

Xaverian College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

**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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 104 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 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 students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Xaverian College

North West Region

Inspected September 1999

Xaverian College is a designated Catholic sixth form college in inner city Manchester. It is one of a group of colleges which recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. The college's self-assessment process involved all staff and governors. The college produced a detailed self-assessment report informed by thorough course reviews and extensive surveys of students' and parents' perceptions. The report was moderated by senior managers and approved by the governing body. By the time of the inspection, the college had made good progress in implementing many aspects of its action plan. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. In one area, weaknesses in teaching and learning and in retention and achievement had been understated. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the grades that the college awarded itself.

The college offers courses in six of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in four of these was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has fostered a strong sense of community. All students have good levels of personal support. They participate in a wide range of enrichment activities. There are good pass rates for most GCE A level courses. Many students on these courses achieve higher grades than predicted by their GCSE results. Since the last inspection, the college has made significant improvements in

quality assurance, governance and management. Sound course review procedures are consistently implemented. The college makes successful efforts to gather perceptions of students and parents and takes effective action in response to the concerns identified. Staff development activities are closely linked to college priorities. Governors take effective action to fulfil the college mission. They carefully monitor the college finances and other aspects of college performance. Financial management is good. Significant improvements in the accuracy and availability of management information have increased its use in course planning and review. The narrow range of courses provides few opportunities for entry at intermediate level. There are no foundation courses. To further improve its provision, the college should: broaden its range of courses for Catholic school-leavers with low achievements; address weaknesses in retention; address weaknesses in achievement on some GCSE and GCE AS courses; and provide sufficient additional learning support to meet demand.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and science	3	Support for students	2
Business studies and administration	2	General resources	3
Art and design	2	Quality assurance	3
Psychology, sociology and law	3	Governance	3
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Xaverian College was founded in 1862 and established as a sixth form college in 1977. It has been located on its present site, 2 miles south east of Manchester city centre, since 1907. The college is housed in seven separate buildings, which date from between 1840 and 1976. The whole campus is designated a conservation area.

2 The college is located in an area of Manchester in which there is considerable social and economic deprivation. Adjacent areas of the city are among the 10% most deprived wards in England and Wales. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. The number of 16 year olds in the city gaining five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grade C or above in 1998 was 29%, compared with the national average of 46%. Of the college's students, 22% are of minority ethnic heritage compared with 13% of Manchester residents. The college recruits 79% of its students from within the city of Manchester. It has close links with six Catholic high schools in Manchester, one Church of England high school and five other Catholic schools outside the city of Manchester. Of the college's students, 62% are from these schools. The college is currently in the process of having its trusteeship transferred to the Roman Catholic diocese of Salford.

3 There is a wide choice for students progressing from year 11 in Manchester schools. In addition to the sixth forms in eight independent sector schools, there are two schools with sixth forms, seven with some 16 to 18 provision, two large general further education colleges and three sixth form colleges, two of which are Catholic. In the boroughs adjacent to Manchester, there are two Catholic sixth form colleges, one to the north and one to the south of the city, five other sixth form colleges and six large further education colleges.

4 The college offers 28 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), seven general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), four at advanced level and three at intermediate level and 11 GCSE subjects. In July 1999, there were 1,242 students on roll, of whom all but 11 were full time. Of these, 13% were following an intermediate level course and 87% an advanced course. Many students on advanced level programmes also take an intermediate level course such as GCSE English or mathematics. Almost all students are under 19.

5 The curriculum is organised in six faculties, each subdivided into curriculum areas with responsibility devolved to individual curriculum leaders. Student support is based on a tutor system, managed by eight senior tutors. The heads of faculty, along with members of the senior management group, make up the academic board. They and the senior tutors form the middle management of the college. The senior management group meets fortnightly and also holds a strategy meeting every half term. The college employs 81 teaching staff and 102 staff in total, 19 of whom are part time.

6 The college is involved in a number of local partnerships, including the Manchester Lifelong Learning Partnership and Manchester Catholic Education Partnership, which involves all Catholic secondary and post-16 providers in the city. It participates in a number of educational initiatives such as a basic skills summer school and a key skills consortium. It has good links with higher education institutions and is a member of the Unique Hope network, the members of which are Liverpool Hope University College and a number of Catholic sixth form colleges in the north west.

7 The college's mission statement commits it to become a community 'in which the spiritual, moral and intellectual talents of [its] students are nurtured'. The college sees the religious education programme, the other opportunities for spiritual development that it offers to all students, the supportive pastoral programme and the wide range of enrichment activities,

Context

many with an emphasis on helping others, as integral to the fulfilment of its mission.

The Inspection

8 The college was inspected during the week beginning 27 September 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the individualised student record (ISR) for 1997 and 1998. The college provided data for 1999. These were checked against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies, and found to be accurate. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. Nine inspectors and an auditor

carried out the inspection over a total of 41 days. Inspectors observed 45 lessons and five tutorials and religious education lessons and examined students' work. The inspection team examined documents provided by the college to support its self-assessment report and held meetings with college governors, managers, staff, students, parents and representatives of local schools and the community.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 60% were judged to be good or outstanding and 4% were less than satisfactory. This compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1998-99.

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	13	13	2	0	31
GCSE	0	5	1	0	0	6
GNVQ	2	5	1	0	0	8
Tutorials	0	2	3	0	0	5
Total (No.)	5	25	18	2	0	50
Total (%)	10	50	36	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Xaverian College	15.4	83
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Science

Grade 3

11 The inspection covered courses at advanced and intermediate levels in mathematics, computing and information technology (IT). Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report but found that weaknesses in accommodation were not identified.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses and lessons
- good retention rates on most courses
- improving achievement levels on most courses
- good access to high-quality computers and software

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement of students in some lessons
- poor levels of achievement in GCSE mathematics
- inappropriate accommodation for larger student groups
- narrow range of courses

12 Out of 13 lessons observed, inspectors graded seven as good or outstanding. This proportion is below the national average for the programme area in 1998. As the self-assessment report states, most teachers use detailed lesson plans with clear aims and objectives. Learning resources are well prepared and of good quality. In a GCE A level lesson, the teacher used a range of learning activities to enable students to gain practical experience of tackling problems and then showed them how to review and consolidate their learning. In many lessons, teachers did not provide work which was sufficiently challenging for the students. Teachers asked

few questions and did not check students' understanding of the topics being taught. In several mathematics lessons, teachers made few opportunities for students to contribute to discussions, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report. Students are set clear assignments at an appropriate level for the course. Standards of presentation are generally good. In marking work, teachers give detailed written guidance to help students improve their performance.

13 As the self-assessment report recognises, pass rates on advanced level courses improved in 1999 to above the national averages. Pass rates in GCE A level mathematics have consistently improved over the last three years to 92% in 1999. In both computing and IT, pass rates improved to above the national average in 1999 from well below the national average in 1998. Pass rates on the GCSE mathematics course have consistently declined over the previous three years. In 1999, 36% of the students completing the course achieved grades C or above compared with the national average of 43%. Conversely, retention rates on all courses improved in 1999, most to above national average levels, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. At the end of the first year of GCE A level courses, students who are identified as being unlikely to succeed are transferred to the appropriate GCE advanced supplementary (AS) course.

14 The college recognises that the range of courses is narrow. There are no GNVQ courses in IT. The lack of alternatives to the GCSE in mathematics leads to some students following inappropriate courses. A recently introduced GCSE course in IT has increased the choice available to prospective students. Students participate in a wide range of enrichment activities such as study visits, national competitions and foreign trips. They regularly receive an informative mathematics newsletter. Courses are effectively managed. Course teams meet frequently. They have developed

Curriculum Areas

comprehensive schemes of work and a central bank of learning materials, which are available on the college computer network to both students and staff. Students are provided with detailed course handbooks that they find helpful. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report.

15 The self-assessment report states that students have good access to high-quality computer hardware and software and inspectors agreed. Students are able to use these resources during timetabled lessons and on a casual or 'drop-in' basis. In some larger groups, students often have to share computers. As noted in the self-assessment report, teachers are well qualified and many have postgraduate qualifications.

16 Good use is made of display materials in many teaching rooms. Classrooms are often too small for the size of the groups using them. In some cases, this leads to severe overcrowding and prevents teachers from moving around to check students' work. Accommodation for mathematics courses is scattered across two buildings and, consequently, there is no identifiable base for the subject. The college did not identify these weaknesses in its self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and science, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	217	181	154
		Retention (%)	84	80	81
		Achievement (%)	62	39	36
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	174	161	148
		Retention (%)	77	75	81
		Achievement (%)	80	85	92
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	40	25	31
		Retention (%)	75	60	74
		Achievement (%)	86	67	91
GCE A level IT	3	Number of starters	*	42	60
		Retention (%)	*	71	72
		Achievement (%)	*	73	98
GCE AS mathematics	3	Number of starters	11	12	13
		Retention (%)	82	75	85
		Achievement (%)	75	60	100
GCE AS IT	3	Number of starters	*	10	14
		Retention (%)	*	80	79
		Achievement (%)	*	17	73

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies and Administration

Grade 2

17 The inspection covered GCSE and GCE A level courses and GNVQ courses at intermediate and advanced levels. Inspectors agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- sound assessment and monitoring
- consistently improving pass rates at GCE A level
- high retention and achievement on the GNVQ intermediate course
- well-planned courses

Weaknesses

- low retention on the GNVQ advanced course
- low and declining achievement and retention on the GCSE course
- insufficient IT resources

18 The college provides GCSE, GCE A level and GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses for full-time students. GCE A level courses recruit particularly well. Inspectors agreed that courses are well planned and well reviewed. Schemes of work are regularly improved. Teachers work as cohesive teams and meet frequently to plan course improvements.

19 The self-assessment report states that there is much good teaching and inspectors agreed. They graded eight of the 11 lessons observed as good or outstanding. Teachers often provide an appropriate sequence of teaching methods and student activities which are designed to develop and test learning. In one lesson, the topic of types of markets was effectively introduced

through activities that immediately engaged the students and this was followed by a combination of short exercises and video extracts which developed their understanding and consolidated their knowledge of the topic. In another lesson, students' experiences in their work placements were used successfully to explore different organisational and administrative arrangements in business companies. Students were well motivated, worked productively on set tasks and participated enthusiastically in question and answer sessions. In a few lessons, teachers did not allow students to develop their responses to questions fully. Inspectors agreed that assessment of students' work and monitoring of their progress is effective. Students set targets that they use to review their progress and plan future action. The faculty provides a 'drop in' subject support workshop. As identified in the self-assessment report, students put a high value on the useful and frequent feedback they receive from teachers. Attendance and punctuality are closely monitored and are good overall.

20 Pass rates on advanced level courses are good and improving, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. In 1999, pass rates on the GCE A level course improved to significantly above the national average. Students on this course achieved higher results than those predicted for them on the basis of their qualifications on entry. On the GNVQ intermediate course, both pass rates and retention rates have consistently improved over the last three years to levels significantly above national averages. Many of the students on this course progress to the advanced level course. Conversely, pass rates and retention rates on the GCSE course have been low and declining over the last three years. Persistent low retention rates on the GNVQ advanced course are not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Last year, the college introduced strategies to improve retention and these are having some effect. This year, the numbers of students retained on the second year of advanced level courses have increased significantly. GNVQ

Curriculum Areas

students demonstrate sound development of key skills in their assignment work and in their portfolios. GCE A level students' files show progressive competence in problem-solving, essay and report writing.

21 Business courses are accommodated together in an older building with rooms of varying size and quality. The best rooms are large and enable a range of teaching and learning styles. Some classrooms are drab and too small for the numbers of students using them, weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report. All rooms have good audiovisual equipment. There are too few computers for use on business projects and assignments. All students are issued with textbooks appropriate for their course. The library has an adequate stock of books, business journals and CD-ROMs. Students use the Internet for research.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business studies and administration, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE	2	Number of starters	35	25	21
		Retention (%)	80	88	67
		Achievement (%)	50	47	43
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	40	35	25
		Retention (%)	78	83	92
		Achievement (%)	55	72	96
GCE A level	3	Number of starters	96	94	121
		Retention (%)	88	73	82
		Achievement (%)	81	83	90
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	28	22	22
		Retention (%)	68	55	59
		Achievement (%)	69	50	77

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered GCE A level courses in art, media and theatre studies, GCSE courses in art and GNVQ advanced art. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but concluded that some strengths were understated and some weaknesses were omitted.

Key strengths

- significantly improved retention rates in GCE A level art
- challenging teaching
- good progression to art-related higher education
- high standard of practical work in media studies
- well-planned courses and collaborative teamwork

Weaknesses

- retention significantly below the national average in GCE A level theatre studies
- students' underdeveloped skills and ideas in GCE A level art
- insufficient learning resources

23 Inspectors agreed that the college offers a broad range of full-time courses with good opportunities for progression. The recently introduced GCE A level media studies course has recruited well. A GNVQ advanced art and design course introduced in 1997 enrolled low numbers and retention was poor. Recruitment has improved to 31 this year. In 1998, 71% of art students progressed to art-related higher education courses. Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities in drama, art, set design, music, theatre and film. Courses are well organised. The location of all art courses in

a designated arts building has assisted close and collaborative teamwork and generated effective joint projects in art, drama and media.

24 Much of the teaching is of a high standard. Of the 10 lessons observed, inspectors judged seven to be good or outstanding. Teachers plan learning activities which take into account individual students' needs, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed that teachers prepare lessons and assignments well. They use a wide variety of methods to stimulate students and help them to learn. During a practical exercise in a GCE A level drama group, students were placed in pairs to explore the themes of anger, bullying and oppression. Each group was given a task that appropriately challenged their individual abilities. In an art lesson, constructive guidance and support was given to individual students. Each was encouraged to develop a unique style and experiment with new techniques and materials unfamiliar to them. In most lessons, students participated well in discussion and spoke effectively. In the weaker lessons, teachers failed to engage students in discussion and evaluation of artwork when it would have been appropriate to do so. Assessment is thorough and teachers provide regular and supportive feedback that enables students to improve their work.

25 Retention rates in GCE A level art and design improved significantly in 1999, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. Retention rates on other advanced courses are poor. In 1998, the college changed to a more practical-based drama syllabus and there is some improvement in the retention of the current second-year cohort of students. With the exception of the GCE A level course in theatre studies, pass rates on most courses are above the national average. Inspectors noted the high degree of technical ability, visual awareness and creativity in students' film work. In a promotional pop video, a sense of audience and context were effectively represented in the

Curriculum Areas

location, framing, camera angles and editing process. The product demonstrated good teamwork. Students' achievements in media are also celebrated nationally in competitions and film festivals. Drama students successfully perform in college productions and at external venues. The self-assessment report understated the strengths in the standard of practical work in media studies. Students on the GCE A level art course have insufficiently developed skills in three-dimensional work and figure drawing. The work observed showed a lack of understanding of the formal elements that underpin three-dimensional, mixed media and figurative drawing. Insufficient attention is paid to sketchbook research and the development of students' ideas.

26 The self-assessment report states that the range and quality of learning resources are poor and inspectors agreed. The range of specialist books and contemporary material is small. There are insufficient IT resources to support the growing number of students in media studies and art and design. Students require

greater access to industrial standard hardware and software. Though the college audiovisual aids technician provides good support for media studies, there is a lack of technician support in art and drama. Most specialist accommodation is good but two workshops are too small for the numbers of students using them. Teachers are practitioners in their subject. All have had recent industrial placements and make effective use of their work experience.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in art and design, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE theatre studies	2	Number of starters	*	16	12
		Retention (%)	*	94	75
		Achievement (%)	*	93	100
GCE A level art studies	3	Number of starters	38	42	69
		Retention (%)	65	69	98
		Achievement (%)	100	100	93
GCE A level media studies	3	Number of starters	*	*	45
		Retention (%)	*	*	68
		Achievement (%)	*	*	93
GCE A level theatre studies	3	Number of starters	34	44	47
		Retention (%)	71	75	56
		Achievement (%)	71	51	69

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Psychology, Sociology and Law

Grade 3

27 The inspection covered courses at intermediate and advanced levels in psychology, sociology and law. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They found additional weaknesses in teaching and learning, retention and achievement.

Key strengths

- good pass rates at GCE A level
- well-managed and systematically planned courses
- high-quality study guides
- recently refurbished faculty accommodation

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory teaching and learning
- low retention rates on many courses
- poor pass rates on GCSE and GCE AS courses

28 Management of the curriculum area and courses is strong. As the self-assessment report states, faculty planning involves both staff and students and is systematic and effective. Schemes of work and lesson plans ensure that the syllabus content is covered. They include references to the subject specific and key skills that are required for success in social sciences. Handbooks and other resources provide clear information on developing the important skills of analysis and evaluation. There is a regular, informative and interesting newsletter in psychology. All courses have induction programmes that familiarise students with the variety of learning resources available. Teachers are involved in the self-assessment process. They work well together and are supportive of each other and of their students. Students' views are sought and lead to action.

For example, outcomes from the faculty students' forum have led to improvements in resources and some changes in teaching styles.

29 Of the 11 lessons observed, six were graded as good and two as less than satisfactory. In the better lessons, teachers used a range of methods to help students learn, including individual and group work, demonstrations, presentations and effective question and answer sessions. In a GCE A level psychology lesson the students, who were just at the end of their induction period, were able to deliver well-prepared presentations. This approach tested their understanding and helped to develop teamwork and oral communication skills at an early stage in their course. Teachers made use of students' own ideas and experiences to illustrate points and aid their understanding. Some lessons did not start on time or were interrupted by students arriving late and teachers concluded the lessons in a rushed manner and failed to consolidate the learning that had taken place. In the weaker lessons, a few students were allowed to shout out and otherwise dominate the discussion. There was no effective checking of students' understanding. Some teaching does not sufficiently stimulate students, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Teachers are aware of this and are beginning to address it by participating in staff development focused on teaching and learning styles.

30 Criteria for assessing work are shared with students. Assignments are carefully marked and students receive useful advice from their teachers on how to improve their work. The formal and informal learning support available to students is extensive. They benefit from a well-developed system of monitoring and reviewing their attendance, motivation and achievement. Advanced level students are made aware of target grade ranges and their progress is reviewed each term. Extra support lessons are timetabled and staff give of their time freely outside the classroom.

Curriculum Areas

31 Pass rates on GCE A level courses are significantly above the national average. In 1999, all law students who entered, passed the examination. Many students on these courses achieve better results than predicted on the basis of their entry qualifications. Pass rates on GCE AS and on GCSE courses are poor, a weakness not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Retention rates have improved recently on GCE AS courses and on GCE A level psychology. They remain below the national average in GCE A level sociology and have declined consistently in GCE A level law. On GCSE courses, retention overall has decreased from 79% in 1997 to 68% in 1999.

32 Teachers are well qualified and keep up to date with changes in their subjects and in the further education sector. They are knowledgeable about developments in inclusive learning and curriculum 2000. New teachers are well supported and have good access to staff

development. Recently refurbished classrooms have attractive displays of students' work. There is a small IT suite for students' use. Study support materials include comprehensive handbooks and high-quality study guides. The guides are written by teachers, annually evaluated by students and teachers and regularly updated. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in psychology, sociology and law , 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE sociology, psychology and law	2	Number of starters	98	63	75
		Retention (%)	79	63	68
		Achievement (%)	48	65	51
GCE A level law	3	Number of starters	60	50	51
		Retention (%)	75	72	70
		Achievement (%)	71	92	100
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	101	133	122
		Retention (%)	70	70	77
		Achievement (%)	70	96	99
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	87	63	48
		Retention (%)	76	63	69
		Achievement (%)	82	100	94
GCE AS psychology, sociology and law	3	Number of starters	29	29	46
		Retention (%)	79	76	80
		Achievement (%)	74	55	57

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

33 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but found additional ones not identified by the college.

Key strengths

- a strong sense of community within the college
- well-considered framework to allow students' spiritual and moral development
- extensive and informative pre-entry activities
- effective induction arrangements
- high levels of support for individual students
- good-quality careers provision
- wide range of enrichment activities

Weaknesses

- insufficient provision of additional learning support
- lack of co-ordination in planning and monitoring student support systems

34 The college's pastoral work and its general religious education course contribute effectively to the fulfilment of its mission. The college makes explicit its aims and identity as a Catholic college, while welcoming students from other faiths and non-faith backgrounds into a friendly community where individuals are valued. The college employs a qualified counsellor and the spiritual director is available to support students. General religious education lessons are well attended and of good quality. However, inspectors considered that there is insufficient focus on the whole college's contribution to the Catholic ethos.

35 Inspectors agreed that pre-enrolment information and activities are a strength. Pre-entry activities build on the college's strong relationships with local schools. Prospective students are interviewed on two occasions. Students with identified learning needs are discussed with schools so that the college can maintain their support. Detailed course descriptions and a clear disability statement supplement the college prospectus. Students speak highly of their induction. All students receive and use an informative planner with an attractive, modern cover featuring 'Flat Eric'. The college charter is discussed with students during induction. Six weeks after enrolment, students meet their tutors to discuss how they have settled into their courses and the college community.

36 All students have a personal tutor. Tutor groups meet daily, with a long session on one day. Attendance at tutorials is generally good. Though senior tutors check that tutors follow the outline tutorial programme, they do not observe tutorials to gain an awareness of their quality. Students have mixed views about the value of tutorials, but feel strongly that personal tutors offer them a high level of support. Students have regular progress reviews with their subject and personal tutors. On GCE A level courses, the review includes a discussion of target grades based on students' previous GCSE achievements. A similar system for intermediate level students has been introduced this year. Students do not produce a formal action plan covering their whole programme. The college maintains regular contact with parents, through reports, parents evenings and personal communication.

37 The college recognises that its provision of additional learning support is not meeting demand. There is a waiting list of students referred by staff or self-referred. In 1998-99, only 7% of students received specialist support, against a college estimate that 25% may have needed it. Only a small number of students are tested for their learning support requirements.

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The support provided to individuals is of a high quality. Teachers of students receiving support are well informed about their progress and give practical and emotional help to them in lessons. A number of college staff have been trained in ways of building support for students into the curriculum. There is no formal support for high achievers. Teachers provide subject clinics for students on Wednesday afternoons.

38 Careers education provided in partnership with the careers service is comprehensive and well planned, strengths noted in the self-assessment report. Careers service advisers attend open days and enrolment and give guidance after examination results. They are working with the college on the issue of retention on GCSE courses. Careers staff provide tutors and students with high-quality materials and support for the careers elements of the tutorial programme. They organise an annual higher education evening for students and parents and a careers convention. College and careers service staff review their work termly and make necessary adjustments. Students' destinations are monitored and the information is used for promotional and guidance purposes. The college has won the Careers Partnership Award for the quality of its information, policy and practice. The careers library is well stocked and students can use a range of software to guide their decisions.

39 Managers of the different aspects of services to students do not formally meet to review services and to produce a coherent development plan. The college does not have a clear strategy for developing its Catholic ethos further. There is no evaluation to inform future priorities. These weaknesses were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

40 Inspectors agreed that students participate in a wide range of enrichment activities. In line with the college mission, students take part regularly in charitable events and many respond practically to social needs within the wider community, often alongside staff. They are

helped to reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes. A large number of sporting and cultural activities is available to students, as well as visits to universities and work placements.

General Resources

Grade 3

41 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found some additional weaknesses. Some weaknesses identified by the college had been partially remedied by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-planned accommodation strategy
- significant improvements in the quantity and quality of IT equipment
- attractive, secure campus
- improvements in facilities for students

Weaknesses

- poorly-sited reception area
- little access for people with restricted mobility
- overcrowding in some areas

42 Since the last inspection, the college has carried out a major survey of its accommodation and, under difficult circumstances, is continuing to adapt and improve it. The college has seven buildings on one site split by a public road. All are clean, well maintained and set in attractive, well-kept grounds. The site is within a conservation area and is regarded as listed by planning authorities. Consequently, there are few development opportunities. However, the college is taking well-considered steps to address weaknesses and its plans are clearly designed to meet curriculum needs. Room usage is at a satisfactory level, despite the

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difficult structure of some accommodation. Energy and maintenance costs are tightly controlled. The college provides a safe, secure environment. Staff regularly check the site in accordance with a security rota and the students' smoking area is deliberately located to minimise the possibility of intruders. There is poor access to college buildings for people with restricted mobility. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report and actions to address it have been incorporated into the accommodation strategy. Public areas are not well located, as the self-assessment report recognises. The college office, which houses the reception desk, is not easily accessible to students and visitors.

43 Most classrooms are suitably furnished and equipped, though some are too small for the size of the classes which use them. A reorganisation of classrooms and other teaching areas has created coherent accommodation for most faculties, though there is some exception to this in mathematics. Recent improvements to performing arts accommodation and facilities include a theatre, music rooms and media studios. The well-equipped sports hall offers a wide range of indoor sports, including roller hockey and trampolining. Most of the college's outdoor sporting facilities are hired from a nearby university and cricket club but there are two lawn tennis courts on the campus. The chapel is an attractive and central feature of the college. The rooms used for religious education lessons appear poorly decorated, in contrast. The modern lecture theatre, completely refurbished in 1995, is in frequent use. GNVQ leisure and tourism students have used it to make presentations to local employers. Some corridors and public areas have attractive displays of students' work. However, some teaching rooms have a worn appearance. Most staff rooms and working areas are shabby.

44 As the self-assessment report states, the college has made a substantial investment in increasing and updating its IT equipment and in

introducing a computer network which serves all the college's buildings. The ratio of computers to students is now 1:7.5. All new students undergo a key skills course in IT at the beginning of the year. The number of technical support staff has also increased. All computers give access to the Internet. Inspectors agreed that the college has some weaknesses remaining in its IT provision. Students in some curriculum areas have insufficient access to specialised IT resources. Staff access to IT facilities is poor. The college's development of IT is not planned systematically, though a new co-ordinator has been recently appointed. Staff have good levels of administrative and reprographic support. Learning materials are produced to a high standard within a very short time. The college generates substantial income through reprographic provision for external users.

45 The library, which incorporates the main resources centre, provides a pleasant study environment for students. It is small, seating only 125 students, but is supplemented by satellite rooms in other parts of the college. Students have clear information about the library service and are given attractive bookmarks that indicate the location of resources for their particular subjects. The library houses a range of periodicals, videos, CD-ROMs and books. The bookstock is small but covers the courses offered by the college. In some subjects, there are few books to allow students to develop their interests beyond the syllabus content. A recent benchmarking exercise revealed that the amount of library stock is well below the average for the sector but that the number of books borrowed by students is significantly higher. A press clipping service is well maintained and heavily used by some curriculum areas. Well-qualified library staff monitor the use of stock and report underuse in curriculum areas to teaching staff. They consult with curriculum areas about the purchase of new books. Students would like the library's opening hours to be extended.

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46 The college identified that facilities for students needed improvement and is taking remedial action. Social areas have been refurbished and the main student common room has been decorated with a student-designed colour scheme. Students' comments have resulted in improved catering facilities. The cafeteria can only accommodate 400 students and becomes overcrowded at peak times. Short-term plans for accommodation focus on improving facilities and access for students.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

47 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- accurate self-assessment
- sound review and evaluation at course level
- good links between staff review, staff development and corporate aims
- effective gathering and use of students' views

Weaknesses

- lack of impact of quality assurance systems on raising retention and achievement
- underdeveloped links between quality assurance and planning
- some college services not covered by quality assurance procedures

48 The college has made much progress since the last inspection in establishing college-wide quality assurance procedures. The quality assurance officer has led the development and refinement of quality assurance systems. The college quality assurance committee, which includes teachers and staff from non-teaching departments, has made a significant

contribution to creating positive attitudes to quality assurance. The committee effectively oversees the development, implementation, auditing and review of arrangements for assuring quality. It has established clear guidelines and other documentation to support the course review and self-assessment processes. Systems aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements have not been effective in all areas. Retention rates remain poor on several courses, though many pass rates have improved.

49 Inspectors agreed that course review and evaluation is thorough. The course review process is consistently implemented. Course review includes rigorous analysis of students' retention and pass rates against national figures. Where appropriate, students' achievements are analysed against predictions of students' performance on entry. Students' views, gathered through questionnaires, inform the process. Each course review produces an action plan that identifies responsibilities for implementation and deadlines for action. Improvements made as a result of course reviews include revised student handbooks and better provision of library books for specific subject areas. Course targets for retention and achievement were set last year and are now being used to monitor progress. Course review outcomes are validated at faculty level and are used as evidence in the faculty self-assessment report. The outcomes of lesson observations do not formally contribute to course review and evaluation, though they inform faculty self-assessment reports. Staff clearly understand arrangements for assuring quality in the curriculum areas. However, the links between quality assurance and planning are not yet fully developed. Information collated as a result of faculty reviews is not formally being used to inform planning at college level. These weaknesses were identified in the college self-assessment report.

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50 There is a comprehensive schedule of lesson observations. Each teacher is observed by a peer and, on a separate occasion, by the head of faculty. Lesson observations are graded and the outcomes used to judge the quality of teaching and learning, identify staff training needs and share good practice. Members of the senior management group validate observation grades. The college judged that it has been overgenerous in the allocation of lesson grades and inspectors agreed.

51 The college actively seeks and uses the views of students and parents to improve provision. Students' views are obtained through questionnaires, focus groups and the student council. Students and parents receive a summary report of surveys in which they participate, together with details of resulting action for improvements. Examples of such actions include alterations to refectory services, more helpful student handbooks, changed arrangements for parents evenings and more detailed student progress reports.

52 The college recognises in its self-assessment that systems for assuring the quality of administrative and support services need development. There is no comprehensive system in place for reviewing the quality of provision or college charter commitments. The views of service users are obtained through specific service questionnaires and focus groups. Information from these different sources is not yet collated to provide an overview of the quality of student services.

53 Effective systems are in place to identify the professional development needs of staff and the training that they require to support the achievement of college objectives. During the staff review process, staff meet their line manager and identify their training needs. These inform the annual college training plan. Staff development activities to meet common needs are provided through internal courses. For example, this year all teaching staff

attended a training event that focused on improving teaching and learning.

Approximately half of the college staff development budget is allocated to externally provided training. Staff who attend external courses share what they have learnt with their colleagues. All staff development activities are evaluated.

54 The self-assessment process is thorough and is bringing about improvements. All staff are trained in the self-assessment process. Heads of faculty collate information from the outcomes of course review and lesson observations. A self-assessment day ensures that all teachers have the opportunity to review this evidence and to make judgements about the quality of provision. Heads of faculty present their self-assessment reports together with supporting evidence to two members of the senior management group for validation. This process is rigorous; heads of faculty find the validation meetings demanding. Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment grades in all aspects of cross-college provision and in all but one curriculum area.

Governance

Grade 3

55 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that some had been overstated. They identified some additional weaknesses. By the time of the inspection, some of the weaknesses identified by the college had been rectified.

Key strengths

- strong commitment by governors to the college and its mission
- good monitoring of college finances
- effective use of governors' expertise and experience

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Weaknesses

- few performance indicators for assessing the effectiveness of the governing body
- good practice on openness not adopted
- audit committee acting outside its remit

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

57 The governing body has 14 members. There are three women governors, one of whom is the chair, but no representative from the minority ethnic communities. There is one vacancy for a parent governor. As noted in the self-assessment report, the majority of governors have an educational background, although others have experience in law, architecture and project management. Governors use their expertise to benefit the college, for example in advising on self-assessment and quality issues. A skills audit undertaken by the recently formed search committee has highlighted the need for a governor with a professional accountancy qualification. The search committee has informed the trustees of the potential continuity problems arising out of the expiry of the term of office of all 10 foundation governors on 31 March 2001. In addition to the search committee, the governing body has finance and resources, audit, personnel, remuneration and strategic and development planning committees. The audit committee has on occasions exceeded its remit, for example in reviewing the revised financial regulations and procedures, and recommending them for governing body approval.

58 The governing body meets at least twice a term and its work is supported by sound administrative arrangements. The finance and resources committee meets six times a year and considers the college management accounts in detail at each of its meetings. The management accounts are also presented to the governing body meetings. The clerk, who is also the college's director of finance, has a detailed job description covering the key functions of the role. Given his financial responsibilities, his clerking of the finance and resources, and audit committees is not in accordance with recognised good practice. Governors demonstrate their commitment to the college by their excellent attendance at governing body and committee meetings. Attendance has averaged 87% over the last 12 months, a strength mentioned in the self-assessment report.

59 College targets for recruitment, retention and achievement were presented to the governing body in September 1998 and were revised in May 1999. Governors monitored college performance against these targets and national benchmarks in September 1999.

60 On appointment, governors receive a pack of relevant documentation. There is no formal annual assessment of training needs. Governors are informed of training opportunities and some have attended external courses and conferences. The college organises regular governors' training days; the most recent one dealt with inclusive learning. Recently, governors established formal links with faculties to enable them to widen their knowledge of the college.

61 The governing body adopted a code of conduct in October 1998, but it has not updated this to reflect the Nolan Committee's recommendations on openness and accountability. The register of interests includes a declaration by each governor. Whilst all college staff are required to declare any financial interests, governors with significant financial responsibilities have not been requested to

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complete a declaration for inclusion in the register. The college recently adopted an access to information policy. The policy is not publicised. Furthermore, the availability of agendas, minutes and papers in the college library is limited to governing body meetings, which have been held since May 1999. The governing body adopted a code of practice on 'whistleblowing' in September 1999.

62 Governors established a working group in order to prepare a draft self-assessment report for governance. The draft was externally audited before presentation to the full governing body together with draft self-assessment reports for other areas of the college. Although governors critically examined their performance as part of the self-assessment process, they have not agreed performance indicators in order to monitor the effectiveness of the governing body. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

63 As identified in the self-assessment report, governors are committed to maintaining the distinctive nature of the college in line with the mission statement. They have committed considerable resources to the fulfilment of the mission. This has resulted in subsidised student retreats, well-resourced guidance and pastoral support programmes, the maintenance of a chapel and the appointment of a spiritual director.

Management

Grade 3

64 Inspectors largely agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong leadership to bring about improvements
- effective use of management information systems in monitoring curriculum performance

- good financial management
- purposeful external links and productive collaborative projects

Weaknesses

- lack of clarity in cross-college communications
- mismatch between the range of courses and student need
- underdeveloped monitoring of equal opportunities

65 Since the last inspection, strong leadership has resulted in considerable improvements in management. Inspectors agreed that the new faculty structure has enabled a stronger focus on curriculum review and development. Senior managers have improved their monitoring of teaching and learning. Lesson observation procedures are managed well at faculty level. Overall faculty lesson grade profiles are discussed at senior management group and academic board meetings. Course reviews are used effectively in departmental planning. Senior managers now involve all levels of staff in the target-setting process. The college has provided appropriate training for staff undertaking new managerial responsibilities.

66 Senior postholders are the principal, the finance director, the vice-principal curriculum and personnel and the vice-principal estates and examinations. The senior management group includes the senior postholders and the managers for marketing, staff development, curriculum and pastoral care in addition to a representative from the academic board. Though staff roles and responsibilities are clearly allocated in job descriptions, new structures are not yet fully embedded. Staff understand their own responsibilities and reporting lines, but some are unclear about the respective roles of the senior management group and the academic board. Communications within faculties are good. Faculty classrooms and workrooms are close together and faculty

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staff generally share the same or adjacent staff rooms. Cross-college communications are not always perceived as effective by staff, as the self-assessment report identifies. A recent report from the quality assurance committee highlighted areas of staff concern. Senior managers have responded with an action plan incorporating targets. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of action taken so far.

67 The college celebrates its Catholic tradition whilst welcoming students from other faiths. Inspectors agreed that the college works well with a range of external bodies. It has excellent relationships with its partner high schools. There are purposeful links with the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council, the Manchester Catholic Education Partnership and local community groups. There are good examples of productive collaboration with higher education organisations. For example, part-time degree courses are being developed with Liverpool Hope University College and Manchester Metropolitan University is providing specially designed management training.

68 The college management information system is effectively used to inform whole college planning. It produces reliable and accurate information for managers at all levels. Routine reports on retention, attendance and finance are produced for management meetings and the academic board as part of the annual reporting cycle. Course managers are provided with reports on attendance, retention and achievements at set times in the year. In addition, they request and receive reports on specific aspects of course and students' performance. The staff handbook clearly sets out what information can be accessed directly by staff through the computer network. As noted in the self-assessment report, returns to the FEFC are accurate and made in accordance with required deadlines.

69 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Detailed management accounts are produced each month by the small, but effective, finance department. The college's financial position is closely monitored by the principal and the director of finance, and reported at least half-termly to other members of senior management. The self-assessment report identified this as a strength and inspectors agreed. Budgets for consumables and capital items are delegated to faculty level and budget holders receive monthly reports of actual and committed expenditure against budget. The college is financially sound with good cash reserves. It has produced operating surpluses over the last three years. The commentary accompanying the forecasts identifies a small number of quantifiable financial objectives, although progress against these is not formally reported. The reports of the internal and external auditors do not indicate significant control weaknesses at the college, although the scope of internal audit work is not extensive. The financial regulations and procedures are largely comprehensive and have recently been updated.

70 The college has a marketing strategy and a recruitment officer who co-ordinates the interview and enrolment process. This is efficiently managed and well received by associate high schools and students. There is little structured, effective market research to inform management decisions on the courses offered. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the college's curriculum offer is narrow. The range of programmes at intermediate level is small and there are no foundation level courses. Inspectors agreed that the college's equal opportunities policy is not monitored effectively across the whole college. An equal opportunities officer has been appointed recently to develop the monitoring process. It is not yet possible to assess the impact of this appointment.

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Conclusions

71 The self-assessment report, the second produced by the college, provided a sound basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. It was rigorous, evaluative and clearly presented. Each section contained an action plan. An updated report provided shortly before the inspection contained evidence of good progress on action plans. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. They considered one curriculum grade to be overgenerous but agreed with all the other grades.

72 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 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	99
19-24 years	1
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	13
Level 3 (advanced)	87
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	345	2	28
Business	113	0	9
Hotel and catering	50	0	4
Health and community care	34	1	3
Art and design	99	3	8
Humanities	590	5	48
Total	1,231	11	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 64% 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 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	63	6	0	69
Supporting direct learning contact	10	0	0	10
Other support	20	0	0	20
Total	93	6	0	99

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£3,503,000	£3,377,267	£3,544,115
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.62	£18.98	£17.80
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	72%	72%
Achievement of funding target	101%	104%	100%
Diversity of income	2%	3%	5%
Operating surplus	£229,000	£326,736	£281,677

Sources: Income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Payroll – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	15	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	100	0	0	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	100	0	0	0	0	0
2	Number of starters	790	710	685	4	1	4
	Retention (%)	80	79	78	100	100	50
	Achievement (%)	96	95	97	50	n/a	100
3	Number of starters	2,158	2,071	2,251	22	5	5
	Retention (%)	79	77	80	100	20	100
	Achievement (%)	77	72	88	94	0	80
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Short courses	Number of starters	74	101	67	0	1	0
	Retention (%)	96	94	98	0	100	0
	Achievement (%)	80	95	67	0	100	n/a
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	698	74	762	0	0	2
	Retention (%)	90	81	80	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

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