

Warrington Collegiate Institute

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) 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 inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate 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.

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

Warrington Collegiate Institute

North West Region

Inspected November 1998

Warrington Collegiate Institute is a large general further education college that offers a wide range of courses from entry to further education to postgraduate degrees. The comprehensive self-assessment report was the first that the college had produced. Procedures that contributed to the process, such as grading of lesson observations by college staff, were new to the college. The profile of grades awarded by the college was higher than that awarded by inspectors. The percentage of lessons rated good or outstanding by inspectors was slightly below the national average and the percentage rated unsatisfactory was above the average. In evaluating students' achievements, inspectors used national benchmarking data to a greater extent than the college had in arriving at its judgements. Inspectors did not agree with the college's assessment of two-thirds of curriculum areas and all aspects of cross-college provision.

Six programme areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has strong financial management and a commitment to improving communications. It sustains productive relations with external agencies and employers which are based on thorough analyses of training needs and labour

market trends. There is some well-targeted staff development. Governors play an active role in strategic planning and monitor financial targets effectively, but pay less attention to students' progress. The college gives good pre-entry and enrolment information and has a comprehensive range of personal support services for students. It provides good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on vocational programmes. Parts of the main college sites have been attractively refurbished and include improved access for students with restricted mobility. Some poor-quality accommodation and inefficient room utilisation remains. Segregation of smoking areas is ineffective. The college has a comprehensive framework for quality assurance covering both academic and support functions, but it is not used consistently. Weaknesses identified in the last inspection remain. The college should place more emphasis on students' needs when planning, including identifying and rectifying poor practice in teaching and learning, improving retention and achievement rates, encouraging take-up of support for study skills, and addressing inconsistencies in tutorial support. Quality assurance and management information systems both require considerable improvement.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics, computing and information technology	3	Support for students	3
Engineering	2	General resources	3
Business and management	3	Quality assurance	4
Health and care	3	Governance	3
English	4	Management	3
Adult basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Warrington Collegiate Institute is a college of further, higher and community education, of over 15,000 students. At July 1998, 11,418 students were enrolled on further education programmes. Further and community education students are drawn primarily from Warrington and its surrounding areas, but higher education programmes recruit regionally and nationally.

2 The college provides courses in nine out of 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas and at levels ranging from basic skills to postgraduate degrees. It operates from three main sites: a large further education campus in Winwick Road, a town centre campus for community education in Museum Street and a residential campus at Padgate where most higher education and some further education is located. The college also has courses in over 50 community centres.

3 Warrington is a former 'new town' located at the heart of the region's motorway network. It has seen its population increase by over 12% to 191,000 in the last 15 years and growth continues. Unemployment is low at 3.1%, compared with 5.2% in the north-west generally. This figure masks areas of socio-economic deprivation from which many students are drawn. Since 1981, employment in manufacturing has almost halved to its current 15% level, principally affecting full-time jobs for men. Just over three-quarters of people are employed by the service sector. Almost 60% of these jobs are part time, many in distribution and, most recently, in telephone call centres.

4 The college operates in a competitive environment. There are seven 11 to 18 schools, a sixth form college and many private training providers in Warrington. There are six additional further education colleges within a 15-mile radius of the town.

5 The college consists of three sections called 'colleges': business and technology; general and social studies; and university college. There is

also a directorate of lifetime learning. The colleges and directorate are supported by a range of academic departments and business services. University college has the status equivalent to a faculty of the University of Manchester with which there has been an affiliation for over 30 years. Academic managers report to the vice-principal for academic services, and financial and corporate managers to the vice-principal for business services. The vice-principals, the deputy principal and the director of human resources report directly to the principal and this group forms the principalship. The college's senior management team includes the principalship, college deans, the director of lifetime learning, directors of finance and performance and the managers of marketing, management information and estates.

6 The college's mission is 'to provide quality learning opportunities to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century'. In 1998-99 the college has determined to:

- continue to improve the quality of students' learning experience
- extend participation both to widen access and improve progression
- improve performance in relation to retention and achievement whilst maintaining financial efficiency
- use its flourishing partnerships purposefully to develop collaborative strategies for learning
- develop a self-critical culture, focusing directly on the improvement of learning.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 9 November 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data for 1996 and 1997 were taken from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR).

Context

Data on students' achievements for 1998 were validated by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors working for a total of 49 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 100 lessons and four tutorials, examined students' work and college documents. The inspection team held meetings

with governors, managers, college staff and students and consulted the local training and enterprise council (TEC).

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 59% were judged to be good or outstanding and 10% less than satisfactory or poor. These figures are not as good as the average figures for colleges in the sector inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	4	5	0	1	10
GCSE	0	1	0	5	1	7
GNVQ	1	6	8	1	1	17
NVQ	5	4	3	0	0	12
Other vocational	8	14	12	1	0	35
Other	5	14	4	0	0	23
Total (No.)	19	43	32	7	3	104
Total (%)	18	41	31	7	3	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

9 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 (%)
Warrington Collegiate Institute	10.0	76
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

Mathematics, Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 The inspection covered provision in mathematics, computing and information technology (IT). The college of general and social studies provides mathematics courses. Three of the colleges and the directorate of lifelong learning contribute IT courses. Inspectors observed 25 lessons of which six were in mathematics. Inspectors agreed with a number of strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, inspectors considered that the amount of high-quality teaching and learning was much lower than the college had identified. Several weaknesses in students' achievements were not identified by the report.

Key strengths

- good range of provision
- mainly well-planned lessons
- above average pass rates for students completing general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics and higher national certificate courses
- good access to appropriate hardware and software for specialist computing students

Weaknesses

- some dull and uninspiring teaching, particularly in mathematics
- poor retention rates on several courses
- poor pass rates on several courses
- some poor student responses to work set
- ineffective teamworking in IT

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a good range of courses in the programme area. Specialist IT courses range from foundation to higher education levels and these provide many progression opportunities for students. Several courses allow flexible attendance patterns and the introduction of modular-based courses in mathematics has increased the number of options available to students. Course structures are appropriate and for computing there is a good balance of theory and practical work. While many IT courses recruit high numbers of students, several mathematics classes, particularly at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), have few students. Management responsibility for specialist IT courses and the staff who teach on them is spread across three colleges and a further directorate. This arrangement leads to difficulties in achieving effective overall teamwork and restricts opportunities for sharing good practice. There are no cross-team meetings of specialist computing staff.

12 The self-assessment report for the college identified teaching and learning as usually good and frequently excellent. Although inspectors saw some good and some outstanding teaching, approximately half of the observed lessons were satisfactory or worse. Many lessons are well planned. Most have clear objectives that are shared with the students. In the better lessons, teachers set appropriately demanding work for students. There were also several good examples of individual students' needs being recognised and addressed. However, much of the mathematics teaching is dull and uninspiring. The range of activities that students undertake during lessons that frequently last up to two or three hours is narrow. For example, opportunities for students to undertake practical work, including that relating to IT, or to work in small groups are not taken.

Curriculum Areas

13 The college is aware that poor retention levels across a range of courses in the programme area are a major issue. Inspectors found that on a number of courses only about one-half of the students who enrol on courses complete them. Retention has been low on GCE advanced supplementary (AS), GCE A level and GCSE mathematics, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced level IT and higher national certificate programmes. Pass rates for GCSE mathematics have improved; in 1998 they were well above the national average. Similarly pass rates for those students who

complete the higher national certificate programmes have been good. However, pass rates for the GNVQ intermediate IT course have been very poor.

14 Students on specialist computing courses have good access to up-to-date hardware and software. The self-assessment report indicated a requirement to upgrade the IT resources available and this has recently taken place. As the report also indicated teachers on the mathematics and IT programmes are well qualified.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in mathematics, computing and information technology, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Expected completions	898	976	1,536
		Retention (%)	88	74	83
		Achievement (%)	55	66	100
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Expected completions	*	15	13
		Retention (%)	*	53	69
		Achievement (%)	*	12	40
GCSE mathematics	2	Expected completions	*	*	233
		Retention (%)	*	*	59
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50
GCS A/AS level mathematics	3	Expected completions	*	*	34
		Retention (%)	*	*	38
		Achievement (%)	*	*	75
National diploma in computer studies and GNVQ advanced IT	3	Expected completions	19	*	22
		Retention (%)	79	*	50
		Achievement (%)	92	*	64
Higher national certificate computer studies and business IT	4	Expected completions	*	*	57
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76

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

*data incomplete

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

15 The inspection covered all aspects of engineering including mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering and motor vehicle technology. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. Inspectors generally agreed with the self-assessment report on these areas. Staff had rectified some weaknesses before the inspection.

Key strengths

- detailed teaching plans shared with students
- successful use of a range of teaching methods
- up-to-date industrial assignments
- high level of students' skills
- mechatronics students' achievements of regional, national and international awards
- modern, well-resourced facilities in most areas
- clear links between strategic and curriculum planning

Weaknesses

- lack of practical and laboratory work in some engineering courses
- falling retention rates in further education courses
- little recent updating of teachers' knowledge

16 The self-assessment report acknowledged teaching and learning as a strength. Almost three-quarters of lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be good or outstanding. Teachers shared teaching plans with students and made good use of resources for students' learning. The self-assessment report recognised that the mixture of mature and younger

students in many classes presents a good opportunity for them to learn to work together in teams. Students' assignments often involved practical activities on the implementation of modern technology. During a group assignment students designed and built a circuit using programmable integrated components. These were then used to perform a mechanical function in a motor car. However, the lack of practical and laboratory work on some engineering courses is not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. The engineering section provides good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

17 Retention rates on further education courses are low and falling. Those on higher education courses are at an appropriate level. The self-assessment report acknowledged that students' punctuality is a problem; inspectors observed poor punctuality in one-third of the lessons seen. Achievement rates have improved to above the national average for further education courses, but for higher education courses they have fallen below the national average. The self-assessment report's action plan sets targets for courses and actions aimed at improvement. Mechatronics is a strong feature of provision and college students have won regional, national and European honours for their competence. There are clear progression routes from courses. Students have successfully progressed to both higher level courses and employment.

18 The college offers a broad range of well-managed engineering courses that meet the needs of local industry. There are good links with local employers who contribute to curriculum design at both further and higher education levels. The self-assessment report fails to highlight the strength of strategic and operational planning within the college engineering section. There are clear links between strategic and curriculum planning. Section meetings are regular and productive.

Curriculum Areas

The sections have successfully bid for external funding. For example, a bid to the competitiveness fund resulted in the purchase of technology equipment for mechatronics.

19 Most teachers are well qualified. Teams have good and varied industrial experience, but there is little technical or curriculum updating for teachers. Machinery in the mechanical engineering machine shop is old, but functional.

Mechatronics is well resourced. There is a well-planned resources room for electronics which includes resources for manufacture and experimentation, a reference collection and space for small group project planning. The stock of cars for motor vehicle courses is plentiful, although some of them are dated. There is a productive link with a major motor company.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	255	306	396
		Retention (%)	94	68	55
		Achievement (%)	71	54	82
Intermediate vocational	2	Expected completions	19	20	19
		Retention (%)	53	70	63
		Achievement (%)	10	29	100
Advanced vocational	3	Expected completions	64	54	50
		Retention (%)	63	69	60
		Achievement (%)	58	33	60
Higher education	4	Expected completions	96	76	33
		Retention (%)	85	78	82
		Achievement (%)	79	72	56

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

Curriculum Areas

Business and Management

Grade 3

20 The inspection covered business studies, management and professional courses. Inspectors observed 17 lessons. They agreed with much of the college's assessment of the provision, but considered that strengths were overemphasised and weaknesses understated or omitted.

Key strengths

- a wide range of courses
- effective development of students' key skills
- good achievements on management courses
- good students' work well marked by teachers
- good course management at the Winwick site

Weaknesses

- good teaching practice not disseminated and poor teaching not addressed
- some poor retention
- deficiencies in the provision of study skills support
- restricted student access to IT facilities
- some poor learning environments
- failure to use work experience in course studies

21 Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that it offers courses to meet the needs of a wide range of clients. Students can enter without formal qualifications or can undertake higher level courses in several specialisms. The college company provides tailored management courses for industry. Opportunities for teams to meet and share good practice are inhibited by cross-site management arrangements. Some key course teams have not met regularly. College meeting time is not managed effectively to allow all staff to meet without disrupting lessons.

22 As the self-assessment report observed, there is some good teaching. Just over half of the lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be good or outstanding. Courses and lessons are generally planned to provide students with a varied learning experience in what are generally long sessions. Handouts are well prepared and well presented. Teachers mark students' work well. They regularly test students' understanding of the work. In one quality management session, the tutor asked students to work in groups on a design activity. The exercise succeeded in getting students to concentrate on aspects of quality design which would meet the customers' requirements. The tutor encouraged the students to relate the lessons learned to theory. The college's self-assessment gave insufficient prominence to weaknesses in teaching. Some poorly planned lessons have unrealistic time allocated for activities. In one particularly poor lesson, students had not been asked to prepare for a lesson which was planned to test and build on knowledge they had already acquired. As the college recognises, in a few lessons students spend lengthy periods listening to the teacher.

23 Inspectors agreed with the college that students' key skills are effectively developed on business courses. The use of external materials linked to assignment programmes and certification has improved students' motivation. The college acknowledges deficiencies in the operation of study skills support. Plans to integrate this support with main class provision have not been implemented. The college organises work experience for students but teachers fail to draw upon it for work in lessons.

24 The college has justifiably drawn attention to some good achievements, for example, on management courses. National vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 accounting pass rates are consistently good. The pass rate for higher national certificate was above the national average in 1996 and 1997. Achievements on business courses are more mixed. Achievement on the GNVQ advanced business two-year courses matches or exceeds the national average. The pass rates in GCE A level business studies have been poor at 67% and 63%, respectively, in the last two years. Retention on

Curriculum Areas

several courses has been below the national average. Only two-thirds of those who started GCE A level in 1996 completed the course in 1998. The self-assessment report recognised students' achievements as a strength, but makes no reference to any weakness in achievement or retention.

25 In its self-assessment report the college recognised the difficulties encountered by business students in accessing IT facilities. There are new computers with modern software but because they are located in teaching rooms it is difficult for students to use spare machines

when lessons are in progress. At the Winwick site business provision has no single base and is dispersed across four floors of the building. Most rooms used extensively for business and management courses are clean and well decorated, but they lack displays of business related material. The college self-assessment noted that they offer an unstimulating learning environment. Teachers have appropriate knowledge and experience although the vocational knowledge of some is becoming dated. Staff development is related to both curriculum and staff needs.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate business (one-year programme)	2	Expected completions	12	13	5
		Retention (%)	58	54	80
		Achievement (%)	67	71	50
NVQ accounting (one-year programme)	2	Expected completions	51	48	44
		Retention (%)	75	85	75
		Achievement (%)	55	28	55
National certificate in business and finance (two-year programme)	3	Expected completions	*	60	8
		Retention (%)	*	72	100
		Achievement (%)	*	62	63
GNVQ advanced (two-year programme)	3	Expected completions	38	16	25
		Retention (%)	71	44	92
		Achievement (%)	82	67	78
Certificate in occupational safety and health	3	Expected completions	23	37	34
		Retention (%)	87	92	79
		Achievement (%)	100	71	52
Higher national certificate business and finance	4	Expected completions	64	66	51
		Retention (%)	64	74	73
		Achievement (%)	91	95	+
Continuing education certificate in management studies	4	Expected completions	40	25	22
		Retention (%)	98	84	82
		Achievement (%)	97	95	89

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

*data incomplete

+data incomplete at the time of verification

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 3

26 Fifteen lessons were inspected covering courses in nursery nursing, childhood studies, science (health studies), the certificate in childcare and education, GNVQ in health and social care, NVQ in early years care and education and the diploma in counselling. There were two self-assessment reports. One covered applied social and health education and the other counselling and access to social work. Inspectors agreed with many strengths and weaknesses stated in the reports but found that some strengths were overstated, many weaknesses were underemphasised and several significant weaknesses were omitted.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- good-quality learning resources
- improving pass rates on national diploma and counselling diploma courses
- well-supervised work placements for all students

Weaknesses

- poor or declining retention rates on most courses
- poor achievement rates on all NVQ courses and on the GNVQ advanced course
- failure of teachers to check students' understanding and progress during lessons
- poor IT skills development for childcare students

27 A broad range of social, health and childcare courses offers opportunities for progression from foundation to advanced and higher levels. Counselling courses are offered at levels 1, 2 and 3 and many students progress

from the certificate to the diploma course. For all courses there are informative student and course handbooks that give details of course structure and requirements. Schemes of work provide a good basis for lesson planning. All students have a work placement which is appropriate for their career aspirations and the requirements of their course. Full-time students participate in relevant educational visits within the region and abroad. These strengths are all identified in the self-assessment reports.

28 Of the 15 lessons observed by inspectors, eight were judged to be good or outstanding. Most lessons are well planned. In the best lessons, students experienced a range of learning activities appropriate to the objectives of the lesson and good use was made of students' experience in the work place. In almost half the lessons, teachers failed to check sufficiently students' understanding of the work. In a few cases, repetition and time-wasting detracted from students' learning opportunities. As the self-assessment report states, tutors support students well in planning their assessments and assignments. They give clear briefings on assignments and extensive feedback on students' work. Teachers regularly check portfolios and monitor students' progress. When returning marked work teachers give students guidance on how to improve their performance. Though marking of work is extensive and tutors' comments are helpful, in many pieces of written work errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation and the use of slang words remained uncorrected. Weaknesses in teaching and learning were not identified in the self-assessment report.

29 Retention rates are poor or declining on many courses. Though the self-assessment report acknowledged that retention is poor on the GNVQ intermediate course, it does not mention other weaknesses, nor is there an action plan to address the weakness identified. Pass rates have improved recently on many courses. In 1998, 85% of students completing national diploma courses, all students

Curriculum Areas

completing the GNVQ foundation course and the two students completing the GNVQ intermediate course achieved their awards. Pass rates on the certificate in counselling skills course improved from 81% in 1997 to 95% in 1998. The self-assessment report mentioned these strengths. Achievement is consistently poor on the NVQ course in early years care and education at levels 2 and 3 and is declining on the GNVQ advanced course. The self-assessment report does not identify these weaknesses. While students on GNVQ courses have good opportunities to develop key skills, some childcare students have little or no access to IT. Students with basic skills needs can receive support through timetabled workshop sessions.

The self-assessment report identified that few students take up such support. Learning support staff work with foundation course students during lessons and both students and teachers value this support.

30 Although the curriculum section in the library is well stocked with reference texts, there are insufficient copies of books needed for assignments. Students have little help in developing the skills of using the library and its electronic databases. Classrooms and specialist rooms for health and childcare activities are comfortable, well furnished and have displays of students' work. Teachers are well qualified and many are experienced practitioners.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions	15	13	14
		Retention (%)	67	69	79
		Achievement (%)	50	56	100
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	19	20	12
		Retention (%)	42	70	17
		Achievement (%)	71	36	100
Certificate in counselling skills	2	Expected completions	48	71	53
		Retention (%)	97	87	85
		Achievement (%)	100	81	95
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	39	28	26
		Retention (%)	49	71	42
		Achievement (%)	75	89	64
Other vocational	2	Expected completions	51	97	42
		Retention (%)	76	79	74
		Achievement (%)	41	29	52
Other advanced	3	Expected completions	65	122	123
		Retention (%)	77	88	82
		Achievement (%)	59	65	88

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

Curriculum Areas

English

Grade 4

31 The inspection included GCE A level and GCSE courses in English and English literature and access to higher education. Ten lessons were observed. The self-assessment report refers to more areas than those inspected. Consequently, inspectors had difficulty in extracting specific strengths and weaknesses for English provision. Inspectors judged several stated strengths to be weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good practice in marking and assessment of students' work
- effective arrangements for reviewing students' progress
- good teaching on access to higher education courses

Weaknesses

- poor and declining retention rates
- poor achievement on the GCE A level literature course
- unsatisfactory attendance at lessons
- ineffective management of teachers' performance
- some dull and unimaginative teaching
- little use of available resources to support learning

32 Inspectors disagreed with the college's self-assessment judgement that teaching and learning is of a high standard. Inspectors found wide variations in the quality of lessons and judged four to be less than satisfactory or poor. There is some dull and unimaginative teaching. The materials used in some lessons are uninspiring. Students do not always work profitably. In one lesson, students wasted time copying a grammatical exercise from the

whiteboard which could have been done more effectively on a printed sheet. In contrast, provision for students on access to higher education courses is good. A group of access students had a lively debate about the meaning of a single word. They used each other's experience to probe and extend their understanding. The self-assessment report identifies the failure to integrate key skills, particularly IT skills, with GCE A level and GCSE lessons as a weakness and inspectors agreed with this judgement. There is little use of IT or audiovisual aids within lessons, though facilities are available. Classrooms are comfortably furnished, but there are few displays which provide a subject identity or stimulate students' learning.

33 Although students' written work is of an appropriate standard for the level of course studied, their oral skills are not sufficiently developed at GCSE. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, the uptake of study skills support by students is low. However, individual teachers provide students with resources to help develop their writing skills, where necessary. Marking and assessment are conscientious. Teachers hold meetings to standardise their marking throughout the year. Comments on written work are lengthy and specific and give clear guidance to students on how to improve their work. Teachers regularly review progress with individual students, as identified in the self-assessment report.

34 The self-assessment report records that curriculum co-ordination and management is effective. Inspectors partly agreed with this. A co-ordinator oversees English courses and holds termly meetings of all teachers and weekly meetings of smaller teams, which deal effectively with operational matters. For the first time in October 1998, the curriculum area produced a development plan drawing together all the information needed for a thorough review. Previously, outcomes of review procedures have not been monitored systematically. College

Curriculum Areas

managers have reviewed with tutors English courses which have not met retention and achievement targets and agreed an action plan. Teachers are aware of the poor retention rates in English courses and have taken some action to improve them. A comparison of retention figures for the first term of 1998 and the equivalent period in 1997 shows some improvement.

35 Retention rates on all courses for the last three years are unsatisfactory and, on most courses, are declining, a fact not recognised in the self-assessment report. Retention on the GCE A level English language course was 32% in 1997 and 31% in 1998; in GCE A level English literature the retention rates for the three years 1996 to 1998 were 48%, 37% and 42%, respectively. Similarly, retention on GCSE courses is well below the national average for students aged 16 to 18 years. Achievement on

the GCE A level English literature course is well below the national average and students do not perform to the standard expected of them based on their GCSE scores. Achievements by students who complete the GCE A level English language course have exceeded the national averages for the last two years. Analysis of their results shows that students with lower GCSE results do better than predicted, while students with better results on entry do not. The self-assessment report does not give sufficient significance to weaknesses in achievement and retention. Absence from lessons, particularly in GCSE lessons, is high. Only 69% of registered students attended the lessons observed by inspectors. Attendance is closely monitored, as the self-assessment report asserts, and the section has appointed an attendance administrator who contacts absent students and keeps records.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English	2	Expected completions	*	*	126
		Retention (%)	*	*	51
		Achievement (%)	*	*	58
GCSE English literature	2	Expected completions	*	*	25
		Retention (%)	*	*	48
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50
GCE A level English language	3	Expected completions	*	*	42
		Retention (%)	*	*	31
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92
GCE A level English literature	3	Expected completions	*	*	31
		Retention (%)	*	*	42
		Achievement (%)	*	*	54

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

*data incomplete

Curriculum Areas

Adult Basic Education and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

36 The inspection covered adult basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors observed 22 lessons. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment report, although it overstates some strengths and does not identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough and informative skills assessments for the majority of students
- strong team commitment to students
- significant achievements of the majority of students
- effective support systems for students
- a variety of appropriate teaching methods
- a wide range of programmes, many offering accreditation opportunities
- effective networking and strategic partnerships

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention given to students' development of appropriate skills
- few opportunities for students to select learning materials for study on their own
- low retention rates in adult basic education
- insufficiently defined learning objectives for some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

37 The college has a range of specialist programmes for students with literacy and numeracy needs. In addition, there is provision covering a range of levels for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), access to further education and programmes on 'helping your child to learn'. There is a wide range of education and training programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors identified improvements since the last inspection. Effective links with agencies and local communities have helped the college to widen participation for adult students and to improve the learning experience of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Section business plans are linked to the college's strategic plan and include targets for recruitment and retention. Thorough initial assessment, particularly in adult basic education, ESOL and access to further education, informs individual learning plans and their accomplishment. Curriculum planning does not always concentrate sufficiently on students' acquisition of appropriate skills.

38 As the self-assessment report stated, most teaching and the promotion of learning is of a high standard. Of the 22 lessons observed, 18 were judged to be good or outstanding. The most effective teaching is based on clear assessment and planning. On adult basic skills courses, there is an emphasis on well-planned individual work. Tutors negotiate long-term goals and realistic short-term targets with students. This enables students to experience success early in their learning programme. Realistic working environments and work experience opportunities are a strong feature of the learning of many students with learning difficulties and/or difficulties. These include a coffee shop and a horticultural centre run by students on a commercial basis. Planning and recording tends to focus on the content covered rather than the learning achieved. Failure to identify specific individual learning targets for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities hinders recognition of their achievement.

Curriculum Areas

39 Students' work is often of a good or excellent standard. Students have the opportunity to gain nationally recognised qualifications, where this is appropriate. Achievement is also recognised in other ways, such as the section's own student of the month award. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well, particularly in vocational areas. The self-assessment report identified that retention rates in adult basic skills provision are below the national average. The section monitors attendance closely. The college monitors the achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to ensure their progress. However, there are examples of students who have attended for a long time without achieving much at all. In adult basic education, the college has identified lack of progression as a weakness. Inspectors agreed with this judgement, though some improvement has been achieved.

40 Most staff are appropriately qualified. A number have undertaken IT training to support its integration with the curriculum. Several staff in adult basic education have assessment qualifications, but only two have verifier qualifications. Learning support workers are well qualified.

41 In specialist rooms, attractive displays enhance the learning environment, but this is not always the case in general purpose classrooms. Accommodation in centres in the community visited by inspectors is of a good standard. Access to IT has improved. The purchase of eight laptop computers and printers provides improved access for students attending the Museum Street campus and some community venues. An effective partnership has enabled the college to deliver basic skills through IT at the Hawthorn centre. A wide range of materials and resources is available to support learning. However, the lack of opportunities for students to select their own learning materials prevents them from developing the habit and ability to study on their own.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

42 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths that the college self-assessment report identified. However, the self-assessment report failed to recognise some important weaknesses that affect the quality of students' learning.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry and enrolment information, advice and procedures
- comprehensive range of personal support services
- effective systems for identifying additional learning support needs for students
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on vocational programmes

Weaknesses

- inequity of access to tutorial support
- some poor-quality tutorials
- low levels of take up of study skills support
- ineffective management of support for students

43 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that pre-entry and enrolment information, advice and procedures are good. The college works hard to attract students, especially those from groups often under-represented in further education. A dedicated marketing team works effectively to produce thorough market intelligence and promote the college vigorously. A good range of publicity materials, planned regular press coverage, a website and links with local radio ensure that the college maintains a high profile across a wide geographical area. Admissions tutors

work with student services staff to provide a centralised admissions system that includes the arrangement of interviews with careers officers and subject teachers, as required. The schools liaison officer has established strong links with high schools. Several links programmes have been established with customised enrolment arrangements for school-leavers.

44 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there are effective systems for identifying additional learning support needs. All full-time and some part-time students undergo screening during induction. The college offers study skills support to all students although take-up of support following screening is, as the self-assessment report identified, variable across departments. Many part-time students are unable to take up study support or some student services provision outside normal working hours. A self-help pack with study skills information is given to part-time students and telephone contact is possible.

45 Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Specialist help, equipment and learning resources are made available to respond to diagnosed needs and to support the widening of learning opportunities on the main college sites and at centres in the community. The college has excellent links with a range of agencies. These include educational psychologists, services for the hearing impaired, the Careers Guidance Partnership, local health trusts, the local authority and community groups. It works with these partners to widen participation and support lifelong learning. There are 63 students under 16 years of age who have been excluded from school enrolled on college courses. The college runs 'taster' and specialist craft courses at local centres in response to requests from community based organisations.

46 The college is justifiably proud of the comprehensive range of personal support services offered to all students. Inspectors

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judged that the self-assessment report does not sufficiently highlight some strengths of this provision. All students are offered the services of professional counsellors, registered nurses, careers guidance officers, a welfare support officer, an equal opportunities officer and a chaplaincy team. Every student is encouraged to complete a health check questionnaire during induction. The team analyses students' responses and offers advice as appropriate. An under-fives nursery operates on one campus with a playgroup at another. Crèche facilities are available at one community centre. The college acknowledges that demand continues to exceed supply for childcare places and tries to help students where possible. A few free places are available for students' children.

47 Individual college departments provide tutorials using a framework developed by a team of tutors. Inspectors sometimes found the quality and regularity of tutorials to be poor; a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Some students received good, regular support and some do not. There are no clear mechanisms for the evaluation and monitoring of the quality of tutorial support. A tutorial handbook is available to tutors, but not all follow a common plan or carry out set procedures. There is no formal timetabled requirement to provide personal tutorials for some part-time students.

48 The shared management of the learning support section and study skills provision is a weakness identified by inspectors but not by the college. Management of learning support and study skills is under different sections of the college. This results in a lack of joint planning and no opportunity to share good practice. The management structure does not promote a common approach to the various aspects of student support services. Teachers must liaise with both the learning support co-ordinator and the study skills staff about students' needs. Results from screening are sent to the learning support co-ordinator who then passes them to

study skills staff, which may result in unnecessary delays for students.

General Resources

Grade 3

49 Inspectors agreed with many findings of the self-assessment report. They considered that it overstated some strengths. They identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- attractive refurbishment of parts of the main sites
- improved access for students with restricted mobility
- recent investment in IT
- good library facilities on both main sites
- staff work-room facilities

Weaknesses

- some poor-quality accommodation
- no co-ordinated strategy to encourage and facilitate students' use of IT
- inefficient room utilisation
- some poor management of general teaching rooms
- ineffective segregation of smoking areas

50 The college has formulated an accommodation strategy designed to improve its accommodation at both main sites. It has not yet been implemented. The college has, however, a long-term maintenance plan that it reviews and adjusts annually. A new training kitchen, sports laboratory and beauty therapy salons together with the major refurbishment of the tutorial block at Winwick Road have improved the quality of the environment in these areas. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the improvements in communal and recreational facilities are a strength. However, the strategies to confine

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smoking to designated areas on the main sites are not successful and, for example, result in some students being deterred from using the main refectory at Winwick Road. Smoke also permeates non-smoking areas from designated smoking areas. The self-assessment report does not identify this weakness. There are still areas that remain below an acceptable standard. As the self-assessment report recognised, the quality of the environment in the old wartime defence buildings at Padgate contrast markedly with some attractively refurbished accommodation on the same site. Some technology facilities at Winwick Road are poor, although phase one of the improvement strategy, completed in September 1998, has significantly improved the environment in this part of the college. The college site at Museum Street includes the original mechanics institute building and provides the college with a site conveniently located to the main shopping area, but it is relatively costly to maintain. Car parking facilities are good at both main sites, but poor at the town centre site. General teaching rooms in most subject areas are clean and well maintained. Some subject areas such as health and social care make good use of specialist displays to enhance the classroom environment. In contrast, other rooms at both main sites have bare walls and provide an uninviting environment in which to learn.

51 The college has improved access for students with restricted mobility since the last inspection. Ramps and lifts with low level controls are available on both main sites. An improved hoist has recently been installed at Winwick Road and a stair lift at the Museum Street site. There is still work to be done. Improvements planned for the current year include the adaptation of entrance doors and the construction of footpaths with kerb drops at Padgate, the provision of a unisex toilet and Braille/audio for lifts at Winwick Road and the improvement of toilets at Museum Street.

52 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is a need to

improve space utilisation in the college. The college undertook a detailed room use survey in 1997 that identified inefficiencies in room utilisation on both main sites but especially on the Winwick Road site. Revised arrangements have been made at both sites for allocating rooms to classes, but there remains a mismatch of room size to classes. Staff have good office and work-room facilities on both main sites.

53 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that students and staff have access to a high-quality library service supported by well-qualified professional staff. The college has made a significant investment in the library facilities at both the main sites. They have between them 400 study spaces and are attractive environments in which to work. The facilities are good and include zoned areas for quiet study, video playback, group discussion, computer use and study skills support. Library opening times have been extended both during the week and on Saturdays and Sundays. The library publishes a useful series of guides for staff and students. These clearly set out the facilities available, but not all students get an effective induction into how to make the best use of them. Links between the library and subject areas sometimes rely too heavily on informal contact between staff. Librarians are not always given sufficient notice of the resources that students need to undertake assignments or projects so that they can be made available for them.

54 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the investment the college has made to buy computers to promote widening participation is a strength. Two centres have been established in the community to provide flexible access to adults for IT training. The college now has over 400 computers for student use, producing a full-time equivalent student to computer ratio of around 9:1. Some computers are located in specialist areas such as construction, engineering, art and design and business. At both main sites, besides IT equipment in both libraries, computer rooms

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have been designated for students to use outside lesson time. However, these rooms are often timetabled for classes and students are not permitted to use the spare machines in rooms when lessons are being taught. The self-assessment report does not recognise this weakness. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the decentralisation of IT facilities across the college has delayed the development of a co-ordinated strategy. Many students receive little encouragement to utilise IT as part of their course.

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

55 Inspectors agreed with several of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but they did not agree with their relative weighting. Some strengths were overstated and some significant weaknesses understated. Some weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- a comprehensive quality assurance framework
- well-targeted staff development activities

Weaknesses

- unclear links between groups with quality assurance remits
- ineffective implementation of the quality assurance system
- lack of rigour in courses reviews
- underdeveloped analysis of attendance, retention and achievement data
- failure of lesson observation procedures to identify weak practice
- failure to address the weakness in teaching and learning identified in the previous inspection

56 The college has an extensive quality assurance framework which covers all aspects of its work. This framework has undergone considerable development since the last inspection. However, the implementation of the system has not been effective in all areas and there has not been any incremental improvement in the college's provision as a result. Weaknesses identified in teaching and learning in the previous inspection have not been successfully addressed. The college placed too much emphasis on the system and too little on its implementation and outcomes in its self-assessment report.

57 There are several groups within the college with remits which include quality assurance. The links between these groups are unclear. The college has established a quality council that consists of corporation members, college staff and members from outside the college who have experience in the quality assurance field. Links between this council and other parts of the quality assurance system are vague. The academic board has the responsibility for maintaining academic standards and the operation of quality assurance procedures. Two of its subcommittees carry out this work. One subcommittee deals with planning and course approvals and the other with academic standards. Although the terms of reference for these subcommittees are well defined, their role in assuring quality is not. Four audit teams support the work of the academic standards subcommittee. They are concerned with the observation of teaching and learning, course review processes, the college charter and core policies. Although their work is well discussed at the subcommittee, they have had little discernible impact upon improving the quality of provision.

58 Courses are subject to annual review with a sample of courses being reviewed at a greater depth every four years. The college identified in its self-assessment report that there was an unevenness in the rigour of course reviews, but

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inspectors considered that the college had underestimated the extent of this weakness. Some course reviews were superficially completed and insufficiently self-critical. Action points were not always systematically followed up. Analysis of data on attendance, retention and achievement is underdeveloped. There is little effective comparison with national benchmarks. The college analyses responses from a range of student questionnaires, but course teams do not routinely use the views of students to inform the course review process. Responsibilities for overseeing and implementing course review are not explicitly enough allocated to encourage compliance.

59 Staff development expenditure is carefully prioritised to match institutional priorities and relevant programmes have been provided. Lesson observation has been carefully introduced. Evidence from lesson observations was used to support judgements in the college's self-assessment report. The profile of grades awarded by the college was considerably more generous than that awarded by inspectors. Lesson observation has not had a major impact on judgements made in course reviews.

60 The self-assessment report was the first to be produced by the college. An inspection management group was established to oversee the development of the report. An external consultant advised on the process. Managers were given responsibility for co-ordinating the production of the report. The grading of lesson observations by college staff and procedures that contributed to the process were new to the college and not fully tested. The report is comprehensive in coverage. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly specified and evidence sources are detailed and often directly cross-referenced to supporting documentation. Action plans are directly linked to identified weaknesses.

Governance

Grade 3

61 Inspectors were unable to agree with the self-assessment report. They considered that it overestimated the strengths of governance and failed to identify a number of significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- governors well informed on issues in further and higher education
- active role in strategic planning
- effective monitoring of strategic financial targets
- participation in the life of the college

Weaknesses

- an ineffective appointments process
- insufficient consideration of students' progress
- an inadequate range of performance indicators
- excessive use of confidentiality
- poor reflection of community interests

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

63 The corporation has a determined size of 19 members. At the time of the inspection, there were three women members. Two new members have recently been appointed to fill two of the four long-standing vacancies. Despite its best efforts, the corporation has been unable to fill the vacancy reserved for a member from the local TEC. Membership of the corporation

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includes a student and one member of staff. The staff governor has been unable to attend corporation meetings since November 1997 owing to teaching commitments. Members have a good deal of business and professional expertise. They do not strongly reflect community interests. As stated in the college self-assessment report, governors are well informed on current issues in further and higher education. They value the presentations that staff make to corporation and committee meetings on matters of college or more general interest. Governors have a handbook and access to a comprehensive bank of resources. Otherwise, training is not a particular strength, though members have opportunities to attend courses.

64 The corporation meets four or five times a year. Governors receive papers in good time. Meetings are briskly conducted and concisely minuted. The corporation has recently introduced an attendance target of 85%. The regular absence of a fifth of governors led to an average attendance of only 75% at meetings during 1997-98. There are six committees of the corporation: finance and general purposes; audit; personnel; remuneration; estates; and a nominations committee. All operate according to clear terms of reference. The nominations committee has not met frequently enough to address one of its key responsibilities, namely, the filling of vacancies. There is no publicly available policy regarding appointments. The corporation expanded and updated its standing orders and its code of conduct in October 1998, in the light of advice received from external consultants. The corporation's register of interests is consistent with good practice in the sector. All governors and members of the college's senior management team and other staff with significant financial responsibilities have completed it. A 'whistleblowing' policy has been prepared and is awaiting approval.

65 The corporation does not conduct its business sufficiently openly. This weakness was

not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Much of its routine business is classified as confidential, including all the business of the finance and general purposes committee. Only non-confidential corporation and committee minutes and papers are available for inspection in the college's libraries, and their presence is not publicised. The college held an annual general meeting for the first time in October 1998. The college publishes an annual report.

66 Inspectors agreed that the governors' involvement in developing the college's strategic plan is a strength. The corporation has a tradition of an annual residential conference that takes place at an appropriate time in the planning cycle. Members speak appreciatively of the event, which provides them with the chance to work closely with several senior members of staff. Governors also have the opportunity to influence and comment on the strategic plan at board and committee meetings throughout the year. They receive reports which monitor progress against the performance indicators set by the FEFC, and take a keen interest in the college's finances. There is an intention to broaden the range of indicators used. The governors do not take an equally close interest in the curriculum of the college. They do not monitor in sufficient depth the recruitment, retention and achievements of students, a weakness identified in the last inspection report.

67 Governors take an active part in the life of the college. Several of them sit on college development committees, such as that for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; they take part in advisory panels; they help with the recruitment and selection of senior postholders; and they take an active interest in health and safety matters. Board members regularly attend presentation evenings and other important college events.

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Management

Grade 3

68 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, it failed to identify several significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong financial management
- thorough analysis of training needs and labour market trends
- an outward-looking approach, with effective external relations
- the positive promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- insufficient strategic emphasis on student needs
- a lack of accountability at middle management level
- unfocused and ineffective senior management meetings
- an underdeveloped management information system

69 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has an appropriately qualified finance team. Financial objectives are clearly defined in the strategic plan. The college's large cash reserves are positively managed and have generated significant investment income. The reports of the internal and external auditors do not show any significant weaknesses in internal control. The financial regulations are clear and concise and are updated annually. Detailed management accounts are prepared monthly and are supported by a good standard of commentary. The management accounts are considered by the finance and general purposes committee and the senior management team.

Deans and other senior managers hold large budgets, some of which they devolve to section leaders. Budget holders receive timely, monthly reports on actual and committed expenditure. Rigorous performance reviews are held three times a year, to check that expenditure, income and unit targets have been met and to reallocate budgets, if necessary. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this system of performance reviews is a considerable strength.

70 The college's structures and systems for managing its finances are much better developed than those for managing the curriculum and the support that is given to students. The job descriptions of senior and middle managers are vague, and lines of accountability are unclear. The management of curriculum areas is sometimes fragmented. College managers acknowledge that retention and achievement are poor, yet do not uniformly insist on the setting and rigorous monitoring of targets that will bring about improvement. There is a well-established tutorial framework, but no mechanism for ensuring that all staff implement it. The self-assessment report does not acknowledge these significant weaknesses.

71 Before the inspection the college identified problems with its student records system; these are currently being addressed. While there have been some delays with the submission of student numbers returns to the FEFC, the college makes timely financial returns to the FEFC. The college acknowledged in its self-assessment report that its management information system is inadequate. The system is unreliable and does not allow information to be adapted to suit different purposes and different levels of demand. The college is taking steps to replace it.

72 Since the last inspection the college has become more outward-looking and has developed effective external relations. There is a productive working relationship with a wide range of local and regional businesses and agencies, and with the new unitary authority.

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A thorough analysis of local education and training needs and labour market trends underpins strategic and operational planning. A noteworthy development is the needs analysis forum, established to strengthen the college's approach to identifying and meeting changing demands from the community it serves. Membership of the forum is drawn from 12 external organisations, which include businesses, the TEC and the local authority. A growing marketing section with six well-qualified staff plays an effective role in researching need and in publicising the college.

73 Managers have done much to improve communications within the college. Most staff say that members of the principalship and other senior managers are approachable. During the past year, training events have been held which have helped to bring teachers from the further and higher education sections of the college together. The 14-strong senior management team meets fortnightly, supported by the principalship which does not meet formally. Senior managers also meet in several other forums. Minutes show these meetings to be dominated by routine issues; they do not concentrate on the rigorous checking of progress against hard targets and on actions that will improve the students' experience.

74 Managers of the college take an active interest in promoting and monitoring equality of opportunity. An equal opportunities co-ordinator chairs a subcommittee of the academic board and reports on its work to the board of governors. There are clear policy documents, covering a range of areas, including harassment, for which the college has set up an innovative listening service.

Conclusions

75 The inspection team found the college's self-assessment report to be a useful basis for planning and undertaking the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many strengths

identified by the college, though some were found to be overstated. They placed more emphasis than the report did on weaknesses in teaching and the promotion of learning and in the assessment of students' achievements. In evaluating the latter, inspectors used national benchmarking data to a greater extent than the college had in arriving at its judgements. In two-thirds of the curriculum areas and all cross-college aspects, the self-assessment report was insufficiently critical in the evaluation of weaknesses. This led to better grades in the self-assessment report than those awarded by inspectors. In one curriculum area, the self-assessment report grade was worse than that awarded by inspectors. In this instance, several identified weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

76 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)

Age	%
Under 16	4
16-18 years	14
19-24 years	13
25+ years	67
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	33
Intermediate	18
Advanced	14
Higher education	13
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	22
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	295	1,382	15
Construction	88	286	3
Engineering	129	629	7
Business	222	1,826	18
Hotel and catering	236	591	7
Health and community care	407	1,397	16
Art and design	139	515	6
Humanities	216	2,159	20
Basic education	163	738	8
Total	1,895	9,523	100

Source: college data

Note: FEFC-funded students

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 22% 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)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	153	65	1	219
Supporting direct learning contact	60	4	14	78
Other support	130	12	15	157
Total	343	81	30	454

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£14,002,000	£14,636,000	£15,045,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£16.88	£16.41	£15.84
Payroll as a proportion of income	66%	65%	64%
Achievement of funding target	112%	115%	*
Diversity of income	42%	45%	*
Operating surplus	-£524,000	-£381,000	*

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

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

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

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

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997)

*data not available

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