specific learning difficulties they may have.

11 All students have some opportunities to develop key skills. Science students use IT in their courses. Mathematics students make some use of symbolic manipulation and graph-plotting software and are required to make presentations on projects. Computing students develop interview techniques while researching and carrying out their projects.

12 Students' work is of an appropriate standard overall. In most cases, students' course notes are comprehensive and they are

Curriculum Areas

useful for revision purposes. Homework and coursework are set regularly and assessed effectively and teachers provide students with helpful written comments on how they may improve their work. The best coursework and project work are of a high standard. Students are set some ambitious and demanding assignments on GNVQ IT applications courses and they complete these successfully.

13 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that in some subject areas, resources need updating and accommodation requires refurbishing. In other subject areas, however, resources and accommodation are adequate, and in some instances, good. In general, individual students have easy access to computers. It is more difficult, however, for whole classes to have access at any time to IT resources. Some IT software requires updating. Resources for science are well organised but accommodation for science is dated. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that the range of sources of information, such as CD-ROMs, the internet and books, which students may use in their research, is too limited.

14 In 1997, students' achievements in GCE A level subjects were mostly at or above national averages for sixth form colleges. The college's self-assessment report refers to the excellent pass rates in 1997 in GCE A level chemistry, computing and mathematics and to the steady improvement in results in some subjects. It also recognises that in 1997, results in GCE A level social biology were less satisfactory. Results in five of the six GCSE subjects have been consistently above the national averages for sixth form colleges and the retention rate in GCSE mathematics has been above 90 per cent. Students' results in most GCE A level subjects indicate that students have achieved a small value-added factor. In 1997, about 20 per cent of students taking GCSE mathematics improved on their previous results by two or more grades. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that the attendance and retention rates on a few courses fall below the college's target of 90 per cent.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level science, computing and mathematics	Retention (%)	85	78	90
	Pass rate (%)	84	70	83
GCSE information systems and mathematics and sciences	Retention (%)	91	87	91
	Pass rate (%)	39	49	50
GNVQ intermediate IT applications	Retention (%)	*	*	86
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	83

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

15 The inspection covered GCE A level, GCSE and GNVQ courses. Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors mostly agreed with the college's assessment of its provision in business studies. The self-assessment report overstated some strengths and weaknesses, however, and it failed to identify a few weaknesses which were found by inspectors.

Key strengths

- effective, well-planned teaching
- the strong emphasis given to the development of oral communication skills
- the high pass rates on the two-year GCE A level business studies course
- the high retention rate on the GNVQ foundation course and the rapidly improving retention rate on the GNVQ advanced course
- the careful marking of GNVQ assignments including useful written feedback for students

Weaknesses

- the poor retention rate on the GNVQ intermediate course
- the poor pass rate in GCSE business studies
- insufficient development and use of IT
- the lack of qualified assessors and verifiers on the college staff

16 Inspectors agreed with the college that the varied methods of teaching represent a strength in business studies. Lessons have clear aims and objectives which challenge students to think and use their initiative. As the self-assessment report recognises, the effective teaching of communication skills is a strong feature of this curriculum area.

17 GCE A level business studies groups are shared successfully between two teachers. The team works well together and uses resources effectively. At the time of the inspection, students were being prepared for forthcoming modular examinations. Care is taken to ensure that students understand the examination marking scheme. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that students on the GCE A level programme have insufficient opportunity to use and develop IT skills.

18 GNVQ students receive a useful course handbook. Their teachers follow carefully planned schemes of work. Teachers of the GNVQ programme receive appropriate staff development training. They have a full understanding of the nature and scope of GNVQ courses. Inspection confirmed that these staff have a clear idea of what they are delivering, and that the students benefit from regular assessment. Work experience is an integral part of the programme. Students undertake assignments during their work placements which are clearly related to the aims of the course. Students on the GNVQ advanced course in business develop a range of business skills through involvement in the young enterprise programme. The paucity of staff who are qualified as assessors or verifiers was not mentioned as a weakness in the self-assessment report; however, the college has recognised the need to address this shortcoming. It has instituted a programme of staff development which aims to enable more teachers to become qualified assessors or verifiers.

19 Teachers set appropriate assignments and coursework for students on GCE A level and GNVQ courses. In their marking of GNVQ assignments teachers give students detailed written feedback to help them to improve their performance. In contrast, the marking of students' work on GCE A level courses is less helpful and consists of numerical scores rather than constructive comment. Errors of spelling and grammar are rarely corrected. Most

Curriculum Areas

handouts are clear. Some teachers rely heavily on photocopied learning materials which they have borrowed from a range of sources. Few teachers use materials which they have designed or written themselves.

20 In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that low retention rates are a weakness. However, in 1997-98, retention rates on the GCE A level business studies and the GNVQ advanced business courses are high. Retention rates have been consistently high on the GNVQ foundation course. Students on this course benefit from strong learning support. Retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate course have sometimes been poor. In 1996, the pass rate in GCE A level business studies was 95 per cent. In 1997, a one-year course in GCE A level business studies was started and the pass rate fell to 86 per cent. The pass rates on the two-year GCE A level course have consistently been as good, or better, than the national

average for sixth form colleges. The results on the GCE A level business studies course indicate that students' achievements include a significant value-added factor. The self-assessment report understates the poor performance of students on GCSE courses. The college has taken steps to improve this by changing the entry requirements for GCSE courses. It has, however, taken little action to address the low retention rate on the GNVQ intermediate course.

21 The college recognises the need to improve the range of books available in the library. A number of specialist texts are available within the teaching areas. Accommodation for business studies classes has improved. The GNVQ advanced business course is based in an attractive and well-equipped room which has a telephone to assist students carrying out research. Other rooms contain colourful, if somewhat dated, wall displays.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level business studies	Retention (%)	84	78	84
	Pass rate (%)	83	95	86
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	*	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	73
GCSE business studies	Retention (%)	78	84	84
	Pass rate (%)	46	35	41
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	52	81	74
	Pass rate (%)	50	72	50
GNVQ foundation	Retention (%)	100	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	60	67	50

Source: college data

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Modern Languages, History, Government and Politics, Law, Economics and Geography

Grade 3

22 The inspection covered a sample of the humanities provision which included modern languages, history, government and politics, law, economics and geography. Twenty lessons were observed. Four self-assessment reports relating to subject areas were considered. These identify many strengths and weaknesses but few make evaluative statements on the quality of provision. Inspectors agreed with most of these strengths and weaknesses but they identified some weaknesses which were not mentioned in the reports.

Key strengths

- good pass rates at GCE A level in economics, geography and government and politics and in courses in Italian and Russian
- the attention given to relevant cultural, moral and social issues
- the extensive bank of resources
- the successful development of students' skills, knowledge and understanding
- the good support for individual students
- the close relevance of lessons to the requirements of the examination syllabus

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates at GCE A level in law, history, German and French
- the low retention rate on modern languages courses
- in language lessons, some poor use of the language being taught and the lack of interaction between students

- no system for teachers to share good practice
- some ineffective schemes of work
- some poor written guidance for teachers on the marking of assignments

23 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the teaching in these subject areas sustains students' interest and extends the students' skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers give due attention to relevant cultural, moral and social issues. Lessons are carefully planned to ensure that they are relevant to the examination syllabus. A number of lessons, especially in economics, were effective as carefully structured revision sessions. Teachers give valued support to individual students during and outside lessons. Parents of students aged 16 to 19 are regularly informed of their child's progress. In a minority of lessons, little was expected of the students and they were not given sufficiently demanding tasks. In most modern languages lessons, the teachers talked too much and apart from practice for oral examinations, there was little interaction between students. In some instances, the teachers' assessment of assignments included insufficient written guidance on how the students might improve their performance. Some teachers, however, provided the whole class with effective oral feedback on the quality of students' assignment work. Staff have not established a uniform marking scheme for GCE A level courses in modern languages.

24 Most curriculum areas are led and managed well. Subject teams are small and consist of only two or three members. A variety of good practice in teaching and learning occurs across subject areas. There are, however, no systematic arrangements whereby staff may share good practice. In geography, for example, staff have undertaken a useful analysis of the key skills which students need to develop. Such

Curriculum Areas

an analysis has not, however, been carried out in other subject areas. Course files contain schemes of work. The format and quality of these schemes vary significantly. The best have clear objectives whilst the poorer schemes are little more than a list of lesson content. Staff do not evaluate the effectiveness of their lessons. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to acknowledge the extent of inconsistency in administrative procedures.

25 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is a good stock of learning materials and handouts which are held in the library and in curriculum areas, especially in economics. For example, during a successful history lesson, students were able to make use of a database which gave them details of all members of parliament during the civil war. In modern languages, students are not taught by native speakers of the languages being studied. They make visits to Paris and to Halle in Germany, however, in order to develop their language skills. In lessons, there is substantial use of the languages being studied but teachers make unnecessary recourse to English for the purposes of explanation and class management. Extra staff are used in some GCE A level French lessons in order to give the students opportunity to practise their conversation skills. The

satellite link for the teaching of French could not be used at the time of the inspection because of technical difficulties.

26 The college undertakes a thorough analysis of students' examination performance. At GCE A level, the percentage pass rate, based on entries in 1997, is above the national average for sixth form colleges in economics, geography and government and politics and below the national average in law, history and modern languages. Analysis shows that there was a significant value-added component in the achievements of most students on GCE A level economics and geography courses, and of some students on GCE A level German, law and government and politics courses. The analysis also indicates the absence of a value-added component in the achievements of students on GCE A level French and history courses. Students obtain good results on the courses in Russian and Italian, which are administered by St Martin's College. Over 50 students have achieved passes in Italian and Russian over the last three years. Retention rates on modern languages courses are unsatisfactory. Entry requirements for modern languages courses are low and the college pursues an 'open door' policy in its recruitment of modern languages students.

Examples of students' achievements in modern languages, history, government and politics, law, economics and geography, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level economics geography and politics	Retention (%)	94	72	77
	Pass rate (%)	90	95	93
GCE A level modern languages	Retention (%)	79	77	79
	Pass rate (%)	69	63	81
GCE A level history and law	Retention (%)	86	69	75
	Pass rate (%)	70	74	78

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

27 The college's self-assessment report did not cover learning support effectively. It identified some actions to address weaknesses in the provision of learning support but not all of these have been carried out.

Key strengths

- some effective procedures to help students make informed choices
- the effective induction of students
- the well-planned careers guidance programme

Weaknesses

- lack of structured learning support for all students
- some poor tutorial practice
- ineffective formal arrangements to identify and address many students' individual needs

28 There are effective procedures to help most students make an informed choice of their course. Students are satisfied with the information and help they receive. However, the self-assessment report acknowledges that there is a need to make course publicity material clearer and more explicit. Many records of initial interviews are insufficiently detailed to be of much use at the subsequent enrolment interview. This interview is part of a well-planned and effective induction period when students have opportunities to become familiar with the college and obtain further information about the course they have chosen. There is a clear and effective procedure for students who wish to change courses.

29 The college's policy on learning support relates mainly to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-

assessment report that additional support for these students is effective. There is a well-structured procedure for assessing the needs of individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for planning relevant support to meet these. In some instances, learning support is provided during normal lessons and when this occurs there is close liaison between the learning support tutor and the subject teacher. Across the college as a whole, however, only a minority of students have their learning needs systematically and carefully identified. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that the assessment of students' learning needs is not carried out across all courses, and that some students, particularly those studying GCE A level subjects, do not have their needs identified. There is no comprehensive and systematic testing of students on entry to the college in order to assess their learning support needs. Teachers in some subject areas give new students subject-related assessments. Students on vocational courses at intermediate level take initial tests in literacy and numeracy. There are no formal arrangements for ensuring that the learning needs of all students, irrespective of their ability, are identified and met. The college is planning a more systematic approach to the teaching and learning of key skills across all courses.

30 All students have a personal tutor. Time is allocated for the provision of tutorial support. In September 1997, significant changes were made to the arrangements for tutorials. A subsequent review of the arrangements in tutorial practice by the college identified a number of weaknesses resulting from these changes. The inspectors agreed with the identification of these weaknesses. There is some poor communication between tutors and students and also between tutors and other relevant members of staff. Records of interviews are insufficiently detailed. Reviews of students' progress, the identification of students' needs and action-planning to meet these are not

Cross-college Provision

carried out systematically. Some tutors do not make effective use of group tutorial time.

31 Most students are well informed about their academic progress. At the end of each term, they discuss their progress with tutors. A progress report is agreed which specifies action for improving the students' performance. In the main, these reports are helpful and informative, but they are not always comprehensive.

Students value these reviews of their progress. Parents evenings are timed to coincide with progress reports. The college keeps parents of students aged 16 to 19 well informed about their child's progress. Staff are provided with clear guidance and detailed documentation on national records of achievement. During enrolment, however, some interviewers fail to make use of records of achievement and some tutors fail to update them.

32 There is a clear procedure for dealing with poor attendance. Personal tutors are responsible for dealing with students who are persistently absent. The college's electronic register system provides tutors with weekly reports on student attendance. Tutors also receive information notes on absence from teachers. Most tutors monitor poor attendance by individual students closely, but in some instances, they delay in taking subsequent action to address it.

33 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the careers and progression guidance provided for students is comprehensive. There is a programme of individual guidance interviews for students. Students have ready access to advisers on careers and higher education. They are prepared well for their interviews with advisers by completing an action plan which sets out their needs. There are effective procedures to help students to apply for higher education.

34 A part-time counsellor is available through flexible booking arrangements to provide students with help on personal issues. The self-

assessment report recognises the value of providing students with the opportunity to obtain independent advice but states that there is a need to survey the extent to which the councillor's services are used.

35 Students have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of sporting and cultural activities and these further their personal development and broaden their range of experience. Many activities lead to certification. Most students are involved in these activities. There is a tradition in the college of sporting achievement both by individuals and in team games.

General Resources

Grade 3

36 Inspectors mostly agreed with the college's assessment of its general resources and with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The inspectors found some weaknesses, however, which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- the comprehensive accommodation strategy
- generally well-maintained accommodation
- the suitability of most teaching areas for their purpose
- the integrated library and learning resource centre
- the well-used on-site playing fields
- the improvements to the social areas of the college

Weaknesses

- poor use of buildings in evenings and at weekends
- some cramped and unsuitable teaching accommodation

Cross-college Provision

- insufficient accessibility of internet-based resources to students
- the lack of a security system in the library
- some poor accommodation for teaching and support staff

37 The college's main buildings are pleasantly located on an open hillside. The site includes several sports fields and adequate parking facilities. The college is not well served by public transport. In order to supplement the public transport, the college has introduced subsidised home-to-college transport for students. The college has developed a comprehensive accommodation strategy which clearly identifies and prioritises accommodation issues. Teaching accommodation is used effectively during the college day but is virtually unused in the evening or at the weekends. The college plans to start a Saturday school in June 1998.

38 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching areas are well maintained and mostly suitable for their purpose and that a number of rooms provide an effective subject or course base. Inspectors also agreed with the finding in the report that about 20 per cent of all rooms are too small and that, as a result, the range of learning activities which can take place in them is too restricted. The college recognises that there is poor accommodation for teaching and support staff. The self-assessment report did not identify the old-fashioned science laboratories as a weakness of the college's accommodation. These laboratories have uncomfortable wooden stools which make them unsuitable for theory work. However, plans to improve the laboratories are in the accommodation strategy. Teaching accommodation for the arts and English is located together in refurbished accommodation on a nearby site reached by a five minute walk across open hillside. The accommodation is pleasant and spacious and it

contains a drama studio, an art suite, an English suite and a student common room.

39 The library has been extended to form an integrated library and learning resource centre incorporating 20 computer workstations which students can use. As the college states in its self-assessment report, the centre offers a pleasant working environment and the 100 study spaces are sufficient to meet students' needs. There is good provision of books, videos and CD-ROMs for humanities but similar learning materials for science and IT are insufficient. The support provided by the qualified librarian and the assistant librarian is valued by students and staff. There are 130 networked workstations within the centre and in IT rooms and students have good access to these. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to identify that students have insufficient access to the internet. The college has only one computer linked to the internet and this is inconveniently sited.

40 As a result of staff shortages, library book loss has not been monitored and the bookstock has not been counted for two years. There has been no systematic cataloguing of learning materials from across the college. Subject teachers have, however, developed useful banks of learning materials. Because of the lack of a security system, it is not expedient to display expensive books in the library.

41 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the social areas of the college have been improved and that the refectory, which has been enlarged to provide a substantial, bright and attractive cafeteria, is well used. In their responses to a questionnaire, many students said that they found the toilet facilities unsatisfactory. Although these are old fashioned, they are clean and well maintained and several toilets have been improved by the installation of metal frame windows. The student common room areas are rudimentary, sparsely furnished and little used.

Cross-college Provision

42 As the college highlighted in its self-assessment report, students have good access to games pitches and the cricket and sports field which are on site. Arrangements are made for students to use outside facilities which the college does not possess such as those for squash, tennis, swimming and personal fitness. There is a strong tradition of competitive sport in the college with teams reaching a high standard in basketball, squash, soccer, hockey, cross-country, athletics, badminton, table tennis, swimming, tennis, netball and rugby.

43 There is a student union and a college student magazine. The student union, which receives a financial allocation from the college, oversees organised student activities and clubs. The support for some student union activities is poor. The current timetable makes it difficult for club activity to take place in the middle of the day.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

44 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance arrangements identified in the self-assessment report. Progress has been made on addressing some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the integration of the quality assurance process with strategic and operational planning
- use of value-added analysis to enhance student and subject performance
- effective operation of quality review at curriculum level
- surveys used to inform departmental reviews and action plans
- staff development activities which support college objectives

Weaknesses

- lack of quality assurance arrangements for cross-college activities and support services
- too many documents used to support the quality process
- some charter targets not reflected within curriculum area quality standards
- lack of integration of teaching observations with the quality process

45 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the quality assurance system is an integral part of the college's strategic and operational planning cycle. The system has been recently modified and it has still to complete its first cycle of evaluation. For subject areas, the quality assurance system is based upon a curriculum development plan. Subject teams are required to report on progress in meeting a common set of objectives which are derived from the college's annual operating objectives. These objectives, however, contain few quantifiable targets against which teams may measure their performance. In addition, a department development plan has been implemented and this includes a common set of objectives for all departments. The college has established six targets. Some, such as those for attendance and retention rates, apply to the whole college. Others have been set by individual departments and are related to previous attainment by curriculum teams. Reports on students' achievements are made to the corporation. These include a comprehensive analysis of the value-added factor in students' achievements. There is little discussion, however, on the content of these reports. Performance targets for support teams have not yet been agreed. The college has just entered into its first contract for collaborative provision. It intends that the quality assurance arrangements for this provision should be similar to those in the college.

Cross-college Provision

46 Inspectors agreed that the extensive use of value-added data to monitor the performance of individual students and of overall subject achievements represents a strength of the college's quality assurance system. The college makes use of a comprehensive range of data in monitoring progress towards the achievement of targets. The development plan concludes with an action plan which has clear objectives. The quality assurance system is proving effective. Standards of work and students' achievements are improving. The college acknowledges that there are currently too many documents relating to the system and that there is some duplication of documentation. The college recognises that similar development plans, with appropriate service standards and numerical targets, have still to be adapted for cross-college activities and college support services. A quality assessment group has been established to monitor the effectiveness of the quality assurance process.

47 Questionnaires are used to obtain students' views on college services and on the quality of courses. Inspectors agreed with the statement in the self-assessment report that the results of the surveys are used to inform departmental reviews and action plans. The observation of teaching is undertaken by the college management team. All teaching staff have been observed. The college intends to train teaching staff to undertake classroom observations which will complement those of the management team. College managers acknowledge that the findings from their observations have yet to be taken into account in the college's quality assurance process. There are suitable internal verification procedures for the college's GNVQ programmes.

48 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first the college had produced. There was no involvement of external bodies or persons outside the college in the self-assessment process. The subject-based self-assessment reports were produced by departmental teams before the major restructuring of the college. The recently

formed curriculum teams were responsible for producing the action plans arising from the reports. The cross-college sections were prepared by the college management team. Quality assurance arrangements were assessed by the college self-assessment group. The corporation assessed the quality of its governance and approved the final report. The quality assessment group audited two strengths from each self-assessment area to check the validity of the overall report. Action plans have been written and these identify the person responsible for their implementation, a realistic timescale within which action must be completed and targets against which progress in achieving improvements may be measured.

49 The college charter is clearly written. It contains useful information about college procedures, sets out commitments which the college promises to fulfil, and specifies targets which the college aims to meet.

50 A review of the performance of staff is carried out annually. Through this review, the training needs of staff are identified. The review procedure is to be modified to include the setting of targets for staff. Staff who require a specific staff development activity have to complete a form on which they show how the activity will help towards the fulfilment of the college's objectives. If the request is granted, staff are required to offer comments on the effectiveness of the training activity and these are recorded. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, staff have undertaken staff development activities which are relevant to the college's objectives. Some training activities have helped staff to gain a better understanding of the recent reorganisation of the college. Staff with new middle management responsibilities have received insufficient training for their new roles. Because of the recent reorganisation, the college has temporarily suspended working towards achieving the Investor in People award.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 3

51 Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in governance which were identified in the self-assessment report. The inspectors found some weaknesses which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- the effectiveness of the corporation in addressing weaknesses in management
- the governors' wide range of skills
- the governors' commitment to the college
- the high quality of papers for corporation meetings
- the effective committee structure

Weaknesses

- the involvement of governors in operational matters
- the lack of a system for the appraisal of the principal
- the lack of arrangements for governors to oversee the quality assurance system
- the lack of uniform clerking practices for the corporation's committees

52 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the corporation's activity in addressing weaknesses in college management represents a strength in the governance of the college. In 1997, reports were commissioned to advise the corporation on strategic planning for the college and on the college's organisational structure. An action programme to implement most of the proposals in these reports was agreed. Following the resignation of the principal in July 1997, an acting principal was appointed to implement this programme. A new principal was

appointed in March 1998 to take up post in June 1998.

53 A revised strategic plan was approved in October 1997 and procedures were established to monitor progress towards achieving its objectives. There were no specific objectives in the plan for governors. Governors recognise that their role in the planning process is unclear. There are no formal arrangements whereby the governors receive summaries of advice to college managers from employers or representatives of the local community.

54 Inspectors agreed with the findings in the self-assessment report that governors have a wide range of skills, and that they have demonstrated a high level of commitment to the college. The report states that meetings of the corporation and of its committees are well attended but inspectors found that attendance by independent members is sometimes low. Although a quorum has always been maintained at meetings, on some occasions the independent governors were in a minority and the minutes do not record whether they were given the right to defer business to a later date. There are long-term vacancies on the corporation. There is no TEC nominee. The search committee has identified the need for female governors and governors from minority ethnic backgrounds.

55 Governors acknowledge that they became closely involved in the running of the college over the last two years in order to oversee the action taken to address concerns over aspects of strategic and operational management. The governors are now withdrawing from this executive role but the relationship between the principal and governors has not yet been clearly defined. The self-assessment report acknowledges that it is a weakness that the principal has not been appraised for a number of years.

56 The governors have not overseen arrangements for assessing the quality of college provision. They have approved a policy on

Cross-college Provision

quality but are unclear about their role in overseeing the quality assurance process. They have recognised the importance of performance indicators and a number have been included in the current strategic plan. A governor has been invited to join the self-assessment group. Corporation members attended a training session on self-assessment and following this they made a realistic assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses.

57 The business of the corporation is handled efficiently, with timely and appropriate agendas, papers and minutes with items treated as confidential when appropriate. The experienced clerk is an external appointment who also clerks a number of neighbouring colleges. He serves the corporation only. The corporation's committees are clerked by college management and different practices apply. The advisory role of the clerk was especially evident and valuable during recent management changes. Current arrangements do not ensure that the committees have access to advice provided by the clerk to the corporation.

58 The corporation has comprehensive standing orders. The register of interests and the code of conduct for members need updating in some areas. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the corporation delegates business to an appropriate range of clearly constituted committees. The majority of governors are members of at least one of the committees and these cover remuneration, search, finance, audit, students and personnel and strategic planning. The remit and membership of these committees have been reviewed recently. As the self-assessment report states, committees play a key role in systematically reviewing college policies but their role in monitoring the effectiveness of their implementation is unclear. Reports from the committees to the corporation cover both decisions taken and recommendations for the consideration of the full board.

59 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.

Management

Grade 3

60 The self-assessment report identified some strengths but also some serious weaknesses. The college has taken action to improve its management but significant weaknesses remain. Inspectors agreed with the majority of strengths identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the effective implementation of action to address management issues
- the achievement of pay cost savings and the more efficient deployment of staff
- the provision of timely and accurate management information
- the promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
- regular and timely financial management accounts
- the college's improving financial situation

Weaknesses

- some aspects of the new management structure
- the development of the strategic plan
- some ineffective monitoring of progress towards the achievement of strategic plan targets
- underdeveloped marketing and business development

Cross-college Provision

- insufficient financial forecasting information in management accounts

61 Inspectors agreed with the college that it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the new management structure. Many managerial roles are not fully developed. Lines of accountability and communication are not fully operative. The college is encountering problems in achieving effective co-ordination of the large number of small teams in curriculum areas. Existing procedures need to be revised to support the new structure more effectively. Some managers need further training. Support staff have been reorganised into new teams.

62 As the self-assessment report states, there have been moves towards more effective and efficient deployment of staff. Pay costs have been reduced and teaching hours for each member of staff have been increased. Constant change over the last two years and continuing uncertainty about the future have led to low staff morale.

63 Poor internal communication is acknowledged as a weakness in the self-assessment report. There has been some improvement in communications within the college. Staff are kept informed about key issues at full staff meetings and through a regular written bulletin. Communications between staff in subject teams are largely informal. The purposes of some staff meetings and the roles of various groups are unclear. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the purpose of the academic board is also unclear.

64 Two weaknesses in the strategic planning process were identified in the self-assessment report and by inspectors. The first weakness is the lack of a coherent overall planning strategy. It has proved difficult to take forward a number of strategic actions in advance of the appointment of a new principal from 1 June 1998, and the planned merger of the college

with another institution. The college's decision to offer provision with a collaborative provider represented a major change in the college's strategic direction but this was not properly planned. The second weakness lies in the unsatisfactory setting of targets in some areas of management and the inadequate monitoring of progress towards reaching these targets. Some operational plans are poor. Many staff are not fully aware of the college's strategic objectives. There has been little consultation with staff teams and with local employers and representatives of the local community over the compilation of the strategic plan.

65 The college is able to produce good-quality, accurate and timely management information. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the collection of management information on applications and enrolments is a strength of the college's management. The quality and provision of management information for attendance, retention and achievement have improved. The tracking of students' destinations is comprehensive. Information on students' destinations is not always well used in development planning. The college recognises the need to identify exactly what should be contained in regular management reports to assist planning and monitoring.

66 The college maintains good relations with schools, some employers, and community organisations. It maintains close liaison with local schools without sixth forms. The college carries out a great deal of marketing activity but its involvement with the TEC has been small. It has, however, been successful with bids for funding from the TEC development fund. There is scope for the college to increase its liaison with external organisations.

67 The college has started to make its market research more systematic and it has developed a marketing plan. The plan is not realistic and achievable in the light of the college's current

Cross-college Provision

expenditure and staffing. There is little staff expertise in marketing. The college is undertaking more business development activities, but it lacks detailed market research.

68 There is an active equal opportunities committee which promotes and monitors the implementation of equal opportunities policy. Students of all religions can use facilities provided for private prayer but the college recognises that it does not satisfy the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* because it fails to provide collective acts of worship.

69 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The finance department is headed by a qualified accountant who is a member of the senior management team. Management accounts produced every two months are supported by a detailed commentary. They are comprehensive but lack sufficient forecast information. All governors receive regular management accounts. Budget holders receive appropriately detailed and timely reports.

70 As the self-assessment report states, the college has a good record of meeting its financial targets. The college's financial situation has improved. The longer term financial strategy is beginning to develop in response to the financial pressures arising from the needs of convergence. Arrangements for controlling the college's entry into collaborative provision arrangements, including internal audit coverage, are developing and have yet to be tested fully.

Conclusions

71 The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report through its quality assurance system. The report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements

in the report. In a few cases, weaknesses were either not identified or were understated.

Inspectors agreed with all the grades awarded by the college to curriculum areas and with three of the five grades the college awarded to its cross-college provision. In one case, inspectors considered the college underestimated its strengths. In the other, inspectors considered the college overgenerous in assessing its provision.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	98
19-24 years	2
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	2
Intermediate	16
Advanced	82
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	287	6	30
Engineering	8	0	1
Business	149	3	15
Hotel and catering	63	0	6
Health and community care	34	1	4
Art and design	51	3	5
Humanities	373	13	39
Total	965	26	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Permanant	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	57	0	3	60
Supporting direct learning contact	10	0	0	10
Other support	13	0	0	13
Total	80	0	3	83

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£2,970,000	£2,945,000	£3,063,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£20.02	£19.88	£20.11
Payroll as a proportion of income	81%	78%	74%
Achievement of funding target	103%	102%	108%
Diversity of income	1%	2%	3%
Operating surplus	-£194,000	-£97,000	-£67,000

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 96/39 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

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

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	420	343	402
	Average point score per entry	4.9	4.6	4.7
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	+	20	40
	Percentage achieving qualification	+	60%	58%
	Position in tables	+	bottom third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	64	65
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	72%	62%
	Position in tables	*	top third	middle third

Source: DfEE

+no entries

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

College Statistics

Three-year Trends *continued*

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	84	84	85
	Retention (%)	83	75	80
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	48	56	52
	Retention (%)	*	*	84
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	*	63	68
	Retention (%)	*	63	70
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	52	77	60
	Retention (%)	70	85	83

Source: college data

**data not available*

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