

King George V College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

King George V College

North West Region

Inspected January 1998

King George V College, Southport, has over 1,000 full-time students, most of whom are 16 to 18 years old. The college offers courses in five of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Teams of college staff worked to produce the college's self-assessment report. Classroom observation informed the report and was moderated by an external consultant. The inspection team found the report to be honest and successful in identifying most of the college's many strengths and its smaller number of weaknesses. Provision in the college's three largest curriculum areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision.

Governors, managers and staff provide an effective learning environment for enthusiastic students. The college has developed several European links in addition to strong links with partner schools. Standards of teaching are good. Staff are well qualified and effectively managed. Most of them set, mark and monitor students' work meticulously. The quality of provision for students of English, history, languages and science is outstanding. These programmes enrol a high proportion of the college's students. Examination results are well above national averages in many subjects. Good pass rates at higher grades are also evident in a number of subjects. Attendance is excellent and

retention is good. The college has excellent systems for supporting students. Buildings, particularly the new Millennium Centre are attractive, well maintained and well equipped. Some classrooms are somewhat overcrowded at times. To continue to make progress, the college should address the lack of rigour in its operational target-setting, continue to develop its quality assurance system and improve its market research.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	1	Support for students	1
Business	2	General resources	1
English, history and modern languages	1	Quality assurance	3
Politics, psychology and sociology	2	Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 King George V College is a sixth form college with 1,030 full-time students situated on a single site on the outskirts of Southport in Sefton, Merseyside. Most of its students are 16 to 18 years old and come from north Sefton and south-west Lancashire. The college offers 25 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), several of which are also available as GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects; two courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at advanced level; and nine general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses. About 140 adult students undertake evening courses, mainly in information technology (IT). In 1997, 328 of the 428 students who left the college went on to higher education and 22 entered employment. Most of the remainder either deferred entry to higher education or continued in further education.

2 The local area is one with little manufacturing industry and most employment is in the fields of health care, retailing, tourism and financial services. Many members of the local population commute into Liverpool to work. The area has an unemployment rate above the national average and many families are on below average income. Merseyside is designated as a priority area for European funding. The college successfully applied for funds from the European Social Fund in 1996 and 1997. It works in collaboration with other Merseyside colleges to widen participation in further education.

3 There is a general further education college two miles from King George V College and the area from which students are drawn includes several schools with sixth forms. The college has special partnership arrangements with nine local state schools and one independent school for pupils aged 11 to 16. Between them they provide nearly half the college's students. Local

full-time post-16 and post-17 participation rates are above the national average for England and more than 10 per cent above that for the North West. In 1996, 44 per cent of year-11 pupils in Sefton gained five or more GCSE passes at grades C or above, compared with 44.5 per cent for England as a whole.

4 The college senior management team of six includes the principal, two vice-principals, two assistant principals and the head of administration. The college has three faculties, each with a head of faculty and a faculty pastoral tutor. Each head of faculty is responsible to the principal for the quality of the courses in the faculty. The college works closely with parents, schools and Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and has links with local employers. It is committed to expanding students' experience of Europe and gained a Recognition of European Quality Award from the Merseyside partnership for quality in education and training in 1994. The college's European links include long-term relationships with nine schools and colleges in various parts of Europe. Students undertake projects in subjects such as history and health and social care which have a European dimension. Recently, students have undertaken work experience in Sweden and a geography study exchange with Siberia.

5 The college's mission statement includes a commitment to high-quality academic and general vocational education for its students and a strong commitment to raising individual students' levels of achievement. Students achieve a high average points score per candidate and per examination entry at GCE A level, according to the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 19 January 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. These were validated by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision which was to be inspected two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors, working for a total of 28 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 51 lessons, examined a sample of students' work and a range of college documents. The inspection team held meetings with governors, managers, college staff and students and consulted the Merseyside TEC.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 78 per cent were judged good or outstanding. No lesson was less than satisfactory. This proportion of good or outstanding lessons is well above the average for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. There was a very good average level of attendance of 91 per cent in the lessons inspected. The highest attendances were in English, languages and history at 94 per cent

and the lowest in politics, psychology and sociology at 87 per cent. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	16	19	8	0	0	43
GCSE and GNVQ	2	3	3	0	0	8
Total	18	22	11	0	0	51

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 1

8 The inspection covered GCE A level biology, human biology, chemistry and physics and GCSE human physiology and health. On the whole, inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- good retention rates and excellent pass rates in most GCE A level subjects
- GCE A level grades that exceed expectations based on students' GCSE results
- meticulous marking, correction and annotation of students' assignments
- good accommodation, scientific resources and computer facilities

Weaknesses

- insufficient sharing of good practice between teachers in different science subjects

9 The courses inspected included all the science courses available at the time of the inspection except geology. A GNVQ advanced science course has only successfully recruited once in the last three years. Most students who complete the GCE A level programme go on to study science subjects in higher education.

10 The science teachers in each subject team work well together, share teaching resources and use the same detailed schemes of work. They compare GCE A level results with predictions based on students' qualifications on entry and use this information in their planning. There is, however, little sharing of good practice between subject teams and there is insufficient support for new teachers who work in more than one team.

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that lessons are well structured. Teachers encourage students to make verbal contributions during lessons. In a biology class, students gave talks on different types of illness. They were confident and well prepared. The teacher introduced the lesson effectively, summarised the main points at the end of the lesson and gave useful feedback on performance. Teachers regularly set, mark and return work to students. The marking is carefully done and includes excellent annotation covering corrections and full explanations of the marking scheme. Record-keeping is excellent. Teaching methods are effective. A few lessons do not have clear objectives. This is particularly true in revision lessons and academic tutorials.

12 Students participate enthusiastically in lessons and discuss difficult issues articulately. They attend regularly and a large proportion complete their courses. The work handed in by students is generally of high quality. However, some of their files are untidy and show poor note-taking skills. The self-assessment report included accurate judgements of high pass rates. Notably, all GCE A level chemistry students entered for examinations over the last three years have passed. The proportion passing with the higher grades A to C is 17 per cent above the national average for sixth form colleges. All GCE A level subjects have pass rates above the national average for 1997. The GCSE human physiology and health course has high retention rates but had pass rates below the national average in 1995 and 1997.

13 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report that all teachers are well qualified: they have appropriate degrees and teaching qualifications. Staff and physical resources are effectively deployed. Good use is made of posters and display cabinets to give the rooms a subject identity. They are well maintained but some are untidy. General scientific equipment is fit for its purpose and sufficient in quantity. Computers, other IT hardware and relevant software are readily

Curriculum Areas

available and of a good standard. Most of the laboratories have a computer with a printer and there is a small room containing several additional computers close by. Some rooms are, at times, overcrowded. One room has working surfaces at different heights, which is inconvenient for students doing practical work.

Examples of students' achievements in science, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level	Retention (%)	84	85	88
	Pass rate (%)	87	95	96
GCSE	Retention (%)	*	93	92
	Pass rate (%)	22	54	32

Source: college data

**data not available*

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

14 The inspection covered GCE A level and GCSE business studies and GNVQ advanced business. The self-assessment report on the programme area was thorough and evaluative. Inspectors considered that it accurately reflected the strengths and most of the weaknesses in provision. By the time of the inspection, the college had already remedied some weaknesses noted in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- good achievement rates
- well-planned work experience for GNVQ advanced business students
- high-quality IT facilities
- well-managed courses

Weaknesses

- teachers' expectations of students occasionally too low
- inadequate schemes of work and lesson plans

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that most of the teaching is effective, but in a minority of lessons the teachers' expectations of students are too low. In a GCE A level class, students undertook research tasks which helped to develop their IT skills. However, the students would have made more progress if they had not spent so much time making notes. Assignments are set at an appropriate level, many within a business context. They are marked thoroughly and meet awarding body requirements. Schemes of work do not give sufficient emphasis to the development of students' key skills. Some

lessons plans do not have sufficient detail. Teachers keep comprehensive records of students' progress.

16 Business courses are generally well managed. Staff hold regular meetings. They circulate agendas and minute action points. Internal verification procedures for GNVQ courses are effective and ensure standardisation of assessment. Teachers hold appropriate academic qualifications. A number also have training and development lead body awards. Most of the accommodation for business courses is of a high quality, although some rooms are too small for the groups using them. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there were effective resources for students' use. All teaching rooms are equipped with whiteboards, overhead projectors and screens. Several rooms have networked computers.

17 Students produce written work of a good standard; they make frequent use of IT to enhance its presentation. Students' analytical, problem-solving and research skills are effectively developed throughout their courses. GCE A level essays are well structured. GNVQ portfolios provide a thorough record of students' achievements. All GNVQ students have well-planned work experience. This work is then used in an assignment. Students' achievements in external examinations significantly exceed national averages for sixth form colleges. Of the 29 students successfully achieving the GNVQ advanced business diploma, four achieved six additional units and two also passed a GCE A level. Retention rates are good as stated in the self-assessment report. Most students progress to higher education.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level	Retention (%)	100	84	86
	Pass rate (%)	92	88	86
GCSE	Retention (%)	*	100	89
	Pass rate (%)	69	100	88
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	86	97	78
	Pass rate (%)	78	94	93

Source: college data

**data not available*

Curriculum Areas

English, History and Modern Languages

Grade 1

18 The inspection covered GCE A level and GCSE courses in English, French, German and Spanish and GCE A level history. The inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses listed in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much good or outstanding teaching
- excellent examination results
- high levels of retention and attendance
- imaginative and effective use of resources
- strong European links and valuable enrichment opportunities

Weaknesses

- insufficient sharing of good practice across subjects
- declining retention rates on GCSE courses

19 The quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum area is excellent as stated in the self-assessment report. The practice of having more than one teacher responsible for a group of students is proving beneficial to the students. Teachers use an appropriate variety of activities and tasks to maintain students' interest. They encourage students to air their views and when these are challenged, the responses demonstrate good subject knowledge. Students are skilled in communication and display interest in, and enthusiasm for their work. In languages, many students achieve a commendable level of fluency. History students show a high level of understanding, knowledge and skills in working with a wide range of source materials. In one lively and productive session, students reviewed

their examination manuscripts, identifying and agreeing examples of individual and class strengths and weaknesses.

20 The lesson plans in history are exemplary, but in other subjects little of the planning is committed to paper. Assignments are set regularly and marked thoroughly. Teachers' comments on assignments are helpful and constructive. The self-assessment report makes clear the importance placed on the work students do on their own, and the care with which it is marked. The fact that several of the teachers in the curriculum area are themselves examiners or moderators clearly has benefits for students. There is little sharing of good practice between teachers in different subject teams.

21 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that external examination results are good. All GCE A level results are well above the national average for sixth form colleges; 100 per cent pass rates have been achieved in several subjects. A high proportion of students achieve at the higher grades A to C. GCSE results are also well above the national average with the exception of English in 1995. Retention rates are high on many GCE A level courses. On GCSE courses, retention rates are declining, particularly in modern languages. In response, the modern foreign language department has introduced the vocationally orientated 'foreign languages at work' course.

22 All teaching staff have degrees and teaching qualifications; some have higher degrees. Foreign language assistants are well integrated with the rest of the teaching team. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that resources are excellent. In languages, good use is made of CD-ROMS, software packages, audiovisual resources, the language laboratory and a satellite link. There is some innovative use of IT in history.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in English, history and modern languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level	Retention (%)	79	77	81
	Pass rate (%)	95	94	97
GCSE	Retention (%)	86	71	52
	Pass rate (%)	68	98	95

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Politics, Psychology and Sociology

Grade 2

23 The inspection covered GCE A level politics, psychology and sociology. Inspection evidence confirmed the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college.

Key strengths

- clear links between theory, practice and students' experiences
- good development of IT, numeracy and communication skills
- comprehensive and helpful marking in sociology and politics
- good achievement rates
- high-quality learning resources

Weaknesses

- limited use of differentiated teaching strategies
- not enough checking on students' understanding
- some infrequent setting and poor marking of work

24 Inspection evidence confirmed the assertion of the self-assessment report that teaching is generally good. Most lessons involve the use of a variety of appropriate methods. Teachers integrate the key skills of IT, numeracy and communication with the main subject matter through coursework, data analysis and research. Lesson plans provide little or no detail of intended learning outcomes or consideration of individual students' needs. Few teachers use differentiated teaching strategies to meet the needs of students with different abilities. Some teachers fail to check whether students have understood the work being undertaken.

25 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that examination results are good. Pass rates are higher than the national averages for sixth form colleges. Students' achievements are often better than might be predicted on the basis of their GCSE entry grades. Most retention rates are at least satisfactory; retention rates in sociology are below the college average. In sociology and politics work is set regularly and marked well. Spelling, punctuation and grammar errors are corrected. In these subjects, the criteria for assessment are explained carefully to students. In sociology, students are encouraged to identify their own errors and to correct them. Some sociology and politics students demonstrate a high level of subject knowledge and the skills of analysis, criticism and evaluation in both written work and oral responses. In psychology, homework is not set regularly or returned promptly; factual, technical, spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors sometimes go uncorrected.

26 Members of course teams meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning, students' achievements and students' progress and to conduct review and evaluation. Student questionnaires are used in the evaluation of provision and action plans are drawn up on the basis of the responses. Teams organise extra activities for students such as visits to the Houses of Parliament and attendance at conferences.

27 Resources are of high quality as recognised in the self-assessment report. They include IT resources, research and reference materials, study guides, videos and class sets of GCE A level textbooks. Teaching takes place in dedicated subject rooms which have current and relevant subject displays. Accommodation is generally of a good standard, fairly well furnished, maintained and decorated and of an appropriate size. The psychology room is small for the size of the groups which use it.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in politics, psychology and sociology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level	Retention (%)	78	71	86
	Pass rate (%)	89	94	88

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

28 The self-assessment report covers all the main aspects of student support. It is concise and evaluative. Inspectors' judgements confirmed the strengths and some of the weaknesses identified by the college.

Key strengths

- clearly-defined admissions policies and procedures
- effective induction
- outstanding academic and personal support for students
- thorough systems for reviewing students' progress
- effective careers education and guidance
- a well-developed service for students who need additional learning support
- an extensive programme of enrichment activities
- active involvement of students in developing support services

Weaknesses

- failure to identify sufficiently early a few students' additional learning support needs

29 The college's admission procedures are well documented and effectively implemented. Inspection confirmed the college's own assessment that 'there is a very thorough system of support and guidance for applicants, with good relationships with 11 to 16 schools'. There are plenty of opportunities for prospective students and their parents to find out about the college and its courses. Individual interviews supplement presentations and group work in the schools. Induction is effective. The college has a good balance of activities to ensure that

students feel welcomed and receive enough information to enable them to settle quickly to college life and their studies. Students can request course transfers up to the first half-term.

30 The academic and personal support offered to students is of a very high standard. All students belong to a tutorial group which meets every day for registration and weekly for longer tutorial sessions. In the weekly sessions there are activities to help students develop wider skills and confidence. Students are set clear and challenging targets for achievement, attendance and behaviour. All of these are closely monitored by tutors. Progress is regularly logged in the students' record book. This book provides the basis for updating records of achievement and, where applicable, for completing application forms for higher education. Students speak with appreciation of the time and trouble tutors and others take in helping and encouraging them to achieve. The college has a well-publicised counselling service.

31 The self-assessment report outlines the progress the college has made in the provision of additional learning support since the last inspection. Inspectors found the new system to be effective. There is a common approach to learning support across the college and each department has policies for identifying needs and supporting students. The college takes a proactive approach to recruiting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It currently supports seven students with physical disabilities. Staff have had training to help them identify students who may need additional help. Once such students have been identified, they undertake thorough diagnostic testing and may be referred for specialist help if required. At the time of the inspection, 60 students were having additional learning support, largely on a one-to-one basis. The college recognises in its self-assessment report that not all students are identified sufficiently quickly as needing support. Departments offer a wide range of additional

Cross-college Provision

academic support for all students such as extra workshops and individual tutorials. The college operates a one-year GCSE course for students who did not qualify for an advanced course. Over half these students receive additional learning support. Retention and progression rates for this course are generally high.

32 There is an effective careers education and guidance programme for all students. All first-year students receive a programme of six careers lessons complemented by individual interviews. The college also organises a careers convention and visits to higher education fairs. All students are offered work experience. In 1996-97, all GNVQ students and 43 GCE A level students took up this offer.

33 The college offers an extensive range of opportunities to enrich students' experiences. All students are involved in the supplementary programme, which is partly used to prepare students for the GCE A level general studies examination, and to develop their IT skills. There is a sports programme and opportunities to take part in music and drama activities. Students are involved in all aspects of college life and they are positive about the opportunities they have to influence decision-making through the student council and their tutor groups. A new student services resource base is now open and students are helping to run it.

General Resources

Grade 1

34 The college's self-assessment report brought together its evaluation of all resources, including staffing and specialist resources. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements relating to general resources.

Key strengths

- high-quality accommodation
- a good learning resource centre with excellent IT equipment

- a well-stocked library
- good communal areas, refectory and sporting facilities
- appropriate work areas for all staff

Weaknesses

- rooms not utilised efficiently

35 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that it has accommodation of high quality, which is comfortably furnished and well maintained. Some classrooms are in mobiles which have been linked by covered walkways. All classrooms contain whiteboards or chalkboards and most have overhead projectors and screens. Video and audio equipment is provided as required. Communal areas include a refectory, common room, sports hall, sports field and tennis courts. These enhance the students' experience at the college and are well used. Teachers generally have appropriate work areas close to their classrooms.

36 The college sets an occupancy target for teaching accommodation. This was set at 60 per cent for 1996-97. In October 1997, a survey revealed an occupancy rate of 56 per cent. However, increasing class sizes have increased room utilisation and occupancy since then. The last timetabled period of the college day is not used efficiently.

37 The college's self-assessment report clearly acknowledges improvements in accommodation since the last inspection. A £2.6 million development, the Millennium Centre, was recently completed; it includes a library and learning resource area with study space for over 200 students. This area contains 75 networked computer stations, four internet stations, an integral CD-ROM system, learning technology and library resources. Further IT resources are available in classrooms. These include the resources in the new language laboratory, the 20 workstations in the computing room and one

Cross-college Provision

or more computers in most classrooms. Overall there are 134 workstations accessible to students, giving a ratio of students to workstation of about 8:1.

38 There is an appropriate stock of books in all curriculum areas. The library holds class sets of texts, journals, support packs, video and audio materials. Students borrow books regularly. An electronic counter records the use of the library and learning resource area and the resulting data suggest that, on average, each student uses the centre more than once a day.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

39 Inspectors found that the college's assessment of its quality assurance arrangements overstated some strengths and failed to identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a comprehensive quality assurance system
- use of performance data
- an effective system of classroom observation
- good staff development and training arrangements

Weaknesses

- lack of commitment to the quality system by some staff
- ineffective action-planning
- operational target-setting which lacks rigour
- no monitoring of some charter commitments

40 Since the last inspection, the college has made some progress towards the development of a whole-college approach to quality assurance as acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

The college has developed a quality review system which covers all aspects of the college's activities and is well understood by staff and governors. The system is still relatively new. Heads of faculties have not yet had time to establish themselves in their curriculum monitoring role. The system itself has not been evaluated.

41 A major part of the quality assurance system is the process of course review and evaluation. Well-structured course review documents are completed four times each year, culminating in a major summary report to managers in the autumn term. The subject leaders are required to refer to the main college targets, to evaluate provision in their subject areas, to summarise their judgements in terms of strengths and weaknesses and to produce an action plan. To support this, the college produces and distributes data on students' attendance, retention, achievement and progress. These data are not always well used. There are examples of good practice in using the data such as in history where teachers use local and national benchmarks in their reviews. Some subject reviews pay insufficient attention to the setting and monitoring of targets and contain poor evaluations and inadequate action plans.

42 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has introduced a good system for the observation of teaching and learning. An external consultant has carried out evaluation and moderation of the system. The information from the observations informed the self-assessment report. There are separate, confidential lesson observations which are part of the college's staff appraisal system.

43 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the formal arrangements for acquiring feedback from students and others are underdeveloped. Recently, the students have been asked for their views on specific issues such as the tutorial system. The college has not fully analysed the

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returns. A parents' group brings together around 15 parents eight times a year and encourages the discussion of perceptions about the college.

44 The college has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of its charter, during which it sought the views of students on the charter. Students are made aware of the charter commitments during their induction to the college and have confidence in the complaints process. The college charter sets out the entitlements of students but not those of parents, employers or members of the wider community. None of the statements of entitlement is expressed in quantitative terms. The college does not formally monitor its achievement of all the commitments in the charter.

45 The self-assessment report fails to acknowledge the well-organised staff development programme that aims to meet both college objectives and the needs of individuals. Training needs of teaching and support staff are identified through personal development plans, annual reviews, appraisal outcomes and the demands of the strategic plan. They are prioritised for inclusion in an annual training plan. Over 90 per cent of staff have taken part in two or more training events during the past year. There are application and evaluation procedures that allow the staff development manager to monitor the quality, relevance and impact of the training. The college gained the Investor in People award in January 1998.

46 The college's self-assessment process is an integral part of its quality assurance system. The college has established four quality areas; academic, pastoral, administrative, and governance and management. The appropriate team prepared each section of the self-assessment report and submitted it to the college quality audit group. The self-assessment report is set out under the headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*.

Action points follow each section, though responsibilities are not identified and timescales are not set.

Governance

Grade 2

47 The inspection team found that the college's assessment of governance overemphasised some of the strengths and failed to identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- experienced governors who use their expertise to support the college
- commitment to self-improvement and evaluation
- effective audit and finance and general purposes committees
- governing body's monitoring of the college's financial position
- comprehensive register of interests

Weaknesses

- search and remuneration committees not operating effectively
- arrangements for clerkship which carry a potential conflict of interest
- deficiencies in draft standing orders and code of conduct

48 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The governing body substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

49 The highly motivated governors are committed to the welfare and development of the college, as shown by their good attendance records at both governing body and committee

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meetings. As stated in the self-assessment report, individual governors have expertise in education, business, finance, law, engineering and national politics. Governors use their professional experience to guide and advise the college. All governors are linked to faculties and several work on college development committees with staff. They work hard to maintain a high public profile for the college and regularly attend college functions. The governing body has a membership of 16 including two staff and two co-opted governors. Only four governors are women. There are currently two vacancies for independent governors. The governing body feels that there are some areas of expertise which it is lacking and will take this and the current gender balance into account when making future appointments.

50 There are eight governing body committees; finance and general purposes, audit, search, remuneration, marketing, disciplinary and grievance, appeals and curriculum. The finance and general purposes and audit committees have operated effectively in accordance with their approved terms of reference. The search committee has never been formally convened and has not been properly constituted in that it does not have terms of reference, defined membership numbers, or members' terms of office. The remuneration committee had inappropriate clerking arrangements between March 1994 and November 1997 and no minutes were available for the meetings held during this period. The marketing committee is composed of governors and staff and its terms of reference incorporate operational as well as strategic matters. Consequently, the governors serving on this committee may be exceeding their responsibilities. The disciplinary and grievance and appeals committees have not so far had to meet. However, these committees, like the search committee, have not been properly constituted.

51 The governing body has a strong commitment to self-improvement and the critical evaluation of its own work. Governors ensure that they are kept well informed and up to date through a series of presentations by external and staff speakers at their meetings. However, as acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report, their training needs to be on a more planned and regular basis. Governors acknowledge the benefit of the externally delivered training day that they have undertaken recently, and wish to make it an annual event. The governing body has an established but continuously evolving self-assessment process which has detailed and appropriate standards against which it reviews its own performance. One governor is currently conducting a survey of individual performance through a self-assessment questionnaire. There are no specific, quantifiable targets in the board's own self-assessment documentation. Governors are exploring the development of these, particularly in relation to their attendance at full board and committee meetings.

52 The governing body has taken responsibility for the scrutiny of the college's finances. It approved the 1997-98 annual estimates of income and expenditure in July 1997 and it has monitored performance against budget by reviewing the college's quarterly management accounts. The governing body has a comprehensive register of interests and it has published an annual report of its activities within its 1996-97 financial statements. The governing body does not, however, have a code of practice on 'whistleblowing' and its code of conduct and draft standing orders require further development, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

53 The head of administration and personnel is also clerk to the governing body. She receives no administrative support in her role as clerk and consequently she takes the minutes of all full board and committee meetings. Given her

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responsibilities for clerking the audit committee meetings and for personnel functions within the college there is a potential conflict of interests in her performing these dual roles.

Management

Grade 2

54 The inspection team agreed with a number of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses as a result of the inspection.

Key strengths

- clearly-defined roles and responsibilities for most managers
- effective communication with staff
- efficient deployment of teachers
- extensive external links
- provision of accurate and timely information
- good financial controls and financial monitoring procedures

Weaknesses

- a brief operational plan, not subject to regular formal review
- market research that is variable in scope and effectiveness

55 The college's mission statement is 'to offer the best quality of service to students'.

Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff at all levels understand the mission statement, support it and are proud of it. The statement emerged from a wide consultation process in which staff were fully involved. The senior management team produced the strategic plan. Draft plans were discussed at faculty and other meetings involving teachers. There was less involvement of non-teaching staff. The strategic plan stems

from the mission statement and is designed to support its achievement. The operational plan is very brief. There is no explicit mention of resource issues. The senior management team monitors and records progress towards the achievement of the objectives within the operational plan. However, the team does not conduct regular milestone reviews of the implementation of the plan as a whole.

56 The college's self-assessment states that efforts are made to communicate with staff on regular basis. Inspection confirmed that this is the case. A daily bulletin is issued. Staff consider that communication across the college is effective. Job descriptions exist for all management posts. As the college's self-assessment report observes, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. The college deploys teaching staff efficiently and monitors class sizes centrally. College performance in this and other matters has been evaluated by an external consultant, using the performance of other, similar colleges as a benchmark.

57 The college has a 'liaison plan' which deals with the recruitment of full-time school-leavers and informs the admissions policy. However, there is no formal marketing plan, or any strategy for the recruitment of other students or the development of new services. The college's self-assessment report correctly notes that 'market research has been variable in scope and effectiveness'. External links are appropriate and extensive. Strong links exist with the TEC, the Merseyside Colleges European Group and the local chamber of commerce. The principal is a member of the Southport and Formby Hospital Trust. This link has been of benefit to health and social care students. There has been liaison with the local education authority on the strategic plan. Sefton principals have regular meetings with the director of education.

58 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college information system has proved reliable. Information required for

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internal and external purposes is accurate and produced on time. Reports generated from the system have to be transferred on to spreadsheet software so that managers can use it. Quality standards for the management information system are set. They are monitored on an informal basis, but no formal regular checking takes place.

59 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance team is appropriately structured, qualified and experienced. Managers have monitored the college's financial position closely and have taken prompt action to ensure the college's financial stability. The college had a general reserve of £1.2 million and net current assets of £0.6 million as at 31 July 1997. It achieved a small historical cost surplus in 1996-97 and is forecasting a further small surplus for the current year. Management accounts have been prepared promptly each quarter and the college returned its unqualified 1996-97 statutory accounts by the required deadline. The college has good financial controls in place. This is shown by the positive conclusions of the internal and external auditors.

Conclusions

60 The inspection team found that the college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Once the inspection sample had been decided, the college produced a helpful supplement to its self-assessment report that summarised students' achievements. It took account of the areas to be inspected and provided grades for appropriate groups of courses. Lessons observed and graded by the college resulted in a profile of grades a little higher than that of inspectors. Inspectors judged all the curriculum grades and all but two cross-college grades awarded by the college to be well founded.

61 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 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	86
19-24 years	2
25+ years	12
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	0
Intermediate	12
Advanced	86
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	2
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	279	137	36
Business	84	0	7
Health and community care	18	0	2
Art and design	52	0	4
Humanities	597	0	51
Total	1,030	137	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	56	1	0	57
Supporting direct learning contact	0	1	0	1
Other support	24	0	0	24
Total	80	2	0	82

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£2,707,000	£2,939,000	£3,128,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£18.05	£17.19	£18.20
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	67%	63%
Achievement of funding target	104%	108%	100%
Diversity of income	9%	10%	11%
Operating surplus	£118,000	£142,000	£199,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	321	429	535
	Average point score per entry	5.2	5.5	5.6
	Position in tables	top 10%	top 10%	top 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	18	53	45
	Percentage achieving qualification	78%	87%	91%
	Position in tables	middle third	top third	top 10%

Source: DfEE

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