

Worthing Sixth Form College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

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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 which 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

Worthing Sixth Form College

South East Region

Inspected October 1997

Worthing Sixth Form College is in West Sussex. Production of the college's self-assessment report involved governors and staff at all levels. The governors' audit committee checked the validity of the supporting evidence. The self-assessment report is rigorous and accurate, although the evidence supporting judgements about teaching and learning is limited. Inspectors chose a sample of the college's curriculum on which to base their validation of the self-assessment report. The sample omitted the following areas: science, English, media studies, modern foreign languages, history, environmental sciences, leisure and tourism, and information technology. Action plans arising from self-assessment were appropriate and progress had been made in fulfilling them by the time of the inspection.

The college's main provision is in academic courses for 16 to 19 year olds for which it has a good reputation. The college is providing an increasing number of GNVQ programmes and extending its part-time provision for adults. The college has close working relationships with its partner schools. It co-operates increasingly with a nearby general further education college. Standards of teaching and learning on most courses are high and GCE A level results have

been consistently good in most subjects for the last three years. The college's work in social sciences is outstanding. Student guidance and careers support are well organised. Since the last inspection the college has completely reorganised its quality assurance arrangements to provide coherent and effective curriculum review which is supported by careful student tracking and personal target setting. The system has yielded measurable improvements. The college charter is a well-produced document in which all the college's challenging service targets are published. The college is well governed. Governors are deeply involved in overseeing strategic planning and performance monitoring. Complete reorganisation of the management structure during the last three years has been achieved with the support of all staff. The college has benefited from imaginative leadership and open management. Recent improvements in accommodation have greatly enhanced many areas. If it is to improve further the college should address: a need for further development of teaching methods; poor results and retention rates in a minority of subjects; the arrangements for students who need extra numeracy and literacy support; work experience opportunities; the poor management information systems; some poor teaching accommodation; poor accommodation for sports; low room utilisation; and the small library budget.

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

Curriculum areas inspected	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	3	Support for students	2
Business	2	College resources	3
Health and social care	3	Quality assurance	2
Art, design and the performing arts	2	Governance	2
Social sciences	1	Management	1

The College and its Mission

1 Worthing Sixth Form College in West Sussex was fully established in 1979 as part of a reorganised system of comprehensive education in the area. The college occupies a single site in the west of the town. The Worthing, Arun and Adur area is relatively affluent but there are some pockets of deprivation. There is a high proportion of elderly residents in Worthing. The main industries are pharmaceuticals, light engineering, banking, insurance and public utilities. Only 16 businesses in Worthing employ more than 100 people. There are more jobs traditionally filled by women in Sussex than for men. Retailing and tourism provide many part-time and seasonal jobs.

2 The college has good relationships with the five maintained schools in Worthing. The college competes with, but also collaborates with Northbrook College, Sussex, the local general further education college which has a number of sites nearby. There are 10 other sixth form and general further education colleges within a 30 mile radius of Worthing.

3 On 1 November 1996 the college had 1,040 full-time students, most of whom were between 16 to 18 years old, and 473 part-time adult students. The adult student numbers increase during the year. Full-time student numbers have increased steadily over the last four years. The majority of students are on general certificate of education advanced supplementary/advanced level (GCE AS/A level) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) programmes. About 11 per cent of full-time students are on courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced level in business studies, health and social care, and leisure and tourism. In July 1997 the college employed 109 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 36 full-time equivalents were support staff.

4 The college has recently reviewed its mission statement. It now reads 'the college exists to enrich people's lives by giving access to high-quality education which encourages lifelong learning, provides pathways for progression, and meets the needs of the regional and national economies'. The mission statement is supported by a sophisticated needs analysis and a detailed corporate plan which refers to all aspects of the college's work.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 20 October 1997. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college submitted students' achievement data for the three years 1994 to 1997 which were validated before the inspection against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining 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 nine inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 42 days. They observed 56 lessons and five tutorials, and they examined samples of students' work and a wide variety of college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students, among whom were officers of the students' union. Telephone interviews were conducted with three heads of partner schools.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 68 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 4 per cent were less than satisfactory. This compares with 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1996-97, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report, 1996-97*. The average level of attendance during the inspection was 86 per cent; this compares with

Context

an average of 84 per cent for sixth form colleges reported in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report*, 1996-97. The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE AS/A level	8	19	10	2	0	39
GCSE	1	3	2	0	0	6
GNVQ	2	5	4	0	0	11
Total	11	27	16	2	0	56

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics

Grade 3

7 The 10 lessons which were observed and the assessed work sampled all the GCSE and GCE A level syllabuses. The college's self-assessment report does not give sufficient weight to weaknesses in teaching methods or to poor retention and achievement rates on some GCE A level courses. The report was written before the reorganisation of the curriculum area was begun.

Key strengths

- high retention and achievement in GCSE mathematics and on most GCE A level courses
- provision of mathematics support sessions
- flexible modular GCE A level provision

Weaknesses

- unimaginative GCE A level teaching in the classes inspected
- below average results and poor retention in some GCE A level subjects
- insufficient information technology resources
- some overcrowded teaching rooms
- management responsibility for strategic planning and some courses not yet defined

8 The college provides GCE A level and GCSE courses for 495 full-time 16 to 19 year old students and GCSE provision for a few adults in the evening and through open learning. Schemes of work are merely lists of topics. They do not address what students will be able to do or understand, nor do they include notes on teaching methods and resources. Three out of the 10 classes observed by inspectors were considered to be good or outstanding. In GCE A level classes, students spend much of their time

copying from the board and completing routine exercises from textbooks. In GCSE lessons, more effort is made to use a variety of teaching methods and more emphasis is placed on the use of up-to-date learning materials. One imaginative lesson involved students working in pairs and setting problems for one another to solve. Students who need extra support are identified through a system of tracking and termly review. Individual support sessions in mathematics outside normal timetabled classes are available to both GCE A level and GCSE students.

9 Regular homework and tests are set on all courses. The work is marked fairly, but opportunities to help students to improve by giving detailed, written feedback are sometimes missed. The standard of externally moderated coursework is high. Very little use of computers is made in teaching mathematics. Nevertheless, many students are skilled in wordprocessing and the use of spreadsheets which they have learnt through an Open College information technology course which is taken by all students.

10 The GCE A level pass rate in 1997 of 68 per cent at grades A to E for School Mathematics Project mathematics is below the national average for sixth form colleges. The pass rate for GCE A level mathematics with statistics was good at 95 per cent, but retention was very low at only 59 per cent. Many students gave up the double subject option of applied mathematics and pure mathematics, although they have the opportunity to continue to study mathematics GCE A level. The self-assessment report undervalues the importance of students' achievements and retention.

11 The college's recent restructuring placed mathematics in a division with science. This development has been well received by staff. There are plans for the staff team to co-operate further with colleagues in other areas but the lack of leadership in the mathematics section

Curriculum Areas

hampers progress. Good practice is not shared and there has been no staff development to overcome weaknesses.

12 Teachers are well qualified mathematically but some are out of touch with the variety of teaching strategies that are now used in the subject. There is a very limited range of study materials in either the mathematics resource room or the learning resource centre. Some classrooms are too small for the number of students.

Examples of students' achievements in mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level, all syllabuses	Retention (%)	86	76	84
	Pass rate (%)	75	80	73
GCSE	Retention (%)	79	87	86
	Pass rate (%)	65	55	61

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

13 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering the complete range of business courses. These comprise GCE AS/A level business studies and accounting, GCSE accounting and GNVQ advanced and intermediate programmes in business. In most cases inspectors agreed with the college's identification of key strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the high standard of teaching
- students' achievements in external assessments
- effective curriculum management
- good course planning
- increasingly effective teamworking

Weaknesses

- low retention on the GNVQ intermediate programme
- inadequate work experience opportunities for GNVQ students
- GCE A level teaching schemes which do not encourage the use of information technology

14 The college mainly offers full-time courses for school-leavers in this programme area. The two-year courses in GCE A level business studies are the largest in the area, but GCE AS business studies and GCE AS/A level accounting are also available. The number of students taking GCE A level joint business studies and economics has declined recently. Vocational courses are developing. The GCSE in business studies was replaced in 1996 by the GNVQ intermediate and a GNVQ advanced programme started this year. There are two part-time evening courses in GCE A level business studies and GCSE accounting. The courses are well organised and effectively

managed. There is a programme manager and two team leaders who are responsible for GCE and vocational business courses respectively. They are an increasingly effective team. Considerable attention is given to course planning, and there are common schemes of work, assignment programmes and course handbooks.

15 The majority of lessons observed by inspectors were good or outstanding. The better teaching was characterised by coherent lesson planning, carefully elaborated objectives which were communicated to students, and skilful use of a variety of tasks and teaching methods. Most teachers had a clear sense of purpose but some teaching suffered from a lack of clarity about objectives and inadequately directed questioning to students. Teachers set students realistic but demanding tasks. Internal verification of assessments in vocational courses is adequate. Vocational students have many opportunities to develop key skills but GCE A level students do not. The GCE A level schemes make little use of information technology. Work experience for vocational students is underdeveloped.

16 The quality of students' written work is generally good. Work is often helpfully marked, but sometimes teachers give insufficiently detailed feedback to help students to improve. Pass rates for the two-year GCE A level business studies have been consistently well above the national average for sixth form colleges, at both A to E and A to C grades. The small number of students taking GCE A level economics, and economics and business, also achieve well above the national averages. The first GNVQ intermediate group completed its studies in 1997 and achieved results well above the national average.

17 Teachers are appropriately qualified. Some have recent industrial and commercial experience. Others would benefit from industrial secondments. Accommodation has

Curriculum Areas

been improved recently. GNVQ students have ready access to modern computers in timetabled periods, but access at other times is sometimes difficult. Library resources are adequate.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	*	*	69
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	91
GCSE	Retention (%)	62	58	*
	Pass rate (%)	77	55	*
GCE A levels	Retention (%)	95	84	79
	Pass rate (%)	100	96	97

Source: college data

*course not offered in these years

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

18 Inspectors observed seven lessons. Health and care provision is a recent venture for the college and is currently limited to GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses in health and social care. The self-assessment report does not grade health and care provision.

Key strengths

- systematically planned teaching
- strong team leadership

Weaknesses

- a fall in student retention and achievement rates in the intermediate GNVQ
- limited development of the social care content of the curriculum

19 Teaching is well planned. A variety of teaching and assessment methods is used to stimulate and maintain students' interest. In a first-year GNVQ group, most students were working independently and making full use of a range of learning resources whilst the remainder had chosen to revise with the

teacher. The students were all engrossed.

Teachers in health care enliven their lessons with examples drawn from real situations, but the courses contain insufficient practical work. Students' written work is generally of a high standard and they keep detailed notes.

Assessment methods do not take account of work experience. Work is appropriately graded, although at intermediate level some spelling and grammatical errors are not corrected.

Achievement and retention rates were above the national average among students on the inaugural GNVQ advanced course, but many who started in 1996 had dropped out by the time of the inspection. Pass rates and retention rates on the intermediate GNVQ declined significantly in 1997.

20 The strong teaching team is well managed. A social care specialist would further strengthen the team. Staff development is adequate but there are insufficient opportunities for teachers to gain a wider appreciation of the care sector. General classrooms are good but they are often crowded. There is little material about the subject displayed in them. Specialist resources are so limited that they restrict the possibilities open to teachers. The library has relatively few books and very few specialist journals in this programme area.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	*	95
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	83
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	*	70	33
	Pass rate (%)	*	86	40

Source: college data

*course not offered in these years

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and the Performing Arts

Grade 2

21 Inspectors observed 15 lessons. They included GCE A level art and design, design and communication, theatre studies and music; GCE AS art and music; and GCSE art. The self-assessment report is thorough and inspectors agreed with its findings.

Key strengths

- consistently sound and sometimes outstanding teaching
- good feedback to students on assessments
- good curriculum management
- students' work of a high standard
- high GCE A level pass rates

Weaknesses

- some poor oral and presentational skills among visual arts students
- poor GCSE art examination results and falling retention rates
- poor use of progression and destination data
- inadequate accommodation for the performing arts

22 The area is strongly led. Communications are good and the self-assessment report has provided a focus for staff to work together to improve the area further. Judgements in the report are sound. The staff team is enthusiastic and determined to succeed. Lessons are well planned and well taught with the minor exception of some poorer lesson planning in performing arts. Eleven of the lessons observed were good or outstanding and none were less than satisfactory. Students were extended by both the teaching and the project work they

were given. Teachers provide clear course information and sound advice. Students work with sustained concentration and effort on practical work. In the visual arts, students often lack the necessary oral skills to present their projects effectively and need further help to enable them to do so. In the performing arts, conclusions were not always drawn together at the end of lessons with sufficient clarity to cement students' learning and weaker students were sometimes given insufficient encouragement to stimulate them to improve their performance.

23 Written work, project research and personal studies are thoroughly researched and well presented. Significant progress has been made since the college's last inspection in improving assessment, marking and correction of work. Work is returned promptly and factual, grammatical and spelling errors are corrected consistently. In the performing arts, public performances are energetic and creative. Appropriate priority is given to establishing a sound knowledge of basic skills in the visual arts, including observational drawing and colour work. In GCE A level subjects the examination results are good and the retention rates are steadily improving. In GCSE art, enrolments are low and examination achievements are poor. Data on students' progression are not readily available within the department and are not used to promote this area of work.

24 Staff are well qualified and highly experienced. The specialist resources in theatre and music remain inadequate since adverse comment was made upon them during the last inspection. Staff are stretched, with large numbers of students undertaking practical work. Music lacks soundproof practice rooms. Drama has no dedicated area for theoretical work. More space is now available for art and design work although the shortage of storage for materials, equipment and work persists. The visual arts team makes particularly effective use of display to inform teaching.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in art, design and performing arts, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A levels ¹	Retention (%)	72	79	85
	Pass rate (%)	88	97	89
GCSE ²	Retention (%)	92	83	80
	Pass rate (%)	50	20	25

Source: college data

¹art and design, graphical communication, theatre studies and music

²art and design (only one group per year)

Curriculum Areas

Social Sciences

Grade 1

25 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering the GCE AS/A level and GCSE courses in law, politics, psychology, philosophy, religious studies and sociology.

Key strengths

- well-organised courses with detailed schemes of work and lesson plans
- teaching which is good or outstanding
- rigorous assessment
- detailed review of students' work and action planning for improvement
- good results in GCE A level examinations
- teachers operating effectively in a number of subject disciplines

Weaknesses

- insufficient differentiation in the work to take account of the range of students' ability
- poor student retention in GCE A level sociology

26 The self-assessment report identifies organisation and management of teaching and learning as important strengths. Inspectors agreed with this assessment. There are detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Eighty-five per cent of the teaching which was observed was good or outstanding. In most lessons students are both challenged and are challenging; willing to risk expressing and arguing for controversial ideas. Students use the specialist language of the subjects with

confidence. They are encouraged to value the methods through which the social sciences provide fresh perspectives on society. A few lessons are based on too limited a range of activities, with exposition by teachers a dominant feature. Some group and paired work needs better planning if it is to be effective. Teachers monitor students' attendance and punctuality closely, with the result that attendance was over 90 per cent in the lessons observed.

27 Students are well prepared for examinations through regular assessment. They usually receive constructive feedback. Careful action planning has been effective in helping students who have difficulty in sustaining their motivation for long periods. Targets are set for examination performance and student retention.

28 The self-assessment report highlights some examination results which are outstanding. In the two-year full-time GCE A level courses, pass rates consistently exceed the national sixth form college average at both A to E and A to C grades. Achievements in GCE AS subjects are more variable. GCE A level sociology has not met its target for retention and there is an action plan to improve matters. Retention in the one-year part-time GCE A level courses has steadily improved from 39 per cent in 1994 to 72 per cent in 1997.

29 Teachers are well qualified and effectively deployed. All the staff are able to teach in more than one of the social sciences and some also teach GNVQ programmes. Classes are taught in well-decorated mobile classrooms. There are good classroom materials and library texts to which students have easy access.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in social sciences, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year GCE A levels ¹	Retention (%)	87	79	84
	Pass rate (%)	95	96	94
One-year GCE A levels ²	Retention (%)	39	56	72
	Pass rate (%)	76	88	83
GCSE ³	Retention (%)	83	72	84
	Pass rate (%)	72	70	65

Source: college data

¹sociology, government and politics, psychology, religious studies, philosophy and law

²sociology, law, psychology and philosophy

³sociology, law and psychology

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

30 The college has made considerable improvements in this area since its last inspection. Further improvements were in progress. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong links with partner schools
- the wide range of open days, taster sessions and careers events
- good careers and higher education guidance
- readily accessible counselling and welfare services
- comprehensive student profiling and records of achievement

Weaknesses

- inadequate support for part-time and evening class students
- limited specialist help with numeracy and literacy
- inconsistent tutorial practice
- a limited work experience programme

31 The different aspects of student support are managed by three directors. The managers concerned work closely and effectively together to implement policies. A member of the governing body links with the support service. The arrangement works well.

32 The college has strong links with its five partner schools which also keep in frequent touch with one another. College staff work with these schools to develop their curricula and to plan progression from school to college wherever possible. There is an extensive programme of careers events and guidance. Pupils attend 'taster' days in the college. All

potential students are offered individual interviews. The partner schools make their pupil records available to college staff so that admission decisions are well informed. Consequently diagnostic testing of students for key skills and other special support requirements is justifiably limited. Wider application of testing will be necessary as the college expands its recruitment of adults and students from non-partner schools. Individual support in numeracy or literacy is not available centrally and its provision relies on informal arrangements with subject teachers. The college provides specialist support for students with dyslexia and arrangements are made to support partially sighted students, when required. Links with a special school for students with severe and moderate learning difficulties have developed recently.

33 College and course induction generally takes place in tutorials and lessons during the first few weeks of term. A checklist is given to all students to monitor consistent use of the induction programme. Whilst the programme is carefully planned, its effectiveness varies. The students' handbook and diary acts as a guide to support services and entitlements under the college charter.

34 The college is widening its range of programmes and recruiting more adults to study part-time during the day or evening. Support facilities, which include the learning resources centre, are generally available during an extended college day for three days each week. Part-time students are encouraged to use the same services that are available to full-time students but their needs are not always met.

35 The tutorial policy has recently been revised. Tutor groups now consist of students at the same level and with similar aims. Tutors usually teach the members of their tutorial groups. Registration takes place daily in tutor groups. This short meeting is used effectively as an opportunity for routine communication. Attendance records are maintained accurately

Cross-college Provision

and reasons for absence are rapidly followed up. There is a comprehensive tutorial handbook but some tutors make better use of the weekly tutorial period than others. Students' progress is formally reviewed by tutors twice each year. Every student is given an action plan and their progress is recorded in an individual record of achievement and reported to parents if appropriate.

36 There is a comprehensive range of resources to help students to plan their careers. Links with the careers service are generally effective and the careers library is well maintained. The college provides a high level of support for careers counselling. The extensive careers programme includes external speakers. There are limited work experience opportunities for both GCE A level and vocational course students. The self-assessment report recognises that this needs to be improved. Students have ready access to counselling and welfare advice.

37 In the last two years the students' union has been revitalised. In 1996, the president of the students' union became a member of the governing body. The students' union office has been relocated to a position beside the new refectory. In addition to organising social events, the freshers' fair, an overseas visit to Amsterdam and various fund-raising events for charity, the union committee represents students at local and national levels. The union produces an annual report on its activities which aids the planning of future improvements of student facilities.

General Resources

Grade 3

38 Accommodation and equipment have improved since the last inspection in 1994. This has been recognised in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- a phased building programme which is in progress
- improved provision of modern computers
- an attractive and welcoming learning resources centre

Weaknesses

- poor room utilisation
- the remaining stock of poor buildings
- inadequate expenditure on the library

39 The college occupies a single site of 5.5 hectares which is contained by housing, a railway line and a leisure centre. About one-third of the site is occupied by buildings and the remainder is covered by playing fields. The main buildings were constructed in the 1960s. There is a mixture of two and three-storey blocks with flat roofs. Many of the single-storey buildings are in poor condition and a new survey is in hand to assess the extent of the problem.

40 A five-phase building and expansion programme is under way. A new cafeteria, learning resources centre and business studies centre have been completed. Work on conference facilities and an improved entrance and reception area is due to start later this year. Improvement of many of the poorer buildings such as the performing arts block, the changing rooms and open-air gymnasium, awaits the outcome of a new condition survey. There is limited social space for students which,

Cross-college Provision

combined with the constraints of the timetable, results in congestion at meal times and when bad weather forces students to stay inside. Facilities for wheelchair users are available only on the ground floor. Some ramps need alteration to ensure that they are safe. Fire exits are clearly marked in corridors but in classrooms they are often concealed.

41 The college has an accurate room utilisation database but it is only just starting to use it to improve efficiency. Larger teaching areas are sometimes not used to the best effect because teachers prefer to work in their own base classrooms, which they also use as offices. This practice sometimes results in overcrowding. The teaching timetable results in pressures on communal areas at peak times and inefficient use of computing facilities.

42 The library has developed significantly since the last inspection. This year a new learning resources centre was opened. It offers spacious and attractive accommodation which is centrally located. The careers library and student welfare room adjoins the library. The library has 106 study spaces. There are facilities for CD-ROM, video playback and off-air recording. There are approximately 13,600 books, 388 videos, 24 CD-ROM databases and subscriptions to 32 journals and seven newspapers. There are good induction arrangements to the library for students and staff. The library budget is low at £12,000 in 1997-98, or about £10.90 per full-time equivalent student. This is insufficient to keep the present bookstock up to date and to buy materials for new courses. Proposals for new courses underestimate the impact on the central learning resources provision. The library staff are aware that liaison with academic staff should be improved.

43 The college has significantly improved its computers recently. Some £65,000 has been spent on new computers and an associated network. Fifty-nine modern computers are

available for student use; a ratio of computers to students of 1:19. This ratio is worse than in 1994, but the machines are of a higher standard and are more reliable. There are a few computers in curriculum areas but they are not usually available to students in other subjects. There is a good range of software. Access to the Internet is scheduled for early 1998. A consultant is assisting the college to develop its information technology strategy.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses in quality assurance. Many matters which are described as issues for development in the self-assessment report had been acted upon before the inspection.

Key strengths

- a comprehensive framework for self-assessment and quality assurance
- involvement in quality assurance by governors
- participation by the audit committee in validating self-assessment
- appropriate use of standards and targets
- the excellent college charter
- effective course review
- effective tracking of students' progress
- wide consultation in developing procedures

Weaknesses

- limited objective evidence on the quality of teaching and learning

45 Quality assurance arrangements have developed very significantly since the last inspection, when weaknesses clearly outweighed strengths. Policies, activities and reporting arrangements are now clear and fully

Cross-college Provision

understood throughout the college. Course teams produce carefully structured course reviews which are subsequently incorporated into reports by programme managers and divisional directors. Reports are written in standard format. They are reviewed regularly and action is taken until problems are resolved. Divisional directors' reports and evidence from student surveys inform the quality reports presented to governors three times a year.

46 The governors produce a summary quality report which is published in the college charter. The report identifies strengths and issues for development. It also quantifies progress since the previous year. Governors have applied the quality assurance system to their own activities. They have recently carried out an evaluation of staff and student perceptions of their effectiveness. The audit committee has extended its work to the systems used for self-assessment and has validated the evidence upon which the self-assessment report is based.

47 Performance indicators are widely used. The performance of GCE A level students is monitored throughout their studies against grades predicted at the outset. Under performance is quickly identified and steps are taken to put matters right. Targets for student retention are set at course level and then compared with three-year averages. In cases where retention is below the college average, teachers are required to set improvement targets and to achieve them.

48 The attractive college charter is central to the quality assurance arrangements. It sets standards for services and targets for levels of awareness and satisfaction. Surveys of student opinion are used to test compliance with standards. Questionnaires are administered at tutorials to ensure a high level of completion. Students are informed of the outcomes. Targets are met in 90 per cent of cases. The college has an effective procedure for responding to formal complaints, although the range and nature of

complaints have not been summarised. The charter contains no explicit commitments to employers or other external bodies.

49 The college undertook its first self-assessment in preparation for the inspection. This involved a wide range of college staff and governors. Whilst new, the links between the self-assessment process, quality assurance and strategic planning are clear. The college charter is seen as an integral part of this process and the decision to incorporate the underlying charter performance measures into college publicity provides a challenge to both staff and students. Grades for provision were assigned by the curriculum and support managers, but moderated by the senior management team. The self-assessment report was approved by the board of governors and the governors' audit committee checked the validity of the supporting evidence.

50 The college has been slow to appreciate the value of conducting its own lesson observations. A scheme was piloted in the summer of 1997 after submission of the self-assessment report to the FEFC. Some judgements in the report were informed by the external quality review process conducted with other colleges. The staff review system was revised a year ago. Reviews are conducted by managers and subsequent plans refer to the strategic plan of the college. The effectiveness of the revised scheme has not yet been assessed. The college will be assessed against the Investors in People standard in December 1997. Good progress has been made towards achieving the required standards.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 2

51 Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report provides a reliable appraisal of governance in the college.

Key strengths

- highly committed governors with appropriate expertise and experience
- a good working relationship with senior managers
- efficient management of board and committee business
- appropriate involvement in strategic planning
- effective oversight of the college's financial health
- close monitoring of the college's academic performance

Weaknesses

- arrangements for clerkship which do not guarantee independent advice
- limited arrangements for the appraisal and development of senior post holders

52 The college's corporation board has 20 members. A student member was included for the first time in 1996. Other members include 10 independent governors, two staff members, one parent, a co-opted member, a representative of the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and the principal. There are three vacancies, one of which will be filled shortly by election of

another parent governor. The governors provide an appropriate range of professional and business expertise and conduct their affairs at board and committee level efficiently. Attendance at meetings is high.

53 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the governance of the college is good. The board substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The clerk to the governors is the executive assistant to the principal, and also has responsibility for some personnel matters. This arrangement may make it difficult for the independence of the clerk's role to be protected and assured. Governors' understanding and observation of the distinction between governance and management ensure a successful working relationship with senior managers. The chairman and principal meet frequently. Governors fulfil their role in determining the strategic direction of the college's development.

54 Governors supervise the college's performance closely. They endorse the college's key performance targets and receive termly reports which summarise progress towards them. They have conducted their own assessment of the college's achievements against its charter commitments and their findings are used to monitor the college's performance. However, governors have only recently begun to assess formally their own effectiveness as a governing body.

Cross-college Provision

Management

Grade 1

55 The self-assessment report provides a rigorous analysis of the quality of management which was supported by inspection findings.

Key strengths

- a college mission which is supported by clearly defined targets
- strong leadership
- effective management with an open and responsive style
- effective strategic planning based on excellent needs analysis
- good management of change
- strong commitment to equal opportunities and staff development
- consistent achievement of growth targets
- sound financial management

Weaknesses

- poor management information systems

56 Within six months of its first inspection, the college carried out a major reorganisation. The former structure, which was based on over 30 academic departments and tutor teams was replaced by a new framework of three curriculum and three support services divisions. Each is led by a director. This structure has served the college well for the past three years. Following annual reviews of the college's evolving needs the detailed structure of each division has been modified. The process of change has been very well managed. It has brought substantial improvements to the organisation while retaining the trust and co-operation of staff. This achievement reflects the high standard of leadership in the college. There is open and responsive management.

Sound personnel procedures, genuine commitment to equal opportunities and substantial investment in staff development and training have underpinned reorganisation.

57 The college recently reviewed its mission following extensive consultation with staff. It is a clear statement with well-defined aims. The new strategic plan is soundly based on an exemplary needs analysis. It has enabled governors to set precise targets to maintain their traditional services and to exploit new opportunities. Close links with schools remain a priority to sustain the numbers of 16 to 18 year old students. Strategic planning involves staff at all levels and it is systematically linked to the college's quality assurance procedures. Targets for improvement in students' attendance, retention and achievement are well established, but in the three service divisions target setting is less advanced.

58 The college is in a sound financial position. The FEFC's audit service concluded that, within the scope of its assessment, the college's financial management is adequate. The procedure for delegating budgets is understood by staff and is considered to be equitable. Appropriate financial reports are provided for college managers and governors. The college's internal and external auditors have identified no significant weaknesses in the systems of financial control. A rolling cash-flow forecast would enhance the present level of financial reporting. The college's average level of funding for 1997-98 is £17.31 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £17.50 per unit.

59 The college has achieved or exceeded its growth targets in each of the past three years. There are sufficient teachers to deliver the college's programmes and they are effectively supported by the service divisions. Staff and other resources are efficiently deployed. Staffing costs now account for approximately 73 per cent of the college's income. A reduction of some 9 per cent has been made in the past two years

Cross-college Provision

but the proportion of staffing costs remains higher than in many comparable institutions. The college's management information system is no more than adequate to meet current needs. While personnel management is good, the personnel database is basic. Another database copes adequately with students' records, their changes of course and their attendance. Statistical returns to the FEFC have been submitted consistently within deadlines. However, the college has no overall policy on the development of management information systems to support the ambitious expansion plans which are envisaged for the next three years. Several managers do not have access to a management information network and rely entirely on reports prepared by other staff.

Conclusions

60 Although this was the college's first self-assessment report, the inspection team found that it was an effective document for planning the inspection. The majority of the findings of the college's self-assessment report were in agreement with those of the inspection team although the college had not yet developed the methods to provide reliable information about the quality of teaching and learning. This resulted in an overgenerous grading in one curriculum area. Otherwise, the college's judgements were considered to be rigorous and sound. The self-assessment report is used by the college as an effective planning tool and the resulting action plan had progressed significantly by the time of the inspection.

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 (November 1996)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	72
19-24 years	17
25+ years	11
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1996)

Level of study	%
Foundation	0
Intermediate	28
Advanced	72
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1996)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	317	37	23
Engineering	23	1	2
Business	61	19	5
Hotel and catering	8	0	1
Health and community care	39	73	7
Art and design	68	1	5
Humanities	523	342	57
Basic education	1	0	0
Total	1,040	473	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	73	0	0	73
Supporting direct learning contact	12	0	0	12
Other support	24	0	0	24
Total	109	0	0	109

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial Data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£2,975,000	£3,184,000	
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.13	£18.40	£18.86
Payroll as a proportion of income	75%	80%	
Achievement of funding target	99%	103%	pub data N/A
Diversity of income	9%	10%	
Operating surplus	£103,000	-£20,000	

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)

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	406	419	472
	Average point score per entry	5.4	5.7	5.6
	Position in tables	top 10%	top 10%	top 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	#	#	18
	Percentage achieving qualification	#	#	83%
	Position in tables	#	#	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	7	32
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	86%	59%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	middle third

Source: DfEE

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

#advanced vocational courses introduced in 1995

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