

# Kidderminster College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1998-99**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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## Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

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

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

## Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

# Summary

## Kidderminster College

### *West Midlands Region*

#### **Inspected October 1998**

Kidderminster College is a small general further education college in the town of Kidderminster in the Wyre Forest District of Worcestershire. The college had the experience of three major changes to its management structure in the 18 months before inspection. The last of these was due to be fully implemented the week after the inspection. Inspectors concluded that the college's first self-assessment had many shortcomings. Inspectors agreed with only two of nine grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected. The absence of systematic quality assurance was an important contributory factor. Many of the aspects of provision identified as strengths in the report were considered by inspectors to be no more than is normally expected. Some realistic evaluations of weaknesses were made against quality statements set out in Council Circulars 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* and 97/22, *Joint Working: Audit and inspection*. Governors and managers have already initiated preliminary remedial action in response to these. Governors are committed to the college. Communication has improved. There are extensive and productive links with external organisations. The college has a well-organised system of admissions and provides effective additional learning support. Improvements to the accommodation have been made in key areas

and there is good IT provision. The internal verification systems are effective. Inspectors agreed that by developing new courses for a wider cross-section of the community the college is meeting part of its redefined mission.

The college offers courses in nine FEFC programme areas. Inspection covered four of these curriculum areas and aspects of cross-college provision. Grades awarded for lesson observations fell substantially short of the average for all colleges inspected in the previous year. Nevertheless, inspectors observed a few examples of outstanding teaching in each curriculum area. There is satisfactory provision in engineering, care and modern language courses. Achievements in business are poor. The college does not give enough attention to students' and employers' views and has been slow to respond to weaknesses identified during the previous inspection. The college should address: slow progress in developing quality assurance procedures; lack of effective monitoring of the college's performance; the decline in students' achievements and low levels of retention; the poor quality of strategic and operational plans; inefficiencies in staff deployment; the lack of an effective marketing strategy; the governors' ineffective oversight of the college's strategic direction, their inadequate monitoring of the college's performance and their ineffective conduct of corporation and committee business.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Engineering	3	Support for students	3
Business	4	General resources	3
Care	3	Quality assurance	4
Modern languages	3	Governance	5
		Management	4

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Kidderminster College is close to the centre of the town on a site established during the 1950s. Its origins are in the Kidderminster Mechanics Institute founded in the 1850s. The college has traditionally had strong links with the carpet industry. Present links are focused on management and design rather than technology. The college, for example, offers a degree in the design of floor coverings and interior textiles through an association with the University of Wolverhampton. The college provides a range of programmes leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs), many through its contracts with the Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, (TEC). The college curriculum embraces science, information technology (IT), engineering, business, health and community care, art and design, humanities and basic education.

2 The college attracts students with increasingly varied needs. They include students seeking to develop basic literacy, numeracy and life skills and students who aspire to higher education, or to a change of career. The college is a BBC Education Centre and is seeking to maximise the flexibility of study opportunities for students, through national Open College Network programmes. There has been a substantial increase in the numbers of students enrolling for IT and language courses. There are also more students who wish to pursue higher education programmes within the college.

3 The college draws most of its students from Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn, Bewdley and adjacent villages. It also provides outreach courses in Kidderminster and the Wyre Forest District. Kidderminster College's mission is 'to offer high-quality education and training in a supportive, congenial environment which promotes lifelong learning and enables post-16 students of all ages to maximise their potential

and achieve their vocational and personal goals'. The college seeks 'to be a centre of excellence for the county of Hereford and Worcester which meets the needs of employers and contributes to the economic prosperity and development throughout the area and beyond'.

4 Employment opportunities in service industries within the region have increased and there are a significant number of small and medium manufacturing companies on newly established industrial estates. A shift from full-time to part-time study at the college has been discernible as local unemployment levels have fallen to below 4%. Commuters make use of the good rail connections to larger employment centres such as Birmingham and Worcester.

5 There are seven high schools in the Wyre Forest District within seven miles of Kidderminster College. All have courses for 16 to 19 year olds which contributes to the college's difficulty in recruiting more than 15% of its students from this age group. During 1997-98, the college enrolled 7,291 students. This figure includes 1,523 students on recreational programmes and 281 students enrolled on programmes offered within collaborative partnerships. The number of students enrolled on programmes funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) was 5,557, of whom 724 were full time. The number of students enrolled on courses funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England was 211.

6 In 1998, the college employed 106 full-time equivalent teaching staff on full-time or fractional contracts together with 55 full-time equivalent non-teaching staff. In the past three years, 15 teachers have retired or accepted voluntary redundancy and 16 hourly paid staff have accepted mainly fractional appointments.

7 In February 1998, the governors appointed the former deputy principal to the post of principal and chief executive. A new management structure was planned for

# Context

implementation after the inspection. This is to include three deputy principals working with three newly appointed heads of school in an enlarged senior management team. The new heads will be responsible for departments of creative studies, lifelong learning and vocational studies.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	0	5	3	0	0	8
Other vocational	8	9	14	3	0	34
Other	0	1	1	1	0	3
Total (No)	8	15	18	4	0	45
Total (%)	18	33	40	9	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

# Context

## The Inspection

8 The college was inspected during the week beginning 5 October 1998. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the self-assessment report and considered information from other directorates of the FEFC. The college provided data on students' achievements, 1997-98, for the curriculum areas inspected. These were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and the pass lists issued by examining bodies, and were found to be mostly reliable. The college's data for 1998 and individualised student record (ISR) data for 1996 and 1997 were used to compile the tables in the curriculum area reports. The inspection was carried out by 10 inspectors, for a total of 35 working days, and an auditor working for five days. They observed lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college

documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff, and students. Inspectors also received a response from the TEC to a standard questionnaire. Two curriculum areas, art and design, and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, had been reinspected in January 1998 and awarded a grade 3. These areas were not included in the inspection.

9 The table on page 3 shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 45 lessons inspected, 51% were judged to be good or outstanding and 9% less than satisfactory. This profile compares with averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

### Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Kidderminster College	10.6	83
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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



# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 3

**11 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in courses at different levels and with different modes of attendance. There was little agreement between the inspectors' findings and those in the college's self-assessment. The self-assessment report lacked evaluative judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and overstated students' achievements.**

#### Key strengths

- good practice in the use of IT
- well-developed procedures for assessment and internal verification
- excellent results on computer-aided engineering courses
- effectiveness in guiding students to appropriate programmes
- good progression to employment

#### Weaknesses

- lack of variety in teaching
- lack of checks on learning in a significant number of classes
- inadequate feedback on assessment
- no work experience programme for full-time students
- poor links between strategic planning and curriculum development
- poor accommodation

12 The range of study opportunities in engineering includes first certificate and national certificate courses, and craft courses in electrical installation, electronics, and fabrication and welding. An NVQ level 2 course recruits full-time, day-release, and block-release students. Guidance for students is good. Teachers ensure that students are recruited to

programmes which meet their needs and develop their potential. The college assesses full-time students for basic skills and uses effective support strategies to help them to succeed. Engineering and learning support teachers work well as a team in planning and providing this support. There are poor links between market information, strategic planning and the development and management of the curriculum. The course review process lacks rigour. The department does not give enough attention to students' formally expressed views. Assessment and verification services for local industry are a positive development.

13 Teaching is uneven and there are few examples of outstanding teaching. Good lessons were well prepared. Teachers used a variety of learning methods, maintained a lively pace and monitored students' progress. In the poorer lessons, teaching lacked variety and little allowance was made for students' individual abilities. In many lessons, teachers did not check how effectively students were learning. In a particularly good group tutorial the teacher organised the students into teams, each of which elected a team leader. The task they were given involved the verbal control of an intricate practical problem. It was a successful exercise which achieved its twin objectives of induction and team building. Teachers plan the courses well and provide students with comprehensive information. Procedures for assessment and internal verification are good. Teachers make regular assessments without making the process a burden to students. There are examples of inadequate feedback which fail to provide students with the help they need to improve their performance: for example, the correction of grammar, punctuation and spelling in completed assignments is the exception. Inspectors agreed with the college that some full-time students would benefit from work experience in their learning programme.

14 Retention and pass rates in the predominantly part-time block and day-release

# Curriculum Areas

courses are similar to the national averages for this curriculum area. Full-time students on the vocational programmes have an excellent rate of progression to employment. Many of these students return to further part-time study through courses managed by Kidderminster College Training; for example, modern apprentices. There have been good pass rates on computer-aided engineering courses over the last three years. No attempt is made to raise levels of achievement by setting performance targets for individuals and groups.

15 Full-time teachers are well qualified. Part-time teachers provide complementary knowledge and skills which ensure that

curriculum requirements are met. Technicians actively support students' learning and provide good support to the teachers. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that much of the accommodation is dull and unattractive. Some teaching rooms are untidy and poorly furnished, and in some subjects this has a detrimental effect on students' learning. Machine tools are old but they are serviceable and meet the needs of the curriculum. The library has a large holding of engineering books and a few periodicals. Most of the stock is old and engineering students make little use of this resource.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G electrical/electronic engineering	1 and 2	Expected completions	28	16	44
		Retention (%)	89	81	66
		Achievement (%)	100	69	65
C&G computer-aided engineering	3	Expected completions	23	21	20
		Retention (%)	83	67	95
		Achievement (%)	89	100	94
BTEC national certificate/diploma	3	Expected completions	23	22	9
		Retention (%)	83	55	100
		Achievement (%)	*	73	100

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

\*no available data

# Curriculum Areas

## Business

### Grade 4

**16 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the college's judgements on teaching and learning. Overall, however, they concluded that some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were overstated or were at odds with inspection findings. Serious weaknesses in students' achievements were not identified in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- constructive and comprehensive assessment of students' work
- the comprehensive range of courses for women returners
- strong links with employers

#### Weaknesses

- low achievement on academic courses
- declining achievement on NVQ business administration and higher level courses
- significantly poor retention rates
- lack of systematic target-setting and monitoring of retention and achievement
- poorly furnished and poorly equipped classrooms in the management development unit

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its strength in providing a comprehensive range of full-time courses in administration and in IT for women returners. Women returners have contributed significantly to the substantial increase in IT course enrolments. Enrolments on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) full-time courses have declined over the past three years and some courses have not run. Course team meetings contribute to effective curriculum planning and to the monitoring of teaching and

of students' progress. Course reviews vary in style and rigour. Often, they contain too little evaluation: key performance indicators such as enrolment, retention and pass rates are not analysed on a consistent basis. In its self-assessment, the college states that there are effective links with employers and external clients on its management and professional courses. Inspectors agreed with this judgement.

18 There are examples of lessons that are well planned and enthusiastically taught. As claimed in the self-assessment report, teachers use a variety of teaching methods to sustain interest. In the better lessons, they check students' progress thoroughly and encourage all students to play a full part in class activities. On professional courses, teachers draw directly on students' experience in the workplace to illustrate points and to reinforce learning. The teaching of business communication skills is a strength. Some lessons in the IT workshop provided effectively for a mix of students working at different levels. However, in one lesson the learning was mismanaged, and in another the activity was not appropriate to the level at which students were working.

19 Students on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and management courses produce good work. On medical secretaries and NVQ courses, students' portfolio presentation is of a high standard. Business administration students demonstrate a considerable aptitude for and confidence in using computers and software applications, and business administration staff give constructive feedback to students in helping them to improve their work. The achievement rates on GCE A level business studies, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) accounting, and GNVQ courses are much lower than the national average. This is a significant weakness which is not recognised by the college in its self-assessment. GNVQ achievements are claimed as a strength in the college's report but the evidence provided by the ISR clearly indicates

# Curriculum Areas

that they are a weakness. There is also evidence of declining achievement on NVQ administration courses and on higher level management and accountancy courses over the last three years. The college recognises that retention rates for its GNVQ courses are poor. Achievements on modular programmes designed for women returners are good, although the college was not able to provide reliable data.

20 Inspectors agreed with the college's finding that accommodation and specialist resources in the management development centre are in poor condition. The classrooms are spacious but they are poorly furnished and lack any form of display. Workshops are effectively designed and well used; students have easy access to computer workstations and there are good facilities for group work.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ business administration	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	98	86	64
		Retention (%)	69	69	80
		Achievement (%)	89	82	58
GCSE accounts	2	Expected completions	28	21	23
		Retention (%)	64	33	61
		Achievement (%)	17	43	0
GCE A/AS level	3	Expected completions	22	9	21
		Retention (%)	82	33	62
		Achievement (%)	22	33	69
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	26	22	11
		Retention (%)	88	41	16
		Achievement (%)	87	67	50
The National Examining Board for Supervision and Management courses	H	Expected completions	60	41	83
		Retention (%)	98	85	88
		Achievement (%)	100	100	97
NVQ accounting/management higher national certificate	H	Expected completions	29	30	55
		Retention (%)	86	97	80
		Achievement (%)	63	55	41

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Care

### Grade 3

**21 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. The college's self-assessment for this curriculum area does not give enough attention to teaching and learning or to students' achievements. Inspectors considered that most of the strengths identified in the report were no more than would be expected of normal standards of provision. Inspectors found a substantial number of strengths and weaknesses that were not included in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- a good range of appropriate classroom activities
- students' lively and responsive contributions to classroom activities
- extensive checking of marking standards
- effectively planned and monitored work experience

#### Weaknesses

- declining levels of achievement on some courses
- some poor and declining retention rates on full-time courses
- poor completion rates for course units on GNVQ advanced and NVQ courses
- poor access to specialist equipment and materials
- inadequate data on students' destinations

22 The college has recently extended the range of awards it offers and improved students' opportunities for progression. A course leading to a BTEC award in childhood studies recruits full-time and part-time students. A new BTEC first award has been introduced

this year. The college provides NVQ courses in care and childcare. A GNVQ advanced in health and social care has been offered since 1995 but the intermediate level course no longer runs. Short courses in first aid are also available. Some courses lead to awards from the Open College Network. Course teams meet regularly and course documentation is good.

23 Teaching is well planned and well organised. Teachers present topics in an imaginative way. A wide range of teaching methods is used to promote learning. Group work is introduced frequently and effectively as a means of extending students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers use questions skilfully to draw out information and to illustrate points under discussion. In a few classes, topics and concepts were not studied in enough depth. Occasionally, teachers did not present enough new material. The effectiveness with which overhead projectors were used to present information to classes varied widely. Students on childcare and GNVQ advanced courses value their work experience. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that placements are carefully selected. They also found that students on placement were monitored regularly and carefully. Teachers promote the development of key skills and there are opportunities for students to follow a course leading to additional qualifications in areas such as IT and first aid.

24 Students work well and are interested and responsive in lessons. They show appropriate levels of knowledge, understanding and skill. Teachers prepare students carefully for their assignments and these are generally well presented. For one assignment, students were given valuable guidance on how to gather wide-ranging information on the hazards of smoking. Marking was generally helpful. Although there is an elaborate system for tracking and recording students' progress, a large proportion of students on the GNVQ advanced course, 1997-98, fell behind in their completion of

# Curriculum Areas

course units. At the end of the course they still had a lot of work outstanding and failed to gain the qualification in the time normally expected. Some students' work is of high quality. Students make good use of IT resources in their written work.

25 Levels of achievement show a marked decline on some courses. For example, pass rates on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies have been falling for the last three years and the pass rate on the GNVQ advanced course has fallen from above the national average to below it. Over the last few years a large number of students on NVQ courses have not completed the qualifications they were seeking. The college has made numerous changes to try to remedy this, including the use of additional underpinning courses. Retention rates are also poor. Retention levels on the BTEC national diploma and the GNVQ advanced health and social care courses are declining. Analyses of

the causes of poor retention and action plans to address it are not sufficiently well developed. Teachers carefully monitor attendance and seek reasons for non-attendance. The college does not have good data on students' progression.

26 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that specialist resources for health and childcare courses are a weakness. Staff rooms and storage areas are poor. Students are hampered in their development of practical skills by the unavailability of equipment. There is no use of display materials to support students' learning. For example, there are no displays of the students' creative and imaginative play activities with children and other dependent groups. There have been improvements recently to the first-aid equipment. The library bookstock contains a substantial number of outdated books and there is only a small selection of relevant journals.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ	2	Expected completions	*	*	14
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	48
National certificate in childhood studies	3	Expected completions	22	19	18
		Retention (%)	77	74	61
		Achievement (%)	100	86	100
National diploma in childhood studies	3	Expected completions	28	23	30
		Retention (%)	64	70	60
		Achievement (%)	100	94	78
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	13	30	30
		Retention (%)	93	50	54
		Achievement (%)	85	79	58

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

\*results not recorded

# Curriculum Areas

## Modern Languages

### Grade 3

**27 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in French, German, Spanish and Italian. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that some of these were overstated.**

**Weaknesses were understated or not recognised, particularly in respect of teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- recruitment and progression through modular courses
- effective and enthusiastic leadership at course level

#### Weaknesses

- some unimaginative teaching
- insufficient use of the language being studied
- poor results on GCSE courses
- poor facilities for teaching languages

28 The college decided to introduce modular accreditation courses for all part-time adult classes following poor results in GCE A level and GCSE examinations in modern languages combined with declining numbers and low retention. These courses are offered at four levels from entry level to level 3. An NVQ level 1 course is available to students in French and Spanish. A small number of students combine level 2 entry with GCSE at which they are generally successful.

29 Most lessons are well planned. Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies, including work in pairs, simulations, listening tasks and exercises in grammar. Students on an entry level German course were able to collect appropriate vocabulary for reserving hotel

rooms and then simulate successfully the booking process. Students on a course in French at level 1 benefited greatly from a lesson on number which was conducted entirely in French. Students from an advanced GNVQ course in leisure and tourism used material sent by the Spanish Tourist Board to improve their Spanish vocabulary and all were given individual tasks, appropriate to their ability in the language. Teachers willingly give time to support students who require extra help. They monitor written work carefully and give helpful advice. In a number of lessons, work was conducted at too slow a pace or lacked variety. As a result, it failed to sustain students' interest. Students in a level 3 class found listening tasks too difficult and lost interest before the teacher intervened. In a number of lessons, teachers missed opportunities to make effective use of the language being studied. At times, teachers did not recognise the differing abilities of students. In two lessons, classes were badly managed and teachers lost direction of the lessons. These weaknesses in classroom practice were not identified in the self-assessment report.

30 Modular accreditation courses have enabled the college to expand considerably the number of adult students studying modern languages. In 1996, 66 students took GCSE courses. In June 1998, 250 students completed modular accreditation courses. In September 1998, 386 students registered for modular accreditation courses. More than 50 students have progressed from one level to the next over a two-year period. Retention rates on most modular courses have improved at entry level, and at levels 1 and 2. Completion of four units has been achieved by a high percentage of students, particularly at levels 1 and 2. GCSE examination results in 1996 and 1997 were poor and retention rates were also poor. NVQ level 1 courses have poor retention rates but 100% pass rates. Students enjoy their classes and many rapidly gain confidence in speaking their new language. Students' work files

# Curriculum Areas

indicate progress and improvement in written language skills. Some students find the work difficult and the pace too rapid, and are diffident in their oral work.

31 Leadership at course level is good. One full-time member of staff co-ordinates 11 part-time teachers. The teaching team meets each month in the early evening. Meetings are well minuted and communication is generally effective. Teachers have developed effective schemes of work and share good practice. They have also instigated strategies to improve retention and attendance. The co-ordinator has observed more than half of the staff teaching. There is an effective staff handbook. Care is taken to obtain and evaluate students' views. The course co-ordinator does not have a

delegated budget. The section has no formal development plans or action plans.

32 The co-ordinator and six of the part-time teachers are qualified graduate teachers. Five of the part-time staff are not qualified as teachers and one is not yet a graduate. Two of the five are first language speakers. Inspectors considered that equipment to support language teaching is poor. This is not recognised in the self-assessment report. Cassette recorders are available and are widely used. There are eight audio booths, but the satellite television link is not extensively used and access to IT is poor. Accommodation is pleasant and well furnished but there is little attempt to create a more lively environment for learning by displaying suitable material.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in modern languages, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ (four units)	1	Expected completions	*	16	29
		Retention (%)	*	63	72
		Achievement (%)	*	100	100
Open College Network (four units)	1	Expected completions	*	91	79
		Retention (%)	*	58	79
		Achievement (%)	*	81	94
Open College Network (four units)	2	Expected completions	*	47	42
		Retention (%)	*	36	85
		Achievement (%)	*	76	83
GCSE	2	Expected completions	43	60	*
		Retention (%)	85	61	*
		Achievement (%)	36	26	*
Open College Network (four units)	3	Expected completions	*	*	36
		Retention (%)	*	*	94
		Achievement (%)	*	*	41

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

\*courses not offered



# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

**33 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They found a number of other weaknesses and a few further strengths. The college has started to take some action to address weaknesses identified in the self-assessment.**

#### Key strengths

- a well-organised system of admissions
- a good range of careers material
- effective provision for additional learning support
- good use of external support agencies

#### Weaknesses

- lack of co-ordination of student services
- underdeveloped schemes of work for tutorials
- unclear plans of action to improve students' performance
- students' lack of awareness of the function of the student information centre

34 Support for students is the responsibility of the deputy principal (recruitment and student programmes). This is a new post created in September 1998. Before this appointment there was little co-ordination and monitoring of student services, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. The operating plan for student services lacks clear objectives, targets, allocated responsibilities, monitoring procedures or links to the strategic plan.

35 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there are well-organised procedures for admissions. These include thorough arrangements for interviewing and tracking potential students and informing them

about their interview and enrolment procedures. The college's publicity materials are good. Most students find enrolment efficient and induction worthwhile. Potential students, however, have few opportunities to sample the curriculum before enrolment. Only one curriculum area has developed the use of accreditation of prior learning. In its self-assessment, the college recognises that induction has been unsatisfactory for students who arrive late to their courses. The college is resolving this issue by providing additional induction sessions and a newsletter for part-time students and late starters. Students have a poor level of awareness of the function of the student information centre. The centre does not open at lunch times which was a weakness noted during the previous inspection.

36 Students find tutors helpful and supportive. Full-time students have regular timetabled tutorials. Inspectors only partly agreed with the college's assessment that tutorials are good. Inspectors found that a few are, but that many are of a lower standard than they would expect. There has been little staff development aimed specifically at the effective delivery of tutorials. The college has an established system for reviewing students' progress but the completion of students' review forms is of uneven quality. Plans to improve students' performance often lack clear targets.

37 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there are effective arrangements to provide additional learning support. The college assesses all full-time and part-time students following its main programmes to see whether they need support with communication, numeracy and IT. Most students who are offered additional support make use of the service. Learning materials are adapted to meet the requirements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college makes good use of professional expertise from outside the college in assessing and providing support for these students: audio cassettes,

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voice-activated software and lesson notes in large print are available. There is no formal system under which personal tutors are provided with feedback on the progress of those students who are receiving support.

38 The college provides a good range of information on careers and progression to higher education. This includes CD-ROM databases, videos, books and leaflets on careers, and help with the preparation of curricula vitae and letters of application. External advisers give individual guidance interviews and career talks, as part of a partnership agreement with the local careers service. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment finding that the number of students receiving guidance from the local careers service was low. Only one-third of those students targeted for careers advice received help.

39 Personal counselling is available from a well-qualified and experienced counsellor. Students are clearly aware of the service and use it frequently. The college uses external support agencies to enhance the personal counselling service, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. No provision is made by the college for the personal counsellor to receive professional supervision. Inspectors agreed with the weakness, identified by the college, that there is no monitoring of students' views on counselling. The college provides a useful range of advice on financial and social security matters. Arrangements for the administration and allocation of monies from the access and hardship funds are clear. However, there are no procedures under which the administrator of the funds can be assured that students who receive financial support are attending college. There are subsidised childcare facilities registered with the local county council.

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

**40 Inspectors confirmed many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that the evidence provided in the report was not of sufficient quality to support all of the judgements which were made.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a well-resourced learning resource centre
- good computer and software provision

#### **Weaknesses**

- underused classroom and workshop space
- poor access to some teaching areas for students with restricted mobility

41 The college comprises four buildings constructed between 1956 and 1973. The structural fabric of the main buildings is sound. The college also has four prefabricated buildings which are close to the end of their usefulness: one is in a poor state of repair. Since incorporation, substantial refurbishment work has been undertaken and more is scheduled. Maintenance is well planned and carried out with minimum disruption to students. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the college is clean and tidy.

42 The college acknowledges that its classroom and workshop space is underused. The available space is substantially higher than needed for the present student numbers. Storage areas in the college are not used effectively.

43 Inspectors agreed with findings in the self-assessment that the strengths in the college's accommodation are in the areas refurbished to a high standard. These include: the information

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centre, the careers library, and one of the main buildings. The college refectory is also refurbished to a good standard. It is well used, clean, and caters for students until late evening. The reception area is centrally located but does not present a welcoming appearance. The quality of staff rooms varies: some are cramped and often untidy; others, such as the general administration area, are refurbished to a high standard. A lounge is being developed to provide a better communal area for staff. There is an absence of good wall displays throughout most of the college.

44 There are few communal areas for students. The one student common room is well used. The self-assessment report acknowledges the lack of sports facilities: students use a local sports centre about one mile from the college. All floors in two of the buildings are accessible to students with restricted mobility, but there is limited access to the upper floors in the other two. All buildings have ramps to enable wheelchair users to gain access to the ground floor but access to the main building is by use of a ramp some distance away from the main entrance. Although car parking adjacent to the college is minimal, there are several car parks within easy walking distance. Internal and external signing is inadequate.

45 The college has a combined service for all learning resources. It is centrally located near the main entrance and comprises the library, the audiovisual/education technology service, IT centre and reprographic facility. The library is well used: weekly text book issues, in relation to the number of students, are higher than the national average. Opening times are adequate. The bookstock is extensive and well above that expected for a small college. There is a wide range of periodicals and journals in most subjects. There are good links between the library and curriculum areas. Library staff have an effective say in the learning needs of the college through representation on committees. Learning resources staff are well qualified. The

college acknowledges, however, that staffing levels in the library are low. A computerised management system is in place. Most of the books held in the college, including those in curriculum areas, are on the database. Annual book losses are minimal. Library funding for the 1998-99 academic year is low. Ventilation in the library and study areas is poor. The office and work areas are too small and space for storing learning materials is inadequate.

46 The ratio of computers to full-time students meets the needs of the students. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the standard of computer provision is high. This was endorsed by students who have easy access to workstations and good-quality printers. Ten networked computers in the library provide access to the internet. Internet and intranet facilities, however, are only in the early stages of development. There is a useful selection of CD-ROM databases. Accommodation for IT is generally good. Lighting is adequate and there are adjustable chairs and sufficient work spaces around computers. The college does not have enough technicians to support IT and there is no cover for the audiovisual technician during times of absence.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 4*

**47 The college's self-assessment report includes some clear, objective statements about significant weaknesses in its quality assurance arrangements. However, inspectors concluded that the identification of weaknesses was not sufficiently comprehensive and that some strengths were overstated.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective internal verification of assessments
- an effective complaints procedure

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## Weaknesses

- inadequate strategy for developing quality assurance
- insufficient monitoring of standards and targets
- weaknesses in self-assessment
- ineffective arrangements for staff development

48 Inspectors found many weaknesses that were reported in the first inspection of the college. Arrangements for quality assurance had been subject to frequent change in the 18 months preceding the inspection and this had adversely affected the development of effective procedures. For example, the committee responsible for monitoring quality assurance was discontinued and there were interim arrangements for a year before it was reinstated. Inspectors agreed with the statement in the self-assessment that responsibilities for quality assurance are not clear and that the co-ordination of quality assurance is weak. A new management and committee structure is being introduced which will seek to clarify arrangements for assuring quality.

49 The quality assurance policy is not comprehensive, clear or current and the college lacks a systematic quality assurance process. Key aspects of the college's work are not subject to quality assurance measures. Arrangements are narrowly focused on course reviews, which are often weak. The extent and effectiveness of course monitoring was also noted as a weakness in the last inspection report. Many subject teams have developed their own procedures for assuring quality and, in a few areas, this has led to improvements in students' performance. Attempts to use course reviews to highlight weaknesses in cross-college provision have not been fully effective. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is a weakness in the monitoring of outreach work. Inspectors found

similar weaknesses in the monitoring of outward collaborative provision.

50 The college does not give sufficient attention to seeking the views of students. Annual surveys of students' levels of satisfaction have been of little value in assuring quality. Questionnaires have been poorly designed and the college has found it difficult to process the volume of data which they generate. The college has now purchased software for this task and several surveys with more clearly defined objectives are going to be used this year. Inspectors agreed with the college that the contribution of employers to quality assurance is not fully developed.

51 The use of standards and targets as a means of improving quality is generally weak. Many targets are poorly defined or are too general. For example, a college-wide performance target of 80% applied to many student outcomes takes no account of existing levels of achievement. Clear standards are specified for some cross-college activities but these are not monitored. Senior managers acknowledge the need to update the college charter and its related procedures manual to provide a clearer account of what is expected. The college's procedures for handling student complaints are clear and effective. In most cases, after reviewing the complaint, a constructive and prompt response is made and the appropriate action is taken.

52 The development of internal verification has been appropriately phased. The documentation is good, duties are clearly specified and there is training for teachers. Internal verification of courses has helped to improve the assessment of students. For example, there is more effective assessment of key skills and students have received better feedback on their work.

53 The self-assessment undertaken for the inspection was flawed in several ways. Meetings were held to make staff aware of the

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procedural requirements of self-assessment but insufficient attention was given to improving the evaluation process. Considerable slippage in the timetable for producing the report resulted in the final stages being rushed. Insufficient time was left for review and moderation. While there was full involvement of staff in the curriculum reports, too much was left to individuals for the assessment of some cross-college topics and for the final review.

54 Although there are examples of well-planned professional training, the college does not manage the professional development of staff effectively. It does not systematically identify training and development needs and does not make enough links between its planning and its professional development activities. Staff value in-house training and this has been increased to make better use of the low level of funds for staff development. The college acknowledges a weakness in the slow implementation of staff appraisal.

## Governance

### Grade 5

**55 Inspectors were unable to agree with the college's assessment of its governance. Many significant weaknesses had not been identified and a number of the strengths were overstated. Inspectors recognised that during a difficult year for the college, governors had sought to address weaknesses and had appointed a new principal and deputy principals.**

#### Key strengths

- governors' commitment to the college

#### Weaknesses

- ineffective oversight of the college's strategic direction
- inadequate monitoring of the quality of the college's activities

- deficiencies in the procedure for the appointment of governors
- failure to formally record decisions
- ineffective conduct of corporation and committee business
- lack of policies for open governance and accountability

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

57 Governors have not monitored the quality of the college's academic provision effectively. Although academic planning is a standing item at corporation meetings, there has been little consideration of matters relating to the college's academic performance. Governors receive from management an annual report on the college's activities. The report for 1996-97 was lengthy, consisting of separate reports on each of the college's curriculum and cross-college activities. The structure of the report did not make it possible for governors to discern any trends in performance. No discussion amongst governors was recorded or follow-up actions proposed. In their self-assessment report, governors identified a need for more contact with college staff. They have recently allocated a member to each curriculum area to improve their knowledge of the curriculum. This action has yet to make a significant impact on the effectiveness of governors. Progress against the achievement of previous strategic plans has not been reported termly to the corporation. Except for the completion of a self-assessment report, the corporation has not developed procedures to review its own effectiveness.

58 The corporation has 11 members, of whom eight are business governors including the

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chairman of the corporation. Governors are committed to the college and there have been high levels of attendance at recent meetings. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. Women are under-represented on the corporation. The college has not established a formal training and development programme for governors. A skills audit of corporation membership has not been carried out. The search committee has been ineffective in filling vacancies some of which have existed for a year or more. These vacancies have made it difficult for meetings of the corporation to be quorate. As a result, one corporation meeting was declared to be inquorate and was changed to a subcommittee meeting. The college has not developed its own written procedures for the appointment of governors including, for example, a job description for governors, a person specification or the use of public advertising. The application of formal procedures for the appointment of governors has been deficient in relation to the most recent appointments.

59 No committee has a remit to consider matters relating directly to students. There is no student member on the corporation and no formal channel of communication for students to make their views known to governors. None of the corporations' committees has a clear remit to consider curriculum matters or personnel issues, other than those relating to staff deployment and finance. Governors have a good record of attendance at monthly certificate presentation evenings for students.

60 The remuneration committee has not fulfilled its role to advise the corporation. There are no procedures for the formal appraisal of the principal. The corporation has not formally approved and kept records of decisions made in relation to the appointment of senior postholders.

61 Procedures for the appointment of the new principal were confused and the job description

did not comprehensively cover the responsibilities of the principal under the articles of government and the financial memorandum.

62 The college is seeking to fill the post of clerk to the corporation. The present postholder's other roles within the college do not allow sufficient time for the work involved as clerk to the corporation. Corporation and committee business is conducted ineffectively. On occasion, both the finance committee and audit committee have acted outside their terms of reference. The principal is a member of the audit committee, compromising the committee's independence from the management of the college. Agendas for governors' business do not clearly identify which items are for discussion and which are for decision. There is no consistent system for recording key decisions in the minutes of their meetings. Key papers for governors' consideration, for example the financial forecast for 1998 to 2001, have been tabled at meetings. Corporation and committee papers are only available on application to the clerk. Governors receive the college's management accounts at meetings of both the corporation and the finance committee. However, the external audit management letter on the college's financial statements for 1996-97 was not considered by either the audit committee or the corporation.

63 The corporation has recently established a register of interests. This is not comprehensive and has not been completed by two governors. Another governor has declined to make a full declaration of interests. The register is not available at meetings of the corporation. There are no standing orders for the conduct of the corporation's business. No policies have been established to determine payment of governors' expenses or a mechanism to confirm their eligibility to serve under the instrument of government.

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## Management

### *Grade 4*

**64 Inspectors agreed with some strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. Other strengths were overstated and some of the evidence was unconvincing. Inspectors found additional weaknesses. Between the submission of the self-assessment report and the inspection the college has made progress on action plans to remedy some of the weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- the development of courses to promote wider participation
- increasingly effective communications
- extensive and productive links with external organisations
- effective day-to-day organisation of curriculum areas

#### **Weaknesses**

- lack of effective monitoring of the college's performance
- failure to address the decline in students' achievements
- the poor quality of strategic and operational plans
- failure to co-ordinate and develop cross-college services and policies
- inefficiencies in staff deployment
- lack of an effective marketing strategy
- shortcomings in the development and use of management information

65 In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that changes in its management structure have led to weaknesses in management. Following the appointment of the former deputy principal as principal, the college has begun to address these issues. The college's management has not been fully effective in

planning and monitoring its provision. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college had responded to its redefined mission by developing new courses for a wider cross-section of the community. The college achieved its funding targets for 1996 and 1997. Modest targets have been set for attendance, retention and achievement. Senior managers have monitored student numbers and retention rates but there has been little monitoring of students' achievements. Managers have not systematically reviewed the college's performance against its own or national targets. They have not addressed an overall decline in students' achievements between 1995 and 1997, with pass rates falling from 93% to 47%.

66 The self-assessment report states that all staff have had an opportunity to be involved in constructing the agenda from which strategic and operational plans are derived. The college's strategic plan has recently been updated for 1998 to 2001 but is very general in its aims and contains no operational plans. It was produced after a college conference in June 1998. Inspectors found that staff, particularly non-teaching staff, had little awareness of the strategic plan. The plans submitted by curriculum areas consist mainly of lists of planned courses and resource requirements, without any supporting rationale.

67 Inspectors agreed that improvements in communications are raising staff awareness of college issues. A calendar of meetings has been established, but it does not yet include all groups of staff, and there is no clear framework for integrating planning with monitoring of the college's performance. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the academic board has not been effective in influencing strategic plans. The academic board has recently been reconstituted.

68 Earlier restructuring of the college's management produced confusion among staff about their reporting lines, roles and

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responsibilities. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that this led to failures in developing and implementing cross-college policies and services. The new management structure is designed to ensure that all staff clearly understand what is expected of them. Job specifications for many of the posts in the new structure below senior management level have not yet been developed. However, inspectors found that the day-to-day organisation of curriculum areas is effective.

69 The deployment of staff in the college is not efficient, as the self-assessment report acknowledges. While overall staffing costs are average for the sector, full-time teachers have been underemployed and part-time teacher costs are high. The college has taken action to address these issues. The self-assessment report also notes that staffing reductions led to an excessive workload for some staff and managers. There is no delegation of budgets below senior management level. Senior managers allocate resources to curriculum managers according to a formula that is not clear to staff.

70 The FEFC audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The finance team is led by a qualified accountant and is adequately resourced. The senior finance officer attends the senior management team, finance committee and corporation meetings for financial matters. The senior management team reviews the college's monthly management accounts, which are usually produced within management's target of three weeks after the end of each month. The management accounts include income and expenditure and balance sheet information. Cashflow is not forecast in detail beyond the year end. Management accounts are accompanied by clear supporting information on student numbers. Budget holders receive monthly reports against the budgets for which they are responsible. Finance committee minutes acknowledge a need for

budget-holder training. The college's financial regulations have not been approved by the corporation and, although updated, are not comprehensive. Financial performance indicators have been established. Performance indicators have not been established for the college's auditors. The college has forecast a deficit for the current three-year period and has identified a number of remedial actions. The financial implications of these actions have yet to be fully assessed.

71 The college's management information system produces useful analyses of student numbers and staffing hours. These are used extensively by senior managers. Few middle managers have confidence in the data and some maintain their own records. There have been problems with the accuracy of data and returns to the FEFC have been late. The self-assessment report acknowledges the need to review management information requirements. The college is developing an IT policy and ascertaining management information and IT training needs for staff. No use of the system has been made to support market research or to monitor equal opportunities.

72 Extensive and productive links with external organisations, including employers, higher education providers and careers services, have been developed. They lack co-ordination and an overall strategy. The college's new structure aims to address this by placing all marketing, liaison and business development within the remit of a senior manager.

## Conclusions

73 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first to be undertaken by the college. It was produced under difficult circumstances which included the absence of a systematic quality assurance process to underpin the production of the report. Inspectors generally found that much of the evidence used to support strengths in the report



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was unconvincing, or that strengths were overstated. Consequently, the inspection team was not able to agree with many of the college's judgements. The college placed insufficient emphasis on weaknesses in students' achievements and in teaching and learning. Nevertheless, inspectors considered that the college made some realistic and self-critical evaluations. They also found that, between the submission of the self-assessment report and the inspection, governors and the college's managers had taken action to begin to redress weaknesses. In arriving at overall judgements, inspectors used national benchmarking data, such as data on students' achievements, to a greater extent than the college. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded by the college in two out of the four curriculum areas inspected. Where there was disagreement, it was because important weaknesses had not been identified particularly in students' achievements. In the cross-college areas, the inspection team judged the college to be overgenerous in its assessment of all five aspects of provision. Significant weaknesses had not been recognised particularly in the areas of governance, management and quality assurance.

74 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 1998)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	13
19-24 years	13
25+ years	72
Not known	1
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	37
Intermediate	22
Advanced	16
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	21
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	53	870	12
Construction	0	47	1
Engineering	15	245	4
Business	159	999	16
Hotel and catering	37	318	5
Health and community care	211	711	12
Art and design	349	1,188	21
Humanities	115	814	13
Basic education	0	1,160	16
Total	939	6,352	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 13% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	62	44	0	106
Supporting direct learning contact	15	0	0	15
Other support	40	0	0	40
Total	117	44	0	161

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£4,950,000	£4,481,000	£4,563,000 (est)
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.24	£16.99	£17.41*
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	72%	70% (est)
Achievement of funding target	100%	106%	100% (est)
Diversity of income	39%	35%	40% (est)
Operating surplus	-£288,000	-£274,000	-£159,000 (est)

Sources: Income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	98	141	238	813	850	641
	Retention (%)	92	87	79	87	81	78
	Achievement (%)	97	53	49	98	37	61
2	Expected completions	401	492	418	541	510	493
	Retention (%)	83	77	72	89	75	73
	Achievement (%)	73	46	50	93	64	61
3	Expected completions	–	505	530	–	581	660
	Retention (%)	–	67	75	–	82	76
	Achievement (%)	75	62	64	88	73	60
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	5	0	–	63	101
	Retention (%)	–	20*	n/a	–	84	87
	Achievement (%)	100	n/a	n/a	93	79	69
Short courses	Expected completions	76	66	168	953	1,163	1,670
	Retention (%)	93	97	98	99	98	95
	Achievement (%)	99	72	43	97	48	47
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	151	433	415	714	798	1,122
	Retention (%)	83	69	69	90	73	81
	Achievement (%)	98	82	39	100	61	17

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

\*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

**FEFC Inspection Report 06/99**

**Published by the  
Further Education Funding Council  
December 1998**