

Paston 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.

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Paston Sixth Form College

Eastern Region

Inspected November 1997

Paston College is a small sixth form college located on two adjacent sites in North Walsham, Norfolk. The college's self-assessment report was thorough. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings. It was the second major self-assessment report produced by the college. The quality statements in Council Circular 97/12, Validating Self-assessment received close attention. The development of the report benefited from subject area self-assessment reports and from wide consultation within the college. An update to the original report was provided for the inspection. Production of the self-assessment report was viewed by the college as an important contribution to the strategic planning process and the quality assurance procedures.

The college offers courses in eight of the FEFC's programme areas and has continued to extend its provision of vocational programmes. Three curriculum areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The curriculum is well managed. Students receive good levels of support. Pass rates as a proportion of students who complete courses, are mostly good. There are impressive enrichment activities which include an extensive work experience programme. The commitment to improve quality within the college is widely

shared by staff. Management of college operations is rigorous. Governors make an effective contribution to the development of the college. The college should improve: the poor retention rates on some courses; the limited provision of materials to support students working independently; the uneven quality of tutorials; the unco-ordinated provision of learning resources; and insufficient co-ordination of some areas of the curriculum.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	3	Support for students	2
Performing arts	2	General resources	3
Humanities (excluding English, communications and modern foreign languages)	2	Quality assurance	2
		Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Paston College opened as a sixth form college for students aged 16 to 19 in 1984 following the reorganisation of post-16 education in north east Norfolk. It serves a catchment area of approximately 400 square miles. In the past two years it has expanded its curriculum for education and training to provide appropriate courses for adults and for local business. The college occupies two main sites in the centre of the market town of North Walsham, and has a sports field site nearby. Only one of the two main sites, the Lawns, is owned by the college. The other site, the Griffons, is the property of the Trustees of the Paston Foundation. Many of the buildings date from the former Paston School, founded in 1606, which includes Lord Nelson among its former pupils.

2 Norfolk is a rural county and north east Norfolk in particular has a dispersed population and very little industry. There is a pattern of seasonal employment centred on holiday and leisure activities at the coast and on the Broads. Most local companies are involved in food processing, agriculture, manufacturing, construction and distribution. Employment opportunities in agriculture have fallen considerably in the past two decades. They now account for approximately 6 per cent of total employment and are expected to fall further. The great majority of companies employ less than 10 people and many are family concerns. There are pockets of relatively high employment. Norwich, 16 miles from North Walsham, provides greater job opportunities for college leavers than elsewhere in north east Norfolk.

3 In November 1997, the college had 779 students on roll, of whom 579 were full time and 200 were part time. The part-time element consists mainly of adult students most of whom are following a range of courses in information technology (IT). In the college's catchment area

between 0.5 and 0.8 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups and this proportion is reflected in the student population at the college. In the two district council areas, from which the college draws its students, there is a high percentage of retired people: 27 per cent in North Norfolk and 21 per cent in Broadland. Staying-on rates among 16-year-old school-leavers in Norfolk have remained fairly static at approximately 70 per cent for the past three years. The college has seen a slight increase in the number of students aged 16 to 19, and a marked rise in the number of students aged over 19 during this period.

4 The college's mission is 'to provide access to high-quality education, training and personal enrichment, to enable learners to achieve and develop as individuals, and to assist them to contribute more fully to the life of the local community, the economy and society at large'. The college aims to provide 'modern learning within a framework of traditional values, aiming for achievement, quality and care'. The college identifies its customers primarily as: full-time 16 to 19 students of all abilities; adult learners most of whom are returning to continue their education; and local businesses and their employees. It provides a curriculum that seeks to match the requirements of all three groups. The college management team comprises the principal, vice-principal and assistant principal. There are 73 staff of whom 25 are full-time teachers. In addition, most of the senior management team also teach. There are four full-time and 28 part-time technical and administrative support staff. The college is one of the largest employers in the area.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 24 November 1997. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and the information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The inspectorate validated data submitted by the college on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision that was to be assessed. The inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors, working for a total of 26.5 days, and an auditor working for three days. The inspectors observed 43 lessons and examined samples of students' work and college documents that provided evidence to support the self-assessment report. They met governors, managers, college staff, students, parents and careers officers.

6 Of the 43 lessons inspected, 65 per cent were good or outstanding and only one lesson was less than satisfactory. This profile is better than the average for all colleges inspected during 1996-97, according to the *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 84 per cent which is the average for sixth form colleges. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	6	19	10	1	0	36
GCSE and other courses	0	3	4	0	0	7
Total	6	22	14	1	0	43

Curriculum Areas

Science and Mathematics

Grade 3

7 Inspectors observed 16 lessons which covered a range of courses in mathematics and science, mainly at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), but including GCE advanced supplementary (AS) mathematics, and biology and mathematics for the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). Inspection findings confirmed the college's own self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses, although inspectors concluded that the college gave insufficient weight to some of the weaknesses that it identified.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses
- fair and regular assessment
- good pass rates at GCE A level and for GCSE mathematics
- effective curriculum organisation and management in mathematics

Weaknesses

- inadequate strategies to support students with difficulties
- an insufficient range of learning opportunities for students
- declining retention rates on GCE A level courses
- the lack of co-ordination of science provision
- inadequate resources

8 As students progress through the modular GCE A/AS level courses offered in science and mathematics, a succession of modular options become available to them, including the possibility of studying further mathematics. The college's self-assessment recognises this flexibility as a strength. Although the majority

of students are full time, there are several part-time adult students, particularly in biological subjects. There is a GCSE biology course for a small number of students who wish to improve on their science qualifications at intermediate level. Mathematics is the largest GCSE course in the programme.

9 Courses are well planned to cover syllabus content. The experience of teachers and their enthusiasm for their subjects help to motivate their students. Most teaching is satisfactory. In science, the use of ordinary materials, such as plasticine to show a simulation of meiosis and 'poppit' beads to simulate protein structure, enhances lessons. Students perform experimental work competently although a minority do not always pay sufficient attention to safe working practices, particularly protection of the eyes. The self-assessment report acknowledges that IT is seldom used to support the teaching of mathematics or science, and that lessons rarely include: appropriate discussion in small groups; investigative teaching methods; or strategies to develop study skills. These shortcomings do not support the college's strategic objective to enable students to become independent learners. Activities in science lessons do not always cater for the range of ability in a class. The GCE A level induction programme for mathematics is not fully effective in supporting progression from GCSE. Drop-in workshops or other forms of help are not available to students who are struggling with mathematics. The inspectors considered the significance of these weaknesses had been underestimated in the college's self-assessment report.

10 The curriculum in mathematics is effectively managed. Staff meet regularly. A scheme of work contains helpful guidance on teaching methods. In science, schemes of work lack sufficient detail and there is little co-ordination between subjects, for example in the analysis of students' achievements. There is sufficient laboratory equipment for most current

Curriculum Areas

teaching approaches, but provision is inadequate for small group work, for example investigations involving colorimeters, or the teaching of modules such as biotechnology. There is not enough equipment to support mathematics lessons adequately. The provision of library books and journals for mathematics and science is poor. There is some computer software for mathematics but very little for students' research in science.

mathematics and human biology, but this analysis has not been consistently applied across all science subjects. There has been a significant decline in retention rates on all courses at GCE A level.

11 The quality of most students' written and practical work is good. Their files are well organised. Some students make effective use of IT in the production of course notes and assignments. Teachers help their students to prepare for examinations by maintaining a regular programme of homework and tests; they mark assignments carefully and make constructive comments. GCE A level pass rates are above the average for sixth form colleges in the sector in all subjects and close to the average for the higher pass grades at C or above. Good use has been made of value-added data in the analysis of achievements in

Examples of students' achievements in science and mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level mathematics	Retention (%)	98	73	51
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100
GCE AS mathematics	Retention (%)	88	100	84
	Pass rate (%)	64	88	75
GCE A level biology	Retention (%)	97	66	71
	Pass rate (%)	68	95	90
GCE A level chemistry	Retention (%)	91	78	67
	Pass rate (%)	83	94	100
GCE A level physics	Retention (%)	100	70	70
	Pass rate (%)	86	100	92
GCSE mathematics	Retention (%)	85	76	86
	Pass rate (%)	72	54	59

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Performing Arts

Grade 2

12 Ten lessons were observed covering GCE A level courses in theatre studies, performing arts and media, and GCSE courses in media. Inspectors found the college's self-assessment to be thorough and objective. They identified very few additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- innovative teaching with good links between theory and practice
- challenging assignments for students
- well-structured lessons
- good pass rates in most GCE A level and GCSE courses
- students' range of performance skills and key skills
- dedicated space for teaching and performance
- well-managed courses

Weaknesses

- the significant decline in pass and retention rates in a few courses
- some deficiencies in provision of equipment
- some poorly-organised student files
- insufficient use of IT in the presentation of students' written work

13 The arts and humanities sector of the college offers an extensive range of GCE A levels and GCSEs in media and performing arts. The curriculum is well managed. Staff are clear about their roles and work effectively in teams.

14 The quality of most teaching is good and sometimes it is outstanding. The best lesson plans identify a sequence of activities that challenge students and help them to learn.

Inspectors agreed with the college that lessons included an appropriate variety of work. There were some excellent examples of innovative approaches. For example, in one lesson a group of theatre studies students carefully analysed the text of a Strindberg play in order to discover the difference between the words spoken by a character and what the character is actually thinking. This approach helped them to understand Stanislavski's methods of helping actors to interpret roles. Some teaching is particularly adventurous. Students in one lesson were asked to construct a film storyboard for a feminist Western using a stimulating range of old photographs and written source materials. Positive discussion took place on gender stereotypes and some students were forced to reassess their own attitudes. Students' work is marked constructively; there are helpful comments on both language and structure.

15 Most classes provide the opportunity to develop key skills. Where students are encouraged to use computer graphics packages, the resulting work is of a high standard. In all lessons students worked effectively in groups. Performing arts students acquire good planning skills but research and study skills are not fully developed. Few students use IT to improve the presentation of their assignments.

16 Teachers possess a variety of appropriate experience that includes theatre work and writing activity. There is a shortage of staff who have worked in the media industry or have professional dance experience. Recent training initiatives have started to address these shortcomings.

17 Sound and video editing facilities have recently been upgraded to meet the requirements of the courses. There are dedicated spaces for both theatre and media activities and rooms are generally fit for their purpose. There is raked seating for 180 people in the well-equipped theatre, which provides space that is suitable for teaching and public

Curriculum Areas

performance. The lighting rig is good but the lighting board is old and relies on manual operation.

18 The inspection team agreed with the college's assessment that examination results were high. There were good pass rates in most examinations in 1995 and 1996 both in GCE A level and GCSE courses. The pass rates at grades A to C in GCE A level were particularly high. Results at grade C or above in GCSE drama, and pass rates for GCE A level theatre studies, were significantly above the national average for sixth form colleges in the sector. However, results in GCSE media declined significantly for examinations taken in 1997. Since 1995 the levels of retention on most courses have been high but in 1997 the retention rates on two GCE A level courses were well below national averages and the college's own targets. Students have good opportunities to participate in a broad programme of extra-curricular activities and to perform or to exhibit their work in public. There have been some significant and impressive achievements by individual students in competitions and festivals, including national awards and

screening for student films. Films have included 'Chuff' shown on Channel 4 in autumn 1996 and an animated film, 'Dear Greenpeace' shown at the National Film Theatre as part of a national festival in January 1997.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level theatre studies	Retention (%)	89	68	74
	Pass rate (%)	94	100	100
GCE A level media studies	Retention (%)	100	93	67
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level performing arts	Retention (%)	+	100	+
	Pass rate (%)	+	100	+
GCSE drama	Retention (%)	94	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	83
GCSE media	Retention (%)	73	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	73	64	41

Source: college data
+no entries in this year

Curriculum Areas

Humanities (excluding English, Communications and Modern Foreign Languages)

Grade 2

19 Seventeen lessons were observed, covering the subject areas of classical civilisation, geography, history, law, psychology, sociology, religious studies and general studies at GCE A/AS level and GCSE. Inspection findings broadly confirmed the judgements in the college's own self-assessment although with a few notable exceptions.

Key strengths

- comprehensive schemes of work
- well-planned lessons
- clear guidance for course assignments
- high GCE A level pass rates in some subjects
- close monitoring of attendance and retention rates
- the good range of courses

Weaknesses

- teaching insufficiently challenging in a significant minority of lessons
- ineffective teaching of classes with different levels of ability
- little use of specialist computer software packages
- poor retention rates on some GCE A level courses
- poor provision of the resources necessary for students to learn independently

20 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a good range of courses available relative to the size of the college. Subjects that are usually studied by a minority of students, for example, classical civilisation

and religious studies, are offered at the college in addition to a range of GCE AS courses that allow students to broaden their choice of subjects. There is some evidence of subject teachers working more closely together to share good practice and offer each other support.

21 A positive atmosphere is generated between staff and students in lessons. All the courses benefit from comprehensive schemes of work which identify teaching and learning strategies and the resources that they require. A few lesson plans demonstrate imaginative and flexible methods of teaching. However, despite claims made in the self-assessment report, there is little evidence of teaching methods being changed to meet the needs of students who are being taught together but who have different levels of ability. Furthermore, in a significant minority of lessons the teaching fails to: challenge the students sufficiently; maintain enough momentum; or provide checks that students are learning. Students' work is carefully managed, especially the setting of coursework assignments, for which there are some very good handbooks. The self-assessment report acknowledges that most courses make little use of computer software packages. GCE A level history is a notable exception; the course has recently acquired some relevant packages.

22 Most accommodation for the humanities section is satisfactory. Most subject rooms are well equipped and furnished; psychology, which is housed in a science laboratory, is the exception. There is poor provision of appropriate CD-ROM software for humanities subjects. In a few areas there is a shortage of resources, such as books and journal articles, which students need when studying by themselves. In sociology the students are largely reliant on the teacher to provide texts to support research for coursework. These shortcomings limit the capacity of the college to achieve one of its objectives: to create the opportunity for students to learn independently.

Curriculum Areas

23 The inspection team agreed with the college's assessment of students' achievements. In most courses students' achievements in GCE A level are at or above the national average for sixth form colleges. Some subjects have achieved very good results whether measured by success at the higher grades of A to C or across the full range of pass grades A to E. Notable examples are: GCE A level sociology and geography in 1996 and 1997, and psychology in 1997. The poor results for GCSE psychology in 1997 were partly due to staffing difficulties which have now been resolved. Particular attention is paid to maintaining and improving attendance and retention rates. Nevertheless, in 1997, on all GCE A level courses, except history and geography, retention rates were poor; they averaged between 60 per cent and 70 per cent. Inspectors did not agree with the college's claim of high retention rates. In addition, inspectors found no evidence to support a further claim by the college that there is increasing use of a system for analysing the value added to students' achievements in GCE A level examinations.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities (excluding English, communications and modern foreign languages), 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level sociology	Retention (%)	100	65	68
	Pass rate (%)	70	96	100
GCE A level geography	Retention (%)	100	90	81
	Pass rate (%)	93	96	90
GCE A level history	Retention (%)	93	77	75
	Pass rate (%)	86	71	95
GSCE law	Retention (%)	81	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	63	86	93
GSCE psychology	Retention (%)	78	100	61
	Pass rate (%)	88	71	17

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

24 Inspectors agreed with the strengths that the college had identified in its support for students but found that some of the weaknesses had been underestimated.

Key strengths

- the information and effective guidance for students before enrolment
- effective work with local schools and the local education authority (LEA)
- the high level of care and support for individual students
- well-developed support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the impressive enrichment activities and work experience programme for students

Weaknesses

- the uneven quality and effectiveness of tutorial sessions
- insufficient use of the counselling service
- inadequate arrangements for supporting adult students

25 Students receive suitable information and guidance before starting college. Applicants are encouraged to visit the college on open days and evenings. There are half-day information sessions for prospective adult students.

The college prospectus is attractive, clear and informative. Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that there is effective co-operation with schools and with the LEA's Visiting Teacher Service and Adult Education Service. The learning support co-ordinator convenes termly meetings with co-ordinators for special educational needs in the area and attends reviews in three high schools for pupils aged 14

or over. This liaison helps young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to transfer from school to college. The college's successful relationship with the Adult Education Service enables a few adult students to progress to college programmes. The college provides a programme in partnership with the Visiting Teacher Service for a few pupils who are not able to attend school. Five from this group continued at college in 1997, in at least one case with outstanding success.

26 All students are given diagnostic tests on entry to the college to assess their basic skills in mathematics and English. The assessments are not adapted to reflect the requirements of particular courses. Additional learning support is arranged where necessary, although a few students are unaware of how to obtain this support. Inspectors agreed that there is a well-developed service for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The college aims to enrol 10 per cent of the student body from students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; this target has been reached for the last two years.

Pre-foundation and foundation level courses have been developed to create opportunities for appropriate students to progress to further studies. At present there are no arrangements to analyse and record formally the value added to students' achievements from learning support.

27 Teachers and personal tutors provide good care and support to individual students, in line with the college's mission. All full-time students aged 16 to 19 have a personal tutor. Students are clear about their tutor's role as the first person to whom queries or problems should be addressed. Tutors pursue any concerns they may have about students swiftly and effectively. They are able to make appointments for students with the college's external counsellor, educational psychologist or careers adviser. Tutorials take place twice each week for 30 minutes. This time is not always used

Cross-college Provision

effectively. The college news sheet produced twice weekly is read and discussed in detail which limits the time left for tutors to spend with individual students. The college is aware of this weakness and the tutorial system is being reviewed. The arrangements for supporting adult students are inadequate. Adult students only have tutorials on request and have no special support to help them with study skills. This significant weakness is not recognised in the self-assessment report.

28 Attendance is carefully monitored and regularly reported to students. There is a target of 87 per cent attendance. Students are well aware of this figure and respect the sanctions applied to poor attendance. Tutors follow up absences rigorously by telephone and letter.

29 The college makes use of the services of a professional counsellor. The counselling service is not well advertised and some students were unaware of what it could provide. Students have no direct access to the counselling and make limited use of the service; appointments are made on students' behalf by tutors through the vice-principal. Despite these shortcomings, students and personal tutors who use the service are generally pleased with the counselling support that they receive.

30 The student council has regular meetings, organises events and raises money for additional college facilities. The council is well supported by a designated senior member of staff and has campaigned successfully for a students' common room, a room for adults and a new canteen. Although there are no formal arrangements for worship, students are readily able to meet with the chaplain, who is a member of the college staff, if they wish.

31 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the range of enrichment activities followed by students is impressive and the quality is good. Opportunities include: 12 sports options; drama and music; media-related activities such as film and video;

production of the college magazine 'Xpress'; and a fashion show. The high level of participation by students is made possible by the help and support provided by teachers. The programme of work experience is well established and effectively managed.

32 The provision of careers education includes an annual programme and weekly talks or activities, supervised by the college careers co-ordinator. Weekly guidance sessions are provided by colleagues from the Norfolk Careers Service to whom students are referred through personal tutors. Poor attendance limits the effectiveness of some of the careers guidance sessions but overall inspectors agree with the college that the careers programme is well established.

General Resources

Grade 3

33 The college's self-assessment report graded equipment and accommodation separately. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that the quality of equipment is better than the quality of accommodation and that there are some significant weaknesses still to be resolved. Many facilities have improved since the college was inspected in May 1995 when there were substantial weaknesses in the college's accommodation.

Key strengths

- improvements to teaching accommodation
- improved social facilities for students and staff
- the high quality and good range of IT equipment and software

Weaknesses

- constraints arising from the listed status of some buildings

Cross-college Provision

- unco-ordinated provision of learning resources
- inadequate access to learning materials and insufficient support for the curriculum in the library

34 All staff contributed to the development of the accommodation strategy which has clear goals and action points. Since the last inspection the use of teaching accommodation has been significantly rationalised and improved. For example, the administrative functions of the college have been grouped together around a welcoming new reception area, and expressive arts has moved to refurbished and expanded accommodation. Social provision for students has improved with the creation of a common room next to the newly refurbished canteen; these facilities are well used by students. The careers centre is well stocked and accessible and has a new interview room which is used for talks and individual guidance sessions. Some aspects of the college's accommodation remain unsatisfactory. For example, narrow corridors and narrow and numerous stairs, poor access for wheelchair users, the high ceilings and the poor acoustics. Inspectors agree that the college is constrained from making many improvements because of the listed status of two of its main buildings, in one of which Lord Nelson went to school. The self-assessment report recognises that the private study space on both sites is insufficient; a new room on the Lawns Site has recently been opened for students.

35 Inspectors agreed that the students' access to an extensive range of high quality equipment and software for IT is a significant strength. Over 100 computers are available for students' use, a ratio of one computer for every 4.5 full-time equivalent students. A computer network operates across both sites and enables students to access a variety of software, much of which is of industry standard. College policy requires existing computer hardware to be upgraded to a minimum 486 processor

standard. Provision in the well-equipped learning centre includes: a video digitiser; three scanners; 23 high specification computers, 15 of which provide access to the Internet and four that have high graphics capability. Students spoke positively of the level of provision and the quality of IT available to them, and about the staff whose support enables them to use the technology effectively.

36 Since the previous inspection the library has been relocated in a different and larger building. The college recognises that it is not an ideal venue for a library. The maximum number of study spaces available is 60, compared to 40 in the previous accommodation. The library becomes cramped and overcrowded during periods of peak use. Books are stacked on high shelving. A set of library steps is needed to reach the top shelves which discourages browsing. The library is open from 08.30 to 15.45 hours. These hours reflect the timetables of students aged 16 to 19 who have to use the college bus services; they do not meet the needs of the growing number of adult students. At the time of the inspection, the entry of details of the library bookstock onto a computer database was progressing slowly. The new system was not expected to be in use until September 1998. There is insufficient co-ordination between curriculum areas and the library for the provision of learning resources. No central register of the college's learning resources has been compiled. The librarian operates a formal system for library requests but not all curriculum areas make effective use of this system. A few maintain their own small libraries but the librarian does not hold the details of their stock. There are no regular meetings between library and learning resource centre staff and hence little opportunity exists for them jointly to evaluate the college's quality review data on the service which they provide. The college has recognised that the present level of staffing in the library is inadequate and a new post for a learning assistant has been established.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

37 Inspection findings supported most of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report on quality assurance.

Key strengths

- widely shared commitment to improve quality
- improved course review system
- widespread use of performance indicators
- useful students' handbook and extensive students' charter
- effective staff development policy
- valued staff appraisal procedures

Weaknesses

- lack of a fully-developed complaints and appeals procedure
- insufficient involvement of governors in quality procedures
- underdeveloped questionnaires for students

38 The vice-principal has overall responsibility for the development of policy but the commitment to improve quality in the college is widely shared. This drive for improvement is implemented through: the quality policy; the quality operating standards handbook; and the system of course reviews which has recently been revised. A benchmarking exercise, which compared a broad range of performance indicators with those for other sixth form colleges, is being used to set targets for the college. The inspection team agreed with the college that widespread and thorough attention is paid to key performance indicators that are applied, for example, to recruitment of students, retention and attendance rates, and students' achievements.

39 Self-assessment is integral to the development of college policy on matters that affect quality. The quality framework sets out requirements for five areas: the curriculum; students' services; staffing and staff development; resources; and administration and management. Clear statements indicate: specific staff responsibilities; the standards set; and the process for review and monitoring. Most of the reviews measure work against precise targets but a few express targets in more general terms. Governors' involvement in setting and reviewing quality standards has been limited. A working group of the corporation is continuing to develop the corporation's involvement in quality, including self-assessment.

40 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the second major self-assessment report to be produced by the college. The self-assessment process involved a wide range of college staff although there was little formal consultation with external groups or with governors. The report was comprehensive in its approach and followed closely the quality statements in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Production of the report was viewed by the college as an important contribution to the strategic planning process and to quality assurance. Evidence supporting the report was clearly referenced and included a range of subject area self-assessment reports. The evidence base for the evaluation of teaching and learning was limited. At the time the self-assessment report was produced the quality assurance framework did not include teaching observation and assessment of lessons but these have subsequently been introduced.

41 The system for reviewing courses, which has recently been revised, contributes significantly to the assurance of quality in the curriculum. The review is conducted at three stages during the academic year. Targets appropriate to each stage are considered. The progress made towards teaching them is

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maintained. For example, the autumn term review monitors the previous summer's examination results and autumn recruitment patterns. Course files contain clear information about targets set. Each course file also contains operational plans, derived from the college's strategic plan. Quality procedures are not yet wholly consistent. For example, the analysis of examination achievements varies in comprehensiveness and rigour on different courses.

42 Course files show that appropriate action is taken on external examiners' and moderators' comments. This response by the college is particularly important in some of the vocational areas recently developed, for example on programmes leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs). There are thorough and determined attempts to improve internal verification procedures.

43 The inspectors agreed with the college that careful attention is paid to performance indicators and targets throughout the college. There are some college-wide targets, notably the achievement of 87 per cent attendance rate. Every course keeps a thorough record of each student's attendance which is compared regularly with the target. There is thorough analysis of data on recruitment, the reasons for students' withdrawal from courses, and the achievements of students on their courses.

44 An annual survey of students' opinions on their experience at college occurs in the late spring. The questionnaire for 1997 had a response rate of 90 per cent. There is insufficient emphasis in the questionnaire on students' views on teaching and learning, and on the effectiveness of the tutorial programme. Surveys of the quality of tutorials are carried out through discussions with groups of students; this approach is likely to inhibit criticism. Other questionnaires concentrate on induction and on particular courses. They do not have a consistent format. For example, some ask for

respondents' names while others are anonymous. Not all students are asked the same questions. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

45 The college has a students' charter which is extensive and informative. The students' handbook contains a brief summary of the charter and useful information on examinations, tutorial and counselling support, the learning contract and other matters. The handbook also refers to disciplinary procedures, the code of conduct, and, briefly, complaints procedures. The college does not possess comprehensive procedures for written complaints and appeals.

46 The college obtained Investor in People status in 1997. A staff development policy for all college staff is applied effectively. About 60 per cent took part in development activity in 1996-97.

It includes particular emphasis on: training and development lead body assessor training; improvements in IT skills; and management training for middle and senior managers. There is also a new training programme for governors. An important recent initiative has seen the establishment of working groups to advise on staff development. They have been asked to recommend training policies: to improve teaching and learning; to extend equal opportunities; and to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

47 All staff are appraised. Before the event staff are given guidance on appraisal and clear information on its purpose. Appraisal includes a confidential report on the observation of teaching. Staff who had been appraised reported that they found the experience helpful. The college is now revising its appraisal system in order to ensure that staff are always appraised by their line manager, and that targets for each member of staff are more precise and measurable.

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Governance

Grade 2

48 Inspectors concluded that the college's assessment of governance understated some strengths of provision.

Key strengths

- the skills and expertise of governors
- commitment to sound governance
- recent attention by governors to their training
- effective clerking arrangements
- contribution of governors to the development of the college
- comprehensive reporting of students' achievements to the corporation

Weaknesses

- lack of systematic monitoring of college performance
- underdeveloped formal links with the college and the curriculum

49 Governance of the college is effective. Governors bring a wide range of skills and experience to the corporation. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between the responsibilities and roles of governance and of management. The commitment to sound governance has been demonstrated by recent training sessions on: the role of the corporation; self-assessment; and performance indicators. New members have been sought through open advertising. There is a register of governors' interests.

50 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles

of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has established effective committees for finance and general purposes, personnel and remuneration. Members of the finance and general purposes committee receive monthly financial management information. The curriculum committee has met infrequently. The clerk to the corporation is appointed from outside the college, to seek to ensure the independence of the post. The efficiency of the conduct of corporation and committee business demonstrates the effectiveness of the clerking arrangements.

51 The corporation has provided a clear strategic framework for the development of the college to reinforce its mission and consolidate its position in the market. The inspection team agreed with the college's assessment that the value of the corporation's contribution to strategic planning is a significant strength. This contribution has included support for key strategic developments, for example broadening the curriculum, efficiency gains, and making more effective use of existing accommodation.

52 Twice a year the achievements registered against targets in the college's operating plan are comprehensively reported to governors. The outcomes are reviewed by the full corporation. The corporation was given an effective presentation of students' achievements in 1997. The results were placed in the context of national benchmarks for performance in GCE A level and vocational programmes, and also compared with the college's achievements in 1996. The self-assessment report acknowledges that systematic monitoring of college performance is not yet fully developed. For example, performance indicators for the college have not been set by the corporation to enable governors systematically to monitor students' achievements and support services, although some important preparatory work has been undertaken. The corporation working

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party on performance indicators plans to establish self-assessment procedures for the responsibilities of each of the corporation committees; and for elements of the strategic plan. In addition there are developments in curriculum evaluation which include a value-added analysis of students' achievements. The corporation's review of its own work included a members' questionnaire. The review recognised that performance criteria have not been set and the contribution of individual members has not been assessed.

Management

Grade 2

53 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of most aspects of management. The report is clearly written and contains appropriate evidence to support the judgements made.

Key strengths

- rigorous operational management
- actions taken to improve management effectiveness
- effective communications within the college
- well-managed liaison with high schools
- clear management structure with responsibilities well defined
- effective management of the curriculum
- efficient deployment of resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient formal documentation of some aspects of personnel management
- limited financial forecasting information
- insufficient provision of resources for internal audit

54 The responsibilities of college managers and the management committees are well

defined. There is a clear cycle for reporting key aspects of college activities to the management team and senior co-ordinating team.

The college's strategic aim to meet a wider range of education and training needs whilst maintaining the quality of its core provision for students aged 16 to 19 is being effectively implemented. There is a culture that pursues continuous improvement in the effectiveness of management. Inspectors agreed with the college that staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and the contribution that they are required to make to help to achieve college objectives.

55 The staff handbook includes details of policies, administrative procedures and job descriptions of staff. The handbook is being reviewed to reflect current practice and organisational responsibilities. A few procedures relating to the management of personnel have not been formally documented. Arrangements for the appraisal of the principal are not established. There is an annual review of job descriptions which takes account of the college strategic plan.

56 The curriculum is generally well managed. There are effective links between strategic planning and the development of the curriculum. The self-assessment report acknowledges that responsibility for co-ordinating courses below the level of sector leader needs developing. Operating plans which are clearly related to the college strategic plan have been identified for each course and there is termly assessment of progress. Course management files are consistent in presentation and organisation. Data on recruitment patterns from local high schools and research into students' preferences have been effectively analysed and then used to identify the demand for new courses.

57 Resources are managed effectively. Although staff costs as a proportion of total expenditure are rising, action has been taken to

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modify timetables to achieve efficiency gains. Staff roles and responsibilities and reporting structures have been redefined.

58 The college's management information system has been sensibly developed. Levels of staffing in support of the management information system function, are appropriate and a clear and comprehensive information strategy has been established. Management information is used effectively to analyse recruitment patterns and to monitor data on attendance, retention and withdrawals. Reports provided to sector leaders enable budget allocations to be modified to match changes in student numbers.

59 The college has identified the need to establish stronger links with the business community. Some productive links with local employers are maintained through the organisation of the college work experience programme and the annual industrial conference. Links with the Norfolk and Waveney Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) have been established through the college's involvement in TEC development fund projects and a TEC working party considering the effectiveness of labour market intelligence. However, the wide range of commercial and industrial contacts developed through these activities and by individual teachers has not yet been used effectively to promote the college to the business community.

60 The college operating plan provides a well-defined statement of action planned to meet strategic objectives. The plan clearly relates strategic objectives to targets for their achievement. Inspectors agreed that the review processes for operational plans are a significant strength. The responsibilities and dates for achievement of goals are clearly understood. Governors receive detailed termly reviews of progress in achieving the goals. The report presented to the corporation reviewing achievement against the 1996-97 plan represents a model of good practice for the

sector. College management have rigorously assessed the effectiveness of college systems. Where weaknesses have been found there are appropriate actions to correct them. For example, a formal marketing and promotion function has been created and there is improved use of market research.

61 The college is preparing to run training courses for local businesses; appropriate market research has been conducted to identify opportunities. A marketing plan is being produced and further work is in hand to develop an operational plan. Liaison with high schools is effectively managed and well organised. A questionnaire is used to evaluate college publicity to pupils in high schools. Analysis of the responses has enabled the college to identify the demand for courses that are not currently offered and to plan the development of the curriculum. The self-assessment report acknowledges that more extensive market research is required.

62 The college equal opportunities policy is subject to review by a working group which has identified, in an interim report, some areas where the promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities can be improved. The self-assessment report acknowledges the need for more systematic collection and analysis of data to assess the extent to which the policy is working.

63 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has achieved a reduction in its average level of funding so that it is now at the median for sixth form colleges at £17.50 per unit. Financial management information is timely and regular. It includes income and expenditure information and a balance sheet but the college currently does not prepare monthly cashflow information. Once the budget has been set, the forecasts of income and expenditure that it contains are not updated monthly. Insufficient internal audit resources are devoted to the audit of the

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college's systems of internal control to provide adequate assurance.

Conclusions

64 The inspection team found that the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. In the majority of cases, the inspection team agreed with the findings in the college's self-assessment report. However, inspectors identified a few weaknesses and strengths which were given less significance by the college. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected and with most of the grades for cross-college provision.

65 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 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	2
16-18 years	74
19-24 years	3
25+ years	17
Not known	4
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	22
Intermediate	20
Advanced	58
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	123	127	32
Engineering	28	0	4
Business	88	34	16
Hotel and catering	50	0	6
Health and community care	36	0	5
Art and design	83	19	13
Humanities	161	20	23
Basic education	10	0	1
Total	579	200	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	28	4	0	32
Supporting direct learning contact	7	<1	0	8
Other support	11	<1	0	11
Total	46	5	0	51

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£1,626,000	£1,658,000	£1,852,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.77	£18.43	£19.19
Payroll as a proportion of income	75%	71%	66%
Achievement of funding target	96%	106%	106%
Diversity of income	6%	5%	9%
Operating surplus	-£86,000	-£25,000	£57,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	177	186	183
	Average point score per entry	4.9	5.4	5.3
	Position in tables	top third	top 10%	top 10%
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	9	17	33
	Percentage achieving qualification	67%	88%	82%
	Position in tables	bottom third	top third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	60	46
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	87%	72%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	top third

Source: DfEE

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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