Huntingdonshire Regional College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE

2000-01

Contents

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses*

- *grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*

- *grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses*

- *grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*

- *grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.*

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
	%	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*
Curriculum areas	*6*	*44*	*44*	*7*	*0*
Cross-college provision	*9*	*45*	*38*	*8*	*0*

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Sample size: 112 college inspections
Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- *as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification*

- *as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification*

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

Summary

Huntingdonshire Regional College

Eastern Region

Inspected November 2000

Huntingdonshire Regional College is a small general further education college in Cambridgeshire. All college staff and governors were involved in the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the college in its evaluation had not paid sufficient attention to identifying key strengths and weaknesses. The college was inspected concurrently by teams of inspectors from the FEFC and TSC.

The college offers provision in all programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in five of these areas was inspected, together with basic skills and aspects of cross-college provision. The college has made progress in improving standards in some curriculum areas since the last inspection but arrangements for quality assurance remain weak and several shortcomings were identified in management. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding has risen since the last inspection but is still well below the national average for the sector for 1999-2000. Students' achievements are high in some areas, for example on some courses in humanities, business, and health and social care. The retention rate for students is poor on many

full-time courses. Class sizes are well below the average for the sector. The college has effective links with employers and the local community, and there are good arrangements for work experience. Several charitable 'social firms' provide students who have disabilities and/or learning difficulties with good opportunities for developing vocational skills. Potential students receive helpful information about courses at the college and the induction programme is well organised. There has been some improvement in general resources since the last inspection including the refurbishment of classrooms and the college library. Students benefit from extensive sports facilities. Staff have many opportunities for development and training. Governors have undertaken a thorough evaluation of their own performance. They recognise that they have not given sufficient attention to monitoring the performance of the college. The college should improve: some poor rates of student retention and achievement; the standard of teaching and learning and tutorial provision; the poor teaching of basic skills; the low take-up of additional learning support; the inadequate reception area and some poor accommodation; the monitoring of franchised provision; the standard of course reviews; the monitoring of complaints; inadequate strategic planning; financial and budgetary monitoring; ineffective marketing; inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities; and the inadequate oversight of college performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Information technology and computing	3
Business and administration	3
Health and care	2
Humanities	2
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3
Basic skills	3

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

Context

The College and its Mission

1   Huntingdonshire Regional College is a small general further education college. It recruits students from Huntingdon, St Neots and the surrounding areas of the former county of Huntingdonshire which include many smaller towns and villages. The main campus is located in Huntingdon. There is a second, much smaller campus in St Neots.

2   There are six other colleges funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) within a 20-mile radius of Huntingdon. In the immediate catchment area there are seven secondary schools and one independent school, all with sixth forms. In 1999-2000 the college enrolled 625 full-time students and 2,813 part-time students. Courses are provided in all of the programme areas funded by the FEFC for school-leavers and adults. The courses range from foundation to degree level. Adult education courses are provided in over 20 locations in the community, including six 'social firms', which are local businesses holding charitable status where students with disabilities are able to gain qualifications in a working environment. In addition to courses funded by the FEFC the college runs work-based training schemes funded by the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and courses leading to qualifications at higher national certificate and degree level funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

3   The district of Huntingdonshire has a population of approximately 160,000. It is a relatively prosperous area, with an unemployment rate of 1.8% compared with the national average of 4%. Over 90% of organisations employ less than 25 people. Approximately one-fifth of employers are engaged in manufacturing and about four-fifths run service organisations – an employment profile similar to the profile for the whole of the Eastern Region. The college is involved in a number of initiatives that seek to widen participation in full-time or part-time education and training among people who traditionally have not taken up opportunities in further education. For example, there is a significant project that aims to recruit adults from the Oxmoor housing estate, which is adjacent to the main campus.

4   The corporate management team consists of the principal and three assistant principals who are responsible for finance, staffing and resources, and programmes. The clerk to the corporation is also a senior postholder. The full management group is completed by the addition of the managers of the college's six academic divisions.

5   The college's mission stresses its commitment to maintaining locally governed, locally managed and locally accessible further education for an increasingly diverse student population. The mission also emphasises collaboration with other organisations to improve opportunities for local people.

The Inspection

6   The college was inspected during November 2000. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors were able to use accurate data on students' achievements for 1998 and 1999 produced by the FEFC which were based upon returns of the college's individualised student record (ISR). The college submitted data on students' achievements from internal records for 2000, which were checked before the inspection against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. These data contained some inaccuracies which the college was able to correct before the inspection. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately 10 weeks before its inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by

Context

12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 54 days. They observed 70 lessons and seven tutorials, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students. The Training Standards Council (TSC) team of four inspectors worked with FEFC inspectors. Where appropriate, evidence was shared between the teams. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based learning supported by the college.

7   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	2	1	0	0	4
GCSE	0	1	0	0	0	1
GNVQ	2	6	3	0	0	11
NVQ	0	4	0	0	0	4
Other vocational	3	11	7	2	0	23
Other*	3	10	16	5	0	34
Total (No.)	9	34	27	7	0	77
Total (%)	12	44	35	9	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report
Note: percentages subject to rounding
*includes basic education, higher education and access to higher education, and seven tutorials

Context

8   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Huntingdonshire Regional College	8.4	75
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Information Technology and Computing

Grade 3

9   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report although they considered that the report underestimated the significance of poor achievement by students.

Key strengths

- good teaching

- well-structured work experience

- good work-related practical exercises and assignments

- good computing facilities

Weaknesses

- poor achievements on some courses

- poor student attendance and lateness at lessons

- some deficiencies in procedures for course management

- underdeveloped arrangement for assessing key skills

10   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college offers a broad range of courses in computing. Full-time provision includes introductory courses, a course at general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate level in information technology (IT) and a national diploma in computing. Part-time students can choose from a range of courses run during the day or in the evening including computer literacy and information technology, City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7261 at levels 1 and 2, and the European Computer Driving Licence.

There are flexible arrangements for offering much of the provision through workshops offered both during the day and the evening where students work effectively at their chosen pace. The college's IT employment consultative panel enables teachers to maintain good links with industry. There are deficiencies in the procedures for course management. Course reviews are compiled from student feedback but there are no arrangements for course teams to review courses regularly and plan for improvement.

11   Most teaching is good. Teachers use appropriately detailed schemes of work and effective lesson plans. Good lessons take into account the differing levels of students' ability. Practical lessons and work-related practical exercises develop students' programming, technical and office skills effectively. Students are well motivated. They use IT facilities competently and with confidence and are able to work effectively on individual tasks. In one GNVQ intermediate lesson the students designed letter templates with graphical headings, then each wrote a letter and a memo, which were sent by electronic mail as attachments. Teachers give sound feedback to the students during practical lessons. In a key skills class on application of number, national diploma computing students had received their initial assessments and were working at level 2 or 3 on topics to rectify their individual weaknesses. Teachers explain theoretical principles clearly, often using practical exercises. A lesson on logic gates and truth tables was enhanced by the teacher's careful planning, logical approach and well-directed questions. However, on some occasions students are not challenged sufficiently, for example when teachers spend the lessons reading from an overhead projector transparency while the students copy the information. Teachers set suitably demanding and imaginative assignments which are related to the work environment. Most written

feedback to students is good. On some assignments, however, feedback is too brief and does not outline to students how they can improve their work. Key skills assessment is not yet sufficiently developed nor appropriately integrated with the vocational assignments. Inspectors agreed with the college that work experience is a strength. All full-time students have opportunities for work experience in local companies. Students on the GNVQ intermediate IT course have a two-week period, and national diploma computing students have a six-week period in which they complete an assignment for the final-year assessment.

12   Inspectors agreed with the college that good computing equipment and software are available to students. All computers have fast access to the Internet. Technical support is good. The library is well stocked with books for computing and IT courses. However, the range of computing and IT periodicals is inadequate and several books are out of date. There is no

plan for teachers to update their professional and industrial knowledge and skills.

13   The self-assessment report did not fully acknowledge the poor achievement by students on C&G 7261, computer literacy and information technology, and national diploma computing courses. There is a poor retention rate on the national diploma in computing. However, the rate on GNVQ intermediate IT, computer literacy and information technology and C&G 7261 courses has improved to above the national average for the sector. Course teams have recognised a weakness in the record of attendance and lateness of students at lessons. They have set up a thorough system for monitoring attendance, which has led to some improvements.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in information technology and computing, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
OCR computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	271	408	350
		Retention (%)	82	66	88
		Achievement (%)	60	74	56
C&G use of IT certificate and diploma	1 and 2	Number of starters	204	156	127
		Retention (%)	78	73	94
		Achievement (%)	55	54	41
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	†	17	20
		Retention (%)	†	88	85
		Achievement (%)	†	27	76
BTEC national diploma computer studies	3	Number of starters	11	13	14
		Retention (%)	45	*	57
		Achievement (%)	100	*	75

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
*data unreliable
†course not running

Business and Administration

Grade 3

14   Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but concluded that certain weaknesses had not been identified. TSC inspectors observed training in accounting and administration.

Key strengths

- effective opportunities for work experience

- good retention and pass rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) accounting programmes

- flexible provision of office technology for adult students

- a good training office

Weaknesses

- poor integration of key skills within courses

- a poor retention rate on GNVQ courses

- unsystematic curriculum planning and review

- insufficient updating of teachers' industrial experience

15   The college offers courses in business, administration and office technology, including GNVQ business at intermediate and advanced level, NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 in administration and NVQ courses at levels 2, 3 and 4 in accounting. Adult students benefit from flexible arrangements for the timetabling of office technology courses at the Huntingdon and St Neots campuses. They can choose their preferred mode of attendance, study for a variety of qualifications, and work at a pace which suits them.

16   Most teaching is well planned and thorough. In good lessons teachers establish supportive working relationships with students which promotes effective learning. In a business administration lesson, the teacher explained the roles and responsibilities of office reception staff in a lively and entertaining way. In a GNVQ advanced business lesson, the teacher made good use of marketing literature to explore the use of communications in business. In less satisfactory lessons, teachers use an inappropriate range of learning activities. They do not stimulate students' interest or allow time for revision of the main points of a lesson. Some teachers give insufficient opportunity for students to contribute their ideas in class discussions. These weaknesses in teaching and learning were not identified in the self-assessment report.

17   Inspectors agreed with the college that there are good opportunities for students to undertake work experience. Full-time students have a programme of work placements, and linked assignments. The integration of work on key skills within the curriculum has been slow. There is little concentration on identifying the key skills that are required in schemes of work. Opportunities to develop application of number and communication key skills in vocational lessons are often overlooked. Some students are unclear about the degree of skill which they should be seeking to achieve. The self-assessment report identified the need for better integration and monitoring of key skills within courses. Staff work well on an informal basis to plan administration and office technology programmes. However, in many areas procedures for course review and evaluation are unsystematic. Interim and end-of-year course reviews are not sufficiently thorough, and do not always identify strengths, weaknesses and action points. Some course teams do not meet sufficiently often, and meetings are not always recorded. Weaknesses

Curriculum Areas

in course review and evaluation were not identified in the self-assessment report.

18   Most students' written work is good. Portfolios of evidence are well organised and demonstrate a sound understanding of business practice. Most students are well motivated, and their attendance records are good. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessments of strengths and weaknesses in students' achievements. There are declining retention rates on GNVQ business courses. Retention on the GNVQ intermediate course declined to below the national average for the sector in 1999-2000. Retention on the GNVQ advanced course has declined sharply over the three years to 1999-2000, and is significantly below the national average. There are good achievements on the NVQ accounting programmes. Retention and pass rates at NVQ level 2 are at or above national average. The retention rate on NVQ administration level 2 has declined over the three years to 1999-2000. There are good pass rates on some office technology courses, including office opportunities. Overall the retention rate on other short course and long course provision is close to or slightly below the national average.

19   Inspectors agreed with the college that students have access to a good training office. The office is well equipped, and provides a realistic working environment for students on administration courses. Teaching staff have a suitable range of academic and professional qualifications, but there is no planning to enable them to update their industrial experience. Some teachers have received insufficient guidance to enable them to assess key skills. The teaching rooms and workshops are appropriately equipped. A suitable range of learning resources and other materials are available to students.

Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement
rates in business and administration,
1998 to 2000**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	10 90 100	8 75 67	8 62 100
NVQ accounting (one-year course)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	23 100 67	18 89 71	21 100 67
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 92 18	15 80 92	37 70 81
GNVQ business studies	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	9 100 67	16 56 78	15 53 50
NVQ accounting	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	33 84 79	40 88 80	40 85 59
NVQ accounting	4	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	17 88 14	17 94 *	35 94 76

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 2

20   Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching

- good achievement rates on some courses

- a well-organised work experience programme

- responsiveness to the needs of adults returning to study

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on full-time courses

- insufficient monitoring of the progress of individual students

- insufficient progression to higher education from advanced vocational courses

21   The college offers a range of programmes in health and care, which includes: national certificates and diplomas in childhood studies; an access to nursing and health care course; NVQs in care; early years childcare; and education and playwork. Flexible arrangements for attendance and the availability of part-time courses in community locations enable adults to return to study. There is no full-time provision at foundation level and numbers of students on some courses are declining.

22   Courses are well organised. Liaison with other departments which contribute to the teaching on health and care courses is effective. The low proportion of full-time to part-time teachers means that some full-time staff have management responsibility for several courses. Part-time teachers are well supported. The

college has recognised the need for more frequent course team meetings and established a regular time for such meetings. There are effective links with external agencies and employers. There is an active employers' consultative panel and the college is a member of the local early years consortium. Arrangements for work experience are effective and students have access to a wide range of placements. There are comprehensive written procedures and clear guidelines for both employers and students. Students are encouraged to acquire additional skills relevant to employment and to take part in extra-curricular activities.

23   Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that most teaching is good. Schemes of work are appropriately detailed and lessons are well structured. Teachers use suitable methods to sustain students' interest. Teachers draw on their vocational expertise to make effective links between theory and practice. Students are encouraged to reflect on their practical experience as a way of deepening their understanding of their work. In one class students experimented with hand painting and discussed their own and the children's reactions to this activity. Students on a pre-school practice course were given 'story bags' containing props which they used to create and tell imaginative impromptu children's stories. In a lesson on the impact on health of key life events, students analysed statistical data and extracts from problem pages. Students' understanding of equal opportunity issues is developed effectively. Appropriate attention is given to the development of key skills within vocational teaching. Good use is made of effective handouts to assist students in using and recording information. Most materials provided for use in class and for reference are clear and up to date. Tutors make suitably detailed comments on students' written work and provide useful guidance to help them to improve. In a few lessons insufficient attention was paid to individual students' learning needs.

24   There are high expectations of students and attendance is carefully monitored and lateness or absence challenged. However, there is insufficient monitoring of individual students' progress. Tutorial records do not always record progress against previous action points and arrangements for monitoring students' academic progress are not sufficiently systematic. This area of weakness was not identified by the college. Students value the support and encouragement which they receive from their teachers. Adult students in particular appreciate the efforts that are made to accommodate their personal circumstances and other responsibilities.

25   Staff are well qualified and most have recent relevant industrial experience. Students have good access to a wide range of resources including IT. First-aid equipment is good. Accommodation is adequate and classrooms are enhanced with relevant displays including students' work. One group of students decorated their base room as a key skills project.

26   Students' written work is often of a high standard. Achievement levels on courses for adults are good. For example, for the last three years all completing students on the access to nursing and health care course achieved the qualification. Most achievement rates for the national diploma and certificate in childhood studies have been above the national average for the sector although they declined in 1999-2000. On NVQ programmes students are slow to gain accreditation. The self-assessment report did not identify the poor retention rate on full-time courses. Most access to higher education students are accepted for nurse training and many students on full-time courses gain employment. Few students progress from advanced vocational courses to higher education.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate health and social care (16 to 18)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	18 72 69	11 64 *	7 71 60
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	† † †
National diploma childhood studies	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	14 86 100	28 * 100	12 67 63
National certificate childhood studies	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	14 86 88
Access to nursing and health care (full-time, one-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	18 83 100	7 43 100	13 77 100
Diploma in pre-school practice	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	31 84 96	14 94 100	10 100 100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
*data unreliable
†course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

27   Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with the main findings of the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much effective teaching

- good achievement rates on some courses

- good feedback to students on their work

- sound progression opportunities for students on access and teacher training courses

- the effective management of most courses

- the good bookstock in the library

Weaknesses

- some poor retention rates

- adverse effect of poor data on course evaluation

- insufficient provision at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level)

28   Inspectors agreed that the college provides good opportunities to progress to degree level in the humanities and to professional qualifications in teaching. The access to higher education and teacher training courses are well managed and thoroughly reviewed. Schemes of work are appropriately detailed. Students receive a high level of support and guidance. The GCE A level provision in the humanities is limited to one-year courses in a small number of subjects. No GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) courses in the humanities are offered.

29   Most teaching is good; there were examples of very effective practice. In the best lessons teachers quickly engage students' interest and ensure they are clear about the learning objectives. They plan their activities to relate effectively to students' experience. In some lessons, skilful questioning stimulated students and developed their ability to evaluate and conduct an argument. In an English literature lesson, a teacher used a series of prompts to encourage students to justify their opinions by close reference to the text. Students' learning is supported by an appropriate variety of resources. Teachers use videotapes, slides and overhead transparencies as well as helpful handouts. In the less effective lessons, insufficient attention is paid to teaching methods and students do not have sufficient opportunity to respond to the teaching or think for themselves. As the self-assessment report notes, on the GCE A level courses, key skills, including IT, are insufficiently developed. Humanities students understand what is required of them in their assessed work. On access to higher education and teacher training courses, students receive a calendar of scheduled assignments. Teachers give students good feedback on their work, in particular in English and psychology. Access to higher education students benefit from regular practice in taking examinations, which prepares them for future assessment at degree level. There are no clearly established procedures for setting targets for students on the GCE A level courses, or encouraging them to evaluate their own progress.

30   Classrooms for humanities subjects are of adequate size but the standard of furnishing and decoration is uneven. A well-maintained range of audiovisual equipment is available to teachers. Inspectors agreed with the college that effective liaison between library and teaching staff has led to the establishment of a suitable bookstock for students. The collection for English and history is extensive and is supplemented by videotapes. Humanities students have use of the Internet but have insufficient computer software.

31   Most students' work in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) English and on

the access to higher education courses is of a high standard, displaying both fluency of expression and independence of judgement. Access students are successful in gaining places on higher education courses. In the last three years, several have gained places at Cambridge University on continuing education courses. Achievement and retention rates for GCSE English are consistently at or above the national average. The achievements of access to higher education students are good, but the rate of retention was below the average for the sector in 1997-98 and 1999-2000. On teacher training courses, achievement rates matched the national average except in 1998-99 when they were low. In 1997-98, achievement rates in GCE A level history and sociology were very poor and below average in English and law. Since 1998, students' achievements in these subjects have improved. The retention rate on GCE A level courses fluctuates but except for low rates in 1998-99 is at or above the national average. The college recognised that poor data have impeded its ability to make sound judgements on the rates of students' achievements and retention. As a consequence the significance of achievements on the access and teacher training courses was underestimated.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in humanities, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English literature	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	124 70 60	133 80 53	124 76 68
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	28 71 65	* * *	17 76 69
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 85 13	19 63 50	17 76 62
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	34 88 26	* * *	17 71 45
GCE A level law	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	25 * *	25 * *	17 59 78
Access certificate in cross-college integrated studies	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	38 61 93	26 81 85	47 68 94
Further and adult education teacher's certificate (stage 2)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	27 93 79

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

32   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses. They considered that the college had over-estimated the quality of provision for students with the most severe learning difficulties.

Key strengths

- good progression between entry level programmes

- effective learning opportunities in social firms

- good work-placements

- high rates of student retention

Weaknesses

- inadequate initial assessments for some students

- insufficient recording of progress of individual students

- insufficient use of IT

- some poor accommodation

33   Provision for students with moderate or profound learning difficulties is managed by the college's learning support division. The college also has a franchise arrangement with six social firms, local businesses with charitable status which train students who have a range of disabilities, including those recovering from mental illness. Courses in the college range from entry level 1 to level 3. Progression opportunities are good. Students can progress at an appropriate pace through entry level provision, including a vocational access course.

The social firms offer vocational access provision and NVQ levels 1 and 2. Vocational options include courses in business administration, small animal care, horticulture, motor vehicle and manufacturing processes. Some social firms also offer programmes in daily living skills.

34   The initial assessment and curriculum planning processes for students on entry level courses in the college are inadequate. There are no specific generic learning goals for each student based on their individual learning needs. There is insufficient recording of individual students' progress, a weakness not identified by the college. Individual progress is measured by accreditation units achieved rather than skills developed. Students are not involved in recording the progress which they make in lessons. The college recognises the need for greater formal emphasis on social and personal development and has recently introduced a personal profile. Students are encouraged to record personal issues and build up a picture of their strengths. In the social firms there is an appropriate variety of approaches for recording students' progress. These include personal diaries and the completion of daily worksheets. In one firm, students have regular formal work supervision sessions and appraisals.

35   Most teaching is satisfactory. The most effective learning takes place in a context that enables students to develop their skills and knowledge and build on their strengths. In the social firms, individual students undertake suitable tasks as a normal part of the working day, and develop an appropriate range of skills. In one firm, students were involved in building a racing car that was to be offered for sale. As they built the car, the students were learning about motor vehicles, and were also developing teamwork skills and becoming aware of health and safety practices and procedures. There is some less effective teaching on courses for students with more severe learning difficulties, where the topics and aims of the curriculum are

too ambitious for the students. In the weaker lessons, the content was too difficult for students and there was too much emphasis on paper-based activity. For example, some numeracy tasks were either conceptually too difficult for students or were not sufficiently related to practical or concrete examples. Across the provision there is insufficient use of IT to help students to learn. There are no computers in the teaching rooms which are most used by the students.

36   Most students achieve their primary qualification aim. The college is careful to allow students sufficient time to complete portfolios so that they have the best opportunity to succeed. Enrolment and retention targets are met. Inspectors agreed that the rate of retention is a strength. Retention rates have improved from 76% in 1996-97 to 94% in 1999-2000. The data on students' achievements do not accurately reflect students' progress or the achievement of qualifications. Therefore a table of students' achievements has not been included. Inspectors also agreed with the college that the provision of work experience on the vocational access course is a strength. Students are enthusiastic about their work placements, which are chosen to suit their levels of maturity. For the past two years all the students have moved on to foundation level vocational courses at the college or elsewhere. In a social firm for students recovering from mental health difficulties, 50% of students found employment last year, which compares well with the national average for the sector. Social firms work with a range of other local charities to improve employment prospects. In some firms former students had gained appropriate qualifications and were working as assistant instructors.

37   The college recognises that accommodation for students with learning difficulties is poor. Much of the teaching takes place in mobile huts where there is insufficient space for teaching or storage of resources. Learning support assistants are trained by a local charity for

people with disabilities; they have an induction to the college and are valued by staff and students. Their skills are not always made full use of by teachers.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

38   Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good lesson plans

- effective student involvement in reviewing progress

- sound policy and practice for widening participation

- good support for part-time teachers and volunteers

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory individual learning targets

- over-reliance on paper-based exercises in teaching

- underdeveloped monitoring and recording of achievement

- no co-ordination of basic skills work across the college

- insufficient IT facilities

39   The scope of the inspection included primary basic skills provision within the college and community, and training in basic skills to support learning and to help to develop key skills. The college has recently formed a new learning support academic division, in which provision for primary basic skills and learning support are included. Other provision is offered through lunchtime mathematics and key skills workshops linked to vocational courses. Responsibility for these workshops rests within different vocational areas. There is no overall co-ordination or planning for the development of basic skills across the college. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

40   Basic skills support is available to all students in the college. Full-time students are screened and those on courses at level 1 or below are interviewed to discuss screening results and to establish their specific needs. Appropriate support is then offered. Part-time students are not screened but are offered support if they request it.

41   The basic skills co-ordinator has good contacts within the community and is a member of the Cambridgeshire Learning Partnership. The college has developed initiatives to widen participation in further education and extend community provision. It has run three successful family learning courses in partnership with the local education authority (LEA). It has also established basic skills provision for the workplace for care assistants in a residential care home and a basic skills class for adults with mental health problems. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the effectiveness of the college's basic skills provision in the community is a strength.

42   Most teaching is satisfactory. However, only 10% of teaching was judged to be good or outstanding, compared with the programme area average across the sector of 49% in 1999-2000. Most lessons had individual lesson plans to suit each student. However, targets that were established to motivate students to learn were often imprecise. The college recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report. There were some examples of effective learning. One student spoke of how she was learning to measure and could now 'visualise' a metre; she felt confident that she would be able to purchase material to make curtains. However, there is a lack of appropriate planning for the development of skills. Instead, teachers rely on students working through paper-based exercises which were often of little value. Insufficient

attention is paid to developing independent learning skills and there is also insufficient recording of learning. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses. There is poor attendance in basic skills workshops. The basic skills co-ordinator follows up absences with students' course tutors, but course tutors do not always respond by encouraging students to attend sessions.

43   A small proportion of primary basic skills students choose to follow a basic skills qualification. Out of 136 students enrolled in classes in 1999-2000 only 26 achieved a qualification. Other students had appropriate personal learning goals which did not include a qualification. The data on students' achievements do not accurately reflect students' progress or the achievement of qualifications. Therefore a table on students' achievements has not been included. Regular reviews of progress are carried out with students in basic skills classes and with those receiving basic skills support. Students are involved in assessing their own achievement against their individual learning goals. Most students perceive that their skills and confidence have improved. However, the recording of achievement of basic skills students who are not seeking a qualification is underdeveloped. Achievement is not measured against clear targets. This shortcoming was acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report and is addressed in the action plan. The college does not monitor the effectiveness of basic skills support for students on vocational courses.

44   There is good support for part-time teachers and volunteers. The co-ordinator visits and observes lessons regularly and gives appropriately detailed and constructive feedback to teachers. Teachers are encouraged to evaluate their own teaching, and identify areas for staff development. Few teachers have a specialist qualification in the teaching of basic skills. Volunteers are all given initial training and are invited to attend staff development

sessions. Inspectors agreed with the college that the lack of IT facilities is a weakness. There is only one computer in the basic skills base room and it has only recently been connected to the college network and the Internet. There are no computer facilities for basic skills students following courses at community venues. Cramped accommodation in the basic skills base room means resources are not readily available to students; only small numbers of students can use the room at any one time. Key skills support takes place in a range of classrooms when they are vacant; some are not appropriate or adequately resourced.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

45   Inspectors agreed with some strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered others to be no more than normal practice. They identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- appropriate pre-entry information, advice and guidance

- helpful and informative induction programmes

- good personal and pastoral support for individuals

Weaknesses

- some deficiencies in tutorial practice

- inadequate arrangements for careers education and advice

- insufficient provision for, and low take-up of, additional learning support

46   Inspectors agreed that the college provides appropriate pre-entry information, advice and guidance to prospective students. An attractive and well-judged prospectus and individual course leaflets give clear information. There is an information office in the main foyer and an information officer is available to explain courses in more detail to potential students. College staff attend careers events in most local schools. Applications are processed centrally and interviews are arranged with subject staff. Guidance is provided at information evenings and during initial interviews. There is an interview checklist and a standard form for recording the results of interviews but no record of the actual discussions are kept. Students benefit from a helpful and informative induction programme as noted by the college in the self-assessment. Part-time students are entitled to an induction appropriate to the length of their course. Student surveys indicate that students find induction helpful.

47   The college provides good personal and pastoral support for students, a strength recognised by the self-assessment report. Students value highly both the formal and informal support given by their personal tutors and subject teachers. Students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia receive appropriate and effective support. The student services unit provides sound advice on financial matters. Access funds are administered efficiently. However, the range of services is not systematically monitored to evaluate their effectiveness. The unit itself is not easy to reach. It is located in an office setting and does not provide the kind of welcoming atmosphere that would encourage full use of the service by students. The professional counselling service is valued by students and staff. The college caters effectively for the support needs of adult students. Many courses and timetables have flexible arrangements that meet the needs of adult learners.

48   Inspectors identified some deficiencies in tutorial practices, which were partially acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Although standard college documents are used for recording students' progress, the actual records made by tutors are often superficial. Tutors are required to set specific targets and deadlines for students, but such goals are not always clearly identified. Tutors are not sufficiently thorough in building up action plans with individual students. The standard of group tutorials is uneven. The tutorial handbook contains a policy statement charging tutors with the responsibility for the pastoral and academic support of students and for advice and planning on careers and opportunities for progression in further and higher education. It also contains a list of suggested activities for tutors but does not specify any compulsory elements to be covered by all tutors to ensure that the individual student entitlement is met.

49   Careers education and advice on progression are offered through tutorials. Inspectors did not agree with the college that this provision is a strength. There are inadequate arrangements to ensure effective delivery of these aspects of tutorials. Guidelines are provided for tutors but their implementation is often unsatisfactory. Some students complained that they did not get information about all the progression options available to them. The college careers co-ordinator makes a useful contribution to tutorial programmes when invited to do so but is only allocated one hour a week for such activity. The co-ordinator also co-operates with personal tutors in helping students to make their applications for higher education. A careers adviser from a private agency offers individual careers interviews but only attends the college on one morning a week. There is a well-stocked careers library adjacent to the main library.

50   The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge the low take-up of additional support for literacy and numeracy. During induction all full-time students are screened to identify whether they need help with these skills. Tests are marked by subject tutors. At the time of the inspection, some test results had not been returned. Where students are identified as needing additional support they are invited for an interview and then arrangements are made for them to attend the academic support workshop. Many students invited for interview do not attend. In 1999-2000, only 33% of those identified as needing support received it. Those who did attend followed relevant and appropriate individual learning plans. However, such additional support is generally limited to attendance at workshop sessions. There is little support provided on an individual basis during lessons. Many students are resistant to attending workshops. There is little systematic liaison between additional support tutors and personal tutors to monitor and encourage student participation and progress.

General Resources

Grade 3

51   **Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found one additional weakness.**

Key strengths

- well-furbished permanent classroom accommodation

- an attractive and well-equipped library at the Huntingdon campus

- extensive and well-used sports facilities for student and community use

Weaknesses

- low utilisation of accommodation

- some poor accommodation

- an unattractive and poorly laid out reception area

52   The college has two main locations. The Huntingdon campus is close to the town centre and the St Neots campus is adjacent to two schools and a health centre. A local surgery and health clinic is currently being built at the front of the Huntingdon campus. It is anticipated that this will draw more local residents into the college. Inspectors agreed that the college has made improvements to the accommodation since the previous inspection. Four mobile classrooms have been demolished. General classroom accommodation is well furbished. Carpets, good furniture, whiteboards and overhead projectors and screens are standard provisions in most classrooms. A few work surfaces in some rooms, including computer rooms, have been lowered for students who use wheelchairs. Both campuses are clean, free from graffiti and generally well maintained, but some toilets are dirty and cold.

53   As recognised in the self-assessment report the remaining mobile classrooms although they have been remodelled since the previous inspection, provide unsatisfactory learning environments. Their heating is inefficient. Some other aspects of accommodation are also unsatisfactory. Lighting levels are inadequate in some corridors and general areas. Changing facilities attached to the sports hall are in a poor condition. The reception and information area is unattractive and badly designed. There are no signs to indicate where prospective students can obtain information about the college. Reception is behind partitioning and has a counter too high for wheelchair users. Student services are located in another office some distance from the information area. The college accommodation strategy recognises these problems and the low utilisation of accommodation. Options have been identified to address these issues. Utilisation at the St Neots campus is particularly low in comparison to sector averages. The college acknowledges that there is inadequate centralised information to enable efficient monitoring of the use of its accommodation.

54   Access for students with restricted mobility has improved since the previous inspection. A lift has been installed to enable students to reach the business studies classrooms. Where possible, rooms are allocated to allow access to students in wheelchairs. However, the photography area remains inaccessible to them. Some of the double doors in the college do not have automatic stops and are difficult to open for wheelchair users.

55   As the self-assessment report notes the college has developed an IT network which is fast and responsive. The information and learning technology strategy is comprehensive and promotes effective access for staff and students. Staff and students have electronic mail and the college has introduced an intranet. Students report that staff at the helpdesk and other IT support staff are responsive and quick to identify and repair faults. Students at the Huntingdon campus have access to sufficient computers including those with Internet connections. Rooms with high specification computers are timetabled for class use. As a consequence these computers cannot be available on an open-access basis.

56   The library is spacious and has good facilities for study. There is a qualified librarian and extensive guidance is available to staff and students. There is a separate quiet study area and 10 computers that are connected to the Internet and college intranet are available. There are sufficient books and periodicals and a good range of videos. The ample stock of CD-ROMs can be used on dedicated machines. There is no library at the St Neots campus but there are arrangements for the library at the Huntingdon campus to provide resources as required.

57   Since the previous inspection, the college has built a fitness facility with an extensive range of equipment for college and community use. These good facilities include a separate weights room, showers and a sauna. Monitoring of attendance shows that it is well used by students who benefit from a substantially reduced membership fee. A wide range of supervised sports activities are available at lunchtimes. There are tennis courts and a playing field. The refectory offers a range of hot and cold food that is cooked on the premises at reasonable prices. In addition there is a small coffee shop which opens at times that suit staff and students. The college nursery, situated in a former mobile classroom, has 52 places, is free to full-time students and is bright, clean and well maintained.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

58   Inspectors agreed with some of the college's judgements but identified additional weaknesses. The college overestimated progress in improving quality assurance arrangements since the previous inspection.

Key strengths

- effective procedures for gathering evidence to support self-assessment

- good opportunities for staff development

- effective methods to gather the views of students

Weaknesses

- inadequate monitoring of franchised provision

- some unsatisfactory course reviews

- deficiencies in action-planning

- shortcomings in monitoring the charter and complaints

- underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements in non-teaching areas

59   Although inspectors agreed with the college that some improvements have been made to quality assurance procedures since the previous inspection, many weaknesses identified in the previous report have not been adequately addressed. Responsibility for the management of quality assurance is vested in managers at different levels. Weaknesses remain in overall management and the co-ordination of arrangements. As a consequence, insufficient progress has been made in developing effective strategies for improvement, for example raising the poor rate of student retention.

60   Inspectors did not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the

college effectively monitors franchised provision. There is a lack of formal reporting procedures and monitoring arrangements. For example, the results of visits to franchise partners are not routinely recorded. Where issues have been identified for improvement the college has not taken prompt remedial action. There is no single manager with overall responsibility for assuring the quality of franchised provision.

61   The college produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. Inspectors agreed that the procedures for gathering evidence to support the self-assessment process, particularly in the evaluation of governance and curriculum areas, are effective. Lesson observations contribute to judgements on teaching and learning. There is comparison with national benchmarking data to support the judgements on students' achievements. Insufficient consideration is given to the significance of the strengths and weaknesses that are identified. No order of priority is established for rectifying weaknesses.

62   Procedures for observing and evaluating teaching and learning were introduced in 1998. By the time of the inspection, all full-time staff and most part-time staff had been observed at least once. Although teaching has improved since the previous inspection, the college has overestimated the degree of that improvement. The profile of grades awarded by the college is significantly above both the national average for lesson observations and the profile of grades for lessons observed during the inspection. In 1999-2000, 75% of lessons assessed by the college observers were graded 1 or 2, as compared with a national profile of 62% grades 1 and 2 for all inspections in that year. During the inspection 56% of lessons were graded 1 or 2.

63   Review and evaluation of the curriculum is based upon self-assessment reports on courses. The inconsistency in the thoroughness of

reviews was reported in the last inspection and remains a weakness. Some of the annual self-assessment reports on courses are insufficiently self-critical. Inspectors did not agree with the college that action plans adequately address weak course performance. Some course teams vigorously act on recommendations for improvement contained in course reviews but such a response is not common practice. Mid-year course reviews focus on feedback from students and their views about their courses. However, there is insufficient routine monitoring of in-year course performance to check if targets for improvement are being met. The college acknowledges that target-setting at course level needs further development. Although many course teams meet regularly, this is not a formal requirement of the quality assurance arrangements. Course teams do not always record the conclusions reached in team meetings. This weakness is noted in the self-assessment.

64   Students' views are systematically gathered twice a year through questionnaires. Responses are analysed for the whole college and by academic divisions. There is no subsequent action plan or formal report to show that the actions taken to address issues raised by students are appropriate. Student members attend meetings at course level and are represented at the academic board and on the corporation. The college charter contains general information about the college and outlines the service that the college aims to provide to students. There are few measurable standards and not all charter commitments are monitored. Complaints and the college's initial response to them are not centrally logged. Response times and subsequent actions taken to resolve complaints are seldom recorded. There is no routine reporting of complaints that have been received by the college to the academic board or the corporation. The academic board did not meet for two years and was reconvened in December 1999. Performance indicators and

service standards have not been developed for non-teaching areas. There are no procedures to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of support services for students. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

65   The college achieved Investor in People status in 1998. The results from the annual appraisal of teaching staff and the personal development reviews contribute effectively to the college's training and development plan. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are good opportunities for staff development and adequate financial resources to support them. During 1999-2000, approximately 83% of teaching staff and 56% of support staff attended a staff development activity. Staff development events are effectively promoted through a regular staff development newsletter.

Governance
Grade 3

66   Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report for governance but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- significant improvements from self-assessment
- thorough clerking arrangements
- good links with staff and students
- effective recruitment to board

Cross-college Provision

67   Inspectors and auditors agreed that governors conducted a thorough assessment of their own performance. Two comprehensive questionnaires, which reflect a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of governors, yielded a detailed and self-critical response, which has led to significant improvement. For example, induction procedures have been revised and governors have taken steps to strengthen their involvement in strategic planning. There is recognition that specific performance indicators and targets are needed to strengthen self-evaluation. The main target used at present is attendance at board and committee meetings, which is high at 87%.

68   Inspectors and auditors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there has been insufficient involvement by governors in strategic planning. Governors do not feel a sense of ownership of the plan, which is written by senior managers and presented for approval to the board. Governors recognise that the strategic objectives are not specific enough to enable them to monitor the college's progress effectively. They have recognised the need to improve student recruitment and have been active in requesting a systematic marketing plan.

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

70   The corporation has failed to carry out its statutory responsibility of ensuring the solvency of the college. The financial position of the college is weak. Over several years the board has approved inadequate financial forecasts and budgets which have led to operating losses. The capacity of governors to address this issue has been hampered by inadequate reporting by managers. The governors do not receive routine reports about franchising activities, which have grown steadily and now provide over a fifth of the college's income. Up to 12 months ago, management accounts for the corporation were presented irregularly and proved to be unreliable. The solvency of the college rapidly deteriorated. In response to the financial situation, the college, in autumn 1999, appointed a new assistant principal with responsibility for finance. Since then, governors have received more comprehensive management accounts and the finance committee has met monthly to monitor and review the position.

71   With backgrounds in business, finance and education, governors bring a wide range of relevant expertise and skills to the college. A search committee has been effective in recruiting new governors to provide the specific expertise that the board required. Seven new governors have been successfully recruited during the last 10 months. Prospective members are well-informed about the roles and responsibilities of governors and are invited for an interview as part of the selection process. An induction for new governors has been introduced, but there is no formal training plan to help governors to develop their role.

72   As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there are thorough clerking arrangements to support the work of the corporation and its committees. There is a well-qualified and independent clerk. Agendas

and papers are distributed in good time for members to read before their meetings, and minutes are clear. The clerk produced the board's first annual report in 2000, an appropriately detailed and thorough analysis of the corporation's activities. The standing orders for the conduct of business are clear and regularly reviewed. The governors have established a code of conduct, a 'whistleblowing' policy and a register of interests. The corporation's policies and procedures have been usefully collated in a governors' handbook. The corporation has an appropriate range of committees. Their business is reported formally to the full board meetings. All committees have relevant and up-to-date terms of reference and meet regularly.

73   Governors recognise that they need to strengthen procedures for the monitoring of the college's academic performance. They have not yet agreed a set of performance indicators for this purpose. The corporation has begun, through its curriculum and quality committee, to receive some information on targets, and retention and achievement rates. The corporation does not carry out a formal appraisal of the principal or the clerk. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

74   Governors make opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding of the work of staff and students. They have established links to curriculum areas through individual members' attendance at employers' consultative panel meetings. Some governors have spent time in the finance office and observed work in curriculum areas. They regularly attend events that celebrate students' achievements. Three students attend the corporation curriculum and quality committee meetings and there are two student members serving on the full board.

Management

Grade 4

75   Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned improvements in management information

- effective business and community links

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory oversight of college performance

- inadequacies in strategic and operational planning

- failure of budgeting and financial monitoring

- ineffective marketing

- insufficient promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities

76   The college's corporate management team consists of the principal and three assistant principals who are responsible for programmes, finance, and staffing and resources. This team and the curriculum managers of the six academic divisions comprise the full college management group. The corporate team and college management group each meet weekly. Communications between the heads of division and the staff they manage are effective. Regular newsletters and information sessions help to keep staff well informed. However, the senior managers have not developed effective procedures for the thorough oversight of the performance of the college. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Significant issues affecting the whole college such as the quality of teaching and

learning, the curriculum offer and students' achievements are not regularly monitored and reviewed by the management group.

77   Inspectors found inadequacies in the college's strategic and operational planning which were not identified in the self-assessment report. The strategic plan is insufficiently detailed. It does not give specific targets against which progress can be measured. It does not clarify how the financial strategy is integrated with other aspects of planning. The annual operating plan and plans at divisional level also lack specific objectives and targets, which link to the strategic aims. The action plan contained in the college's self-assessment of management does not address important aspects of improving college performance, such as raising levels of recruitment and rates of student retention. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college lacks an effective marketing plan. It has not identified its marketing aims and produced a marketing strategy.

78   Inspectors agreed that progress has been made in improving management information since the last inspection. Following an analysis of requirements at curriculum level, the management information system has been enhanced and now provides regular reports on students and courses. In some areas, curriculum managers have made good use of the reports to monitor progress in recruitment, rates of retention and achievement, and course efficiency. Staff utilisation is carefully monitored. However, class sizes are small. An average class size of 8.4 compares with the national average figure of 10.3. There are many instances of small groups of students following similar qualifications.

79   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college has had three assistant principals responsible for finance in the last two years and there have

been staff changes within the finance team. Budgetary control has not been effective. As recognised in the self-assessment report, significant unplanned operating deficits have been made in recent years. The college's financial position is poor and the latest financial forecasts are not supported by a detailed risk analysis or detailed contingency plans. Monthly management accounts are produced in good time for the active consideration of both governors and senior management. The content of the management accounts has recently been revised and they now provide historical and forecast financial information. Recently updated financial regulations are comprehensive and supported by detailed financial procedures. Both internal and external auditors have identified significant deficiencies in internal control. The internal auditors have highlighted significant weaknesses in key operational controls over the college's increasing and significant franchise provision in the areas of quality assurance checks and the maintenance of student records. Reports provided by managers to governors on franchising are irregular and lack sufficient detail.

80   Inspectors agreed that there are effective business and community links. Employer liaison panels provide a useful forum for considering the relevance of courses to employment needs. The college is a member of the Cambridgeshire Learning Partnership. It plays a significant role in 'Oxmoor Opportunities', a government funded initiative designed to widen and increase participation in learning among residents on a large local housing estate where current participation rates are low. There are some good links with universities, colleges and community groups.

81   As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there has been insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities. There is a lack of quantitative targets and data to assess the impact of equal opportunities policies on students, although some progress has been

made in collating data on staff. The equal opportunities policy was produced in 1996 and has not subsequently been reviewed or revised. FEFC and TSC inspectors found little evidence of current strategies to promote equal opportunities in teaching or in the workplace. An equal opportunities co-ordinator has recently been appointed to address this weakness.

Conclusions

82   The inspection team found the self-assessment report to be a useful document for the inspection. It presented a substantial body of evidence, although it did not clearly identify the most significant strengths and weaknesses. The report was the outcome of a wide-ranging and complex process, which involved staff and corporation members. Strengths in teaching were overstated. The college's grading of lessons was overgenerous although there was some improvement in the standard of teaching since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with one of the six grades in the self-assessment report for curriculum areas. They awarded lower grades for three areas and higher grades for two areas. Inspectors agreed with two of the college's cross-college grades and awarded lower grades in three cross-college areas.

83   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 (July 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	6
16-18 years	10
19-24 years	19
25+ years	65
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	24
Level 2 (intermediate)	26
Level 3 (advanced)	28
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Level not specified	11
Non-schedule 2	10
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 2000)

Programme area	Full-time	Part-time	Total provision (%)
Science	85	434	15
Agriculture	25	129	4
Construction	13	43	2
Engineering	71	122	6
Business	86	343	13
Hotel and catering	26	34	2
Health and community care	96	422	15
Art and design	58	472	15
Humanities	103	564	19
Basic education	62	250	9
Total	625	2,813	101

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 1% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	56	36	0	92
Supporting direct learning contact	15	2	0	17
Other support	63	4	0	67
Total	134	42	0	176

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£4,531,212	£4,474,274	£4,918,125
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.18	£17.52	£17.94
Payroll as a proportion of income	67%	69%	64%
Achievement of funding target	104%	102%	*
Diversity of income	25%	25%	32%
Operating surplus	–£224,697	–£286,822	–£332,073

Sources: Income – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)
Payroll – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Diversity of income – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)
Operating surplus – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)
*audited accounts not available

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	439	366	402	1,234	1,201	1,214
	Retention (%)	89	81	80	83	77	73
	Achievement (%)	84	80	73	65	78	73
2	Number of starters	747	676	648	982	1,070	1,268
	Retention (%)	76	72	73	84	77	78
	Achievement (%)	60	58	63	69	68	74
3	Number of starters	275	307	405	1,187	1,004	848
	Retention (%)	81	71	69	83	86	79
	Achievement (%)	53	63	58	45	61	70
4 or 5	Number of starters	9	–	–	116	116	94
	Retention (%)	67	–	–	96	89	90
	Achievement (%)	17	–	–	54	65	72
Short courses	Number of starters	100	127	72	2,926	691	645
	Retention (%)	91	95	85	99	95	89
	Achievement (%)	63	46	72	95	65	80
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	43	119	360	377	250	635
	Retention (%)	81	96	90	95	91	88
	Achievement (%)	87	67	88	83	71	89

Source: ISR
– ISR data not collected

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