

Peterborough Regional College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	–

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

Peterborough Regional College *Eastern Region*

Inspected May 1999

Peterborough Regional College is a general further education college with two sites in the city of Peterborough. The college has a successful tradition of widening participation and recruits a significant percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. For the inspection the college produced a self-assessment report which involved all staff in its preparation. Self-assessment has not been an integral part of its planning until recently. The self-assessment report was subject to critical scrutiny by senior managers and governors. Some of the weaknesses identified have been addressed since the report was written. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report but considered that insufficient attention was given to weaknesses in students' achievements. The college offers a broad range of courses with provision in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. The college is the first general further education college to be jointly inspected by the FEFC and the Training Standards Council. Work in seven of the college's FEFC programme areas was inspected and eight FEFC grades were awarded. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected.

Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements to the college's main campus. The college's accommodation is of a good standard and students have access to a reasonable range of specialist equipment. Access for students with restricted mobility is poor to some areas. Students are given good academic guidance and have access to a wide range of learning and welfare support services. Students are well supported in the development of their basic and key skills. Standards of teaching are high. The curriculum provision in hair and beauty therapy, media and performing arts, hotel and catering and health and social care is good. Arrangements to assess the quality of teaching and learning are exemplary. In spite of action taken to improve quality assurance procedures since the last inspection there is insufficient analysis of data on students' achievements and the monitoring of action plans is not entirely effective. Governors play a vital role in setting the strategic direction of the college and have effective relationships with managers and other staff. The college is well managed and communications throughout the organisation are excellent. The college should improve: students' pass and retention rates on a significant number of courses; the rigour of course reviews; and the reliability of its data on students.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Business	3	Quality assurance	3
Hospitality and catering	2	Governance	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2	Management	2
Health and social care	2		
Media and performing arts	2		
Languages and EFL	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Peterborough Regional College is a general further education college serving the city of Peterborough and the surrounding areas of Fenland, South Kesteven and East Northamptonshire. The main site of the college, in a residential area about a mile from the centre of the city, serves a significant proportion of the 16 to 19 year olds who live in wards identified as areas of serious deprivation. A second leased site, 3 miles away, provides accommodation for management and accountancy programmes. A separate large house adjacent to the main site provides accommodation for performing arts and media studies courses. In 1997-98, the college enrolled 2,475 full-time and 8,950 part-time students with 71% of all enrolments being students aged over 19. In the same year the college employed 557 staff of which 329 were full-time and part-time teachers and 228 were support staff.

2 The college serves a community characterised by continuing involvement in the service industries. Financial services are particularly buoyant and now employ 5% of the workforce; this figure is expected to grow during the next five years. There has been a continuing decline in employment in manufacturing industries. There are a number of wards within the city of Peterborough where unemployment rates are well above the national average. There are several minority ethnic communities within the city, with large Pakistani and Italian communities.

3 All of the schools within the newly-formed Peterborough Unitary Authority, and most of those in the surrounding rural area, have sixth forms. The attainment in Peterborough schools, however, is below the national average at year 11. In 1998, only 41% of the cohort gained five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or better, compared with 46.3% nationally; the pass rate

in the adjacent Fenland is lower. The college has joint working arrangements with schools, including special schools, that enable students to join college courses for part of their studies. The college also works with a number of Peterborough schools to provide local study centres for adults. In a number of these centres vocational programmes have been developed to enable students to progress to more advanced programmes. The college offers literacy and numeracy provision for adult returners in the city centre as well as in a number of local primary schools and community centres. There is a separate college of adult education, maintained by the authority, in the city centre. The nearest further education institutions are Huntingdonshire Regional College, Isle College and Stamford College. The nearest universities are in Cambridge, Leicester and Northampton, all over 40 miles away. The college provides most of the teaching for a project company, jointly funded between Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise and the local authority, which is attempting to establish a university in Peterborough at a site in the city centre.

4 The college offers courses in all 10 of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas, although the provision in agriculture is small. These courses range from basic entry vocational programmes to higher education courses, including degrees. The college is the sole provider of vocational programmes, especially in construction and engineering, for a large geographical area. A total of 33 general certificate of education advanced/advanced supplementary level (GCE A/AS level) subjects are offered for full-time students and there is a comprehensive range of general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) programmes at intermediate and advanced levels. There has been an increase in the range of programmes at foundation level and an entry level programme has recently been introduced. There are 31 national and higher national

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certificate and diploma courses. A comprehensive range of part-time vocational programmes are available and many of these are linked to appropriate national vocational qualification (NVQ) awards. There are degree programmes in cultural studies, informatics and integrated technologies validated by the University of Sheffield. The college provides a wide range of vocational training and recruits 330 trainees on modern apprenticeships and other government-funded programmes. There is a broad base of NVQ programmes for these and other employed students. A wide range of NVQs at levels 1 to 3 are offered, with some provision at NVQ level 4.

5 The current college management structure has been in place since September 1997. There are four senior postholders, including the principal, and an additional five senior managers. Three assistant principals have specific responsibility for planning and resources, for the curriculum and for client and student services, respectively. There are 10 teaching sections and a central unit which co-ordinates and assesses the effectiveness of initial screening and key skills. The manager for inclusive learning co-ordinates support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

6 The college's mission is to provide a wide range of lifelong learning opportunities which can be delivered flexibly, are of a high quality and are accessible. This commitment is supported by three key aims:

- to work with other providers to deliver a wide range of coherent programmes to meet the needs of business and the community
- to contribute to the social and economic development of the area
- to provide appropriate resources to maximise learning opportunities for students.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 17 May 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors were able to use data on students' achievements produced by the FEFC and based on returns of the college's individualised student record (ISR). Accurate ISR data were available to inform the inspection. The college submitted data on students' achievements from internal records for 1998 which were checked before the inspection against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The data were found to be largely accurate. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before its inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 59 working days. They observed 94 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students. The Training Standards Council (TSC) team of six inspectors worked jointly with FEFC inspectors in the inspection of engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy and business. The key findings of the TSC inspectors contributed to the final judgements of the FEFC about the college's total provision. TSC inspectors observed 89 trainees, 22 work placements, trainee review sessions and nine work-based assessments. They met with 21 employers and 19 college staff.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected by FEFC inspectors and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 94 lessons inspected, 70% were judged to be good or outstanding and 2% were judged to be less than satisfactory compared with national averages for 1997-98, of 65% and 6%, respectively.

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Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	1	4	7	2	0	14
GNVQ	2	8	5	0	0	15
NVQ	5	21	2	0	0	28
Other vocational	3	13	9	0	0	25
Other	4	5	3	0	0	12
Total (No.)	15	51	26	2	0	94
Total (%)	16	54	28	2	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Peterborough Regional College	10.1	72
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 14 lessons including a tutorial. Inspectors agreed with most judgements made by the college but concluded that some weaknesses in teaching and learning and students' achievements were understated.

Key strengths

- an extensive range of courses and qualifications
- carefully-prepared lessons and well-managed courses
- high standard of students' portfolios
- good access to computers for students and staff

Weaknesses

- ineffective management of students' assessed work
- insufficiently co-ordinated assessment of key skills
- pass rates below national averages for most courses
- insufficient links with industry
- some deficiencies in specialist accommodation

11 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that an extensive range of courses provides good opportunities for either full-time or part-time study for a wide range of qualifications. The provision of part-time courses is particularly extensive, providing opportunity for students to progress from courses at level 1, such as the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7261, to higher national level. Full-time students can progress from GNVQ intermediate to a higher national diploma. Courses and access to the computer

workshop are arranged to support a wide range of attendance patterns. Recruitment to full-time courses is buoyant, although these courses mainly attract 16 to 19 year old male students. Part-time courses recruit older students and on these courses the numbers of male and female students are more evenly balanced.

12 Most courses are well managed and staff teams work effectively. An informative guide for tutors helps to ensure that C&G 7261 modules are taught by the same methods. A good range of carefully-prepared workbooks enable students to study on their own. There are sound arrangements for recording and monitoring students' progress. The development and assessment of key skills is not sufficiently co-ordinated on GNVQ courses, as recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers' assessments of students' work do not systematically include feedback on key skills. The teaching of key skills is not integrated with other course elements and this adversely affects students' achievements. There are few established links between individual members of staff and local companies. As recognised in the self-assessment report, local companies have not been involved in the development of the curriculum and students have not visited them to improve their understanding of the role of computers in industry and commerce.

13 Inspectors agreed with the college that teachers were well prepared and that they effectively managed students' work in most lessons. Appropriate technical support was provided for students in practical lessons. Practical exercises are broken down into clearly specified tasks. Effective use is made of diagnostic assessment to identify the differing needs of students, enabling some students to complete their assessed work over a longer period of time. On the higher national certificate course students complete projects which have a strong vocational relevance. In a few lessons, learning objectives were not clearly stated and students made too little progress with

Curriculum Areas

their studies. Some lessons were disrupted by students arriving late. Attendance for lessons was about 10% below the national average. Comprehensive information is kept on students' attainments. Arrangements for monitoring and recording students' progress are thorough and include the use of electronic mail.

14 Students' portfolios on GNVQ courses are well organised and presented and of an appropriate standard. However, students' completion of assessed work is not effectively managed. The self-assessment report did not recognise this weakness. Too many students on GNVQ courses do not complete their assignments on time. Some marked work is not returned promptly and insufficient comments are provided on assessed work to guide students. Insufficient attention is given to developing written action plans for students to improve their performance.

15 Inspectors agreed with the college that students have good access to up-to-date software and hardware. There are sufficient computers for most teaching groups and also for students working on their own. However, the location of computers in six separate rooms restricts their flexible use and some classes do not have easy access to sufficient computers. Rooms are poorly furnished. The chairs are not suitable for students working at computers and the tables do not always provide sufficient workspace. Rooms are poorly decorated and whiteboards are fixed in unsuitable positions. The self-assessment report identified a lack of specialist expertise in some curriculum areas and inspectors agreed. Teachers have insufficient recent experience of industry and few have a teaching qualification.

16 Retention rates are satisfactory on most courses, although for the GNVQ advanced course they are well below the national average. Students' achievements are generally below national averages. The pass rate for the GCE A level course is poor and is consistently below the

national average. The pass rate for the GNVQ advanced course improved in 1998 but was below the national average in the previous two years. The number of students gaining the C&G 7261 award is unsatisfactory. Over the last three years, the average level of achievement on courses for these qualifications has been about 50%. The college did not fully acknowledge the overall poor level of students' achievements, although the absence of analysis against national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC was recognised.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
IT (all C&G courses including short and over 24 weeks)	1	Expected completions	577	546	632
		Retention (%)	81	77	73
		Achievement (%)	35	71	54
IT (all C&G courses including short and over 24 weeks)	2	Expected completions	49	83	376
		Retention (%)	82	81	64
		Achievement (%)	55	54	46
GNVQ IT	2	Expected completions	29	61	63
		Retention (%)	86	77	76
		Achievement (%)	48	70	65
GCE A level (one and two year)	3	Expected completions	46	28	53
		Retention (%)	80	68	72
		Achievement (%)	24	37	38
GNVQ IT	3	Expected completions	24	41	37
		Retention (%)	75	54	57
		Achievement (%)	28	59	67
Higher national certificate computer studies	4	Expected completions	*	17	24
		Retention (%)	*	47	71
		Achievement (%)	*	38	29

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

17 FEFC inspectors observed 12 lessons covering provision in welding, fabrication, mechanical and motor vehicle engineering. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. TSC inspectors observed eight lessons which included teaching and learning, reviews of trainees' work, and work-based assessment.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses and training to meet company needs
- good retention on most courses
- effective development of key skills on motor vehicle courses
- well-organised practical motor vehicle lessons

Weaknesses

- poor achievement on many courses
- lack of formal continuous monitoring of course review action plans
- poorly decorated classroom accommodation
- inadequate planning of some lessons
- underdeveloped use of evidence from the workplace for NVQs

18 The college offers a broad range of engineering courses. The provision includes craft, technician and higher technician courses in mechanical/manufacturing, electrical/electronic, welding/fabrication and motor vehicle engineering. A degree course in integrated technologies, taught entirely within the college and validated by the University of Sheffield, provides students with good opportunities for progression. Some courses are taught in ways which allow students to learn at

their own pace. Productive links with industry have enabled the college to provide training courses for multi-skilling on company premises. A part-time BTEC national diploma in electromechanical engineering is offered specifically to meet the needs of local companies. Currently, 100 engineering students are funded by training and enterprise councils (TECs) as part of the modern apprenticeship scheme and 29 are on national traineeships. Courses are well managed. Course team meetings are held regularly; minutes of meetings are comprehensive and include clear action points. Targets for retention and achievement have been set at programme level. A course review is prepared at the end of each year, but progress made towards implementing action points is not monitored until the following year. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

19 All teachers had appropriate schemes of work. Lesson planning was not systematic. A few lessons were inadequately planned and ineffectively managed resulting in some students not being involved in question and answer sessions. In the better lessons, teachers carefully explained theoretical concepts and then related them to a practical application. For example, a teacher in one lesson questioned the students about gearing ratios and used a cut-away gearbox expertly to demonstrate its operation. In motor vehicle practical sessions the activities were systematically detailed on worksheets and well organised. Students worked industriously on practical tasks and were helped by the teacher, as required. In some lessons students were able to work at their own pace through a series of well-structured task sheets. Key skills, particularly the application of number, are effectively integrated with motor vehicle courses. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. However, evidence from the workplace is not used sufficiently by students in key skills assignments. Insufficiently demanding tasks were set for the more able students. This

Curriculum Areas

weakness was not recognised by the college. Assignment briefs clearly define tasks and the criteria used for assessment. Some teachers provide helpful comment on written assignments, but others provide little feedback.

20 Inspectors agreed with the college that the modern diagnostic motor vehicle electronic test equipment is a strength. The main motor vehicle workshop is spacious and well equipped. Resources include a car which has been donated and four engines which have been recently purchased. Another workshop, used mainly for body repair, is satisfactory. In mechanical engineering, the fabrication and welding workshop is extensive and contains sufficient equipment to meet the needs of students. Recent purchases include two modern welding sets. The mechanical workshop is well

organised, and contains an adequate number of machine tools which are fit for purpose. Classrooms are scruffy and in need of redecoration. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

21 Students are industrious. Most students' written work is good, but only a minority used wordprocessing to improve its presentation. Retention rates are satisfactory with the majority above the national average. The college did not recognise that pass rates at all levels have fluctuated, but are consistently well below the national average. Some evidence for NVQs is gathered in the workplace, but there is an over-reliance on evidence generated in college. Assessment of workplace practice is not always rigorous and, in some cases, does not apply the performance criteria.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Craft (NVQ vehicle maintenance, East Midlands Further Education Council 165, C&G 3830 C&G 3839)	1	Expected completions	48	57	56
		Retention (%)	77	53	75
		Achievement (%)	57	32	26
Craft (NVQ foundation, NVQ body fitting, NVQ mechanical and electrical systems, C&G 3830, East Midlands Further Education Council 165, Autocad two dimensional)	2	Expected completions	263	391	357
		Retention (%)	86	68	70
		Achievement (%)	39	43	37
Craft (NVQ mechanical/electrical systems, C&G 3830, East Midlands Further Education Council 165)	3	Expected completions	26	86	85
		Retention (%)	77	90	82
		Achievement (%)	25	48	66
Technician (BTEC national certificate mechanical/production)	3	Expected completions	49	55	45
		Retention (%)	80	71	100
		Achievement (%)	30	52	46
Technician (BTEC higher national certificate/diploma mechanical/production)	4	Expected completions	52	30	25
		Retention (%)	94	97	84
		Achievement (%)	29	62	43

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

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

22 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering GNVQs in business and retail distribution, GCE A level business studies, business administration and computer literacy and information technology provision. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report, but noted that the college had not identified the significant weaknesses in students' achievements. TSC inspectors observed three lessons which included teaching and learning, reviews of trainees' work, and work-based assessment.

Key strengths

- the wide range of courses
- effective planning and management of courses
- good teaching in the majority of lessons
- good specialist resources

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on most courses
- declining pass rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses

23 The college offers a wide range of vocational and professional business courses from foundation to advanced level, including GNVQ business at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, and GNVQ retail and distributive services at intermediate and advanced level. There are GCE A level courses in accounting and business studies and short courses in business administration and office technology. The flexible arrangements for attendance and study enable many students and trainees to achieve additional qualifications and progress to higher level courses.

24 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that business courses are effectively

planned and managed. Course documentation is well organised. Thorough schemes of work and lesson plans identify appropriate objectives, activities and learning outcomes. Assessment procedures are fair and consistently applied and teachers' comments on written work are helpful and constructive. An integrated GNVQ assignment programme encourages the development of students' communication and information technology (IT) skills. Students' development of key skills is effectively monitored and recorded on higher level business administration courses. However, the self-assessment report recognised that key skills are not sufficiently integrated with all business administration courses.

25 Most teaching is of a good standard. Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods, and make effective use of well-directed and challenging questions to sustain students' motivation and interest and consolidate their knowledge. Office technology workshops are used effectively. For example, students in an Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations Board (RSA) computer literacy and information technology lesson worked confidently at their own pace on a variety of IT packages and demonstrated good independent learning skills. The teacher provided guidance to students on an individual basis. In some lessons, teachers failed to differentiate activities sufficiently to take account of the differing needs of the students in the class. Some teachers failed to reflect good business practice by not using IT, for example, to produce overhead slides and handouts of a professional standard.

26 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students have access to an appropriate range of specialist resources. The office technology workshops provide a conducive learning environment, and contain an appropriate range of up-to-date equipment and software. There is an adequate range of specialist books and other learning materials, including a comprehensive selection of materials

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produced by the college staff. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. They are highly regarded by trainees and employers.

27 Most students are well motivated, and contribute willingly to learning activities and group discussions. Attendance rates are good on most programmes, but poor on the GCE A level business one-year course and GNVQ business foundation and intermediate level courses. Some assignments and portfolios of students' work show an excellent level of analysis and application of key business principles. Weaker portfolios are disorganised and poorly presented. The pass rate on the GCE A level two-year course has increased from 60% in 1996 to 80% in 1998 which is well above the national average, although retention has been erratic. The pass rate on the GCE A level one-year course has remained below the national average for the last three years. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate in business has declined from 47% in 1996 to 28% in 1998, and is well below the national average. The retention rate has increased over the last two years and was slightly above the national average in 1998. The pass rate on the GNVQ advanced course has declined from 61% to 42% over the last three years and is below the national average, but retention has increased and is close to the national average. Pass rates on administration courses have been erratic, but have remained below the national average. Retention rates have increased on level 2 and level 3 courses over the last two years and retention at level 3 was above the national average in 1998. The significant weaknesses in students' achievements were not identified in the college self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	48	40	23
		Retention (%)	67	65	78
		Achievement (%)	47	31	28
NVQ business administration	2	Expected completions	81	71	103
		Retention (%)	63	66	73
		Achievement (%)	41	49	47
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	78	55	55
		Retention (%)	44	65	67
		Achievement (%)	61	55	42
GCE A level business studies one year	3	Expected completions	58	46	32
		Retention (%)	78	78	66
		Achievement (%)	42	44	43
GCE A level business studies two year	3	Expected completions	29	25	18
		Retention (%)	76	48	61
		Achievement (%)	60	64	80
NVQ business administration	3	Expected completions	74	42	29
		Retention (%)	82	69	86
		Achievement (%)	46	41	52
Computer literacy and information technology	All levels	Expected completions	149	355	389
		Retention (%)	75	74	77
		Achievement (%)	46	50	51

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

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 2

28 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering theory and practical activities in hospitality and catering. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching
- comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans
- good pass rates on most courses
- effective support for students with learning difficulties

Weaknesses

- low retention on some courses
- the poor quality of some students' action plans

29 The college offers a range of courses in hospitality and catering from NVQ level 1 to higher national certificate. Programmes include full-time and part-time NVQ provision in food preparation, food and beverage service and supervisory skills and GNVQs at intermediate and advanced level. Enrolments for GNVQ courses are low and falling. The college's self-assessment report recognised the need to develop a marketing strategy to address this. Courses are well managed. Course teams, which include student representatives, meet regularly and maintain clear records of meetings and resulting action. An effective course induction programme is used to introduce students to their studies and to college facilities. There are clear arrangements for students who enrol later in the year. All courses have well-presented, informative handbooks.

30 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that lessons are well planned and

effectively taught. Schemes of work are thorough and well organised and are complemented by detailed lesson plans. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods to extend students' knowledge and skills. In many of the lessons students worked co-operatively and were enthusiastic about their tasks. For example, in one lesson students clearly enjoyed the interesting and challenging experience of making effective use of the internet to plan menus. A conscientious approach by teachers to practical work helps to develop students' technical and social skills. Learning is carefully and effectively managed in situations where students have different ability levels and learning requirements. For example, in some practical lessons students following NVQ level 3 worked in a supervisory capacity alongside others undertaking NVQ levels 2 and 1; all students were able to share tasks appropriately. Students with learning difficulties receive high levels of effective support. Where appropriate, learning support staff work alongside students in practical lessons and in kitchen areas. Teachers set interesting and vocationally relevant assignments. They mark students' work conscientiously and provide constructive criticism to help students improve their performance. There is a detailed and effective internal verification system. Students' progression is carefully monitored and recorded.

31 Inspectors agreed with the college that industrial liaison is a significant strength. Comprehensive links between staff and representatives from industry help to ensure that the teaching reflects current industrial practices. The vocational relevance of courses is enhanced by the use of carefully monitored and appropriate work placements. Industrial visits are also used to relate theory to practical situations and are appreciated by students. Several 'TV chef' personalities have visited the college to take part in cookery demonstrations and have encouraged students' enthusiasm for the hospitality industry. During the current year

Curriculum Areas

students have raised over £700 for Kosovan refugees by making and selling their own brand of biscuits.

32 Most teachers have appropriate industrial experience and use it effectively in their teaching. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality of specialist teaching accommodation is good. The well-maintained production kitchen, pantry, bar and restaurant areas provide a realistic work environment of a high standard. However, the restricted opening hours and lack of customers at times diminishes the realism of students' work experience. Students' changing accommodation is too small and this has led to unfavourable comments by its users. There is an adequate range of specialist books and periodicals in the library although some of the bookstock is dated. Access to IT resources, including the internet, is good.

33 Students are well motivated. They display good levels of competency in all aspects of preparing and serving food. Careful attention is paid to the requirements for hygiene, health and safety. Most portfolios of work are well organised. Students show good application and organisational skills by keeping their log books up to date. Inspectors agreed with the college that some students' action plans were properly completed but many had gaps and lacked appropriate comments. Pass rates on most courses are above the national average. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge the low retention on some part-time courses. Retention rates on full-time NVQ courses are improving and above national benchmarks.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ catering and hospitality (full time)	1	Expected completions	22	17	29
		Retention (%)	85	68	83
		Achievement (%)	64	82	72
NVQ catering and hospitality (part time)	1	Expected completions	6	19	19
		Retention (%)	86	90	56
		Achievement (%)	0	74	79
NVQ catering and hospitality (full time)	2	Expected completions	35	15	15
		Retention (%)	42	83	83
		Achievement (%)	63	87	93
NVQ catering and hospitality (part time)	2	Expected completions	38	27	24
		Retention (%)	86	67	71
		Achievement (%)	39	52	71

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

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 2

34 FEFC and TSC inspectors observed 10 lessons covering the range of provision in hairdressing, beauty and complementary therapy. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good standard of teaching
- high quality of students' written and practical work
- high achievement rates on most courses
- successful integration and assessment of key skills

Weaknesses

- lack of accreditation of students' experiences in the workplace
- low and declining retention rates on some courses
- lack of assessment opportunities in the first year for some hairdressing students

35 The college offers a wide and appropriate range of full-time and part-time courses leading to NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 in hairdressing, levels 2 and 3 in beauty therapy and some specialist courses in complementary and beauty therapy. Courses are well managed. Hairdressing and beauty staff work effectively together as a team. Course teams meet regularly and their meetings are appropriately minuted with a clear indication of responsibility for action and target dates by which action should be completed. Comprehensive course handbooks have been developed to support the management and co-ordination of the curriculum area.

36 Inspectors agreed with the college that the quality of teaching and learning is good. All of the lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be good or outstanding. Schemes of work and lesson plans are carefully designed to accommodate the range of individual students' learning and assessment needs. Teachers share lesson aims and learning objectives with students and make regular checks on their progress and their understanding of tasks set. They use comprehensive resource packs in their teaching. Students are enthusiastic and confident and are encouraged to contribute actively to their own learning programmes. For example, in one lesson hairdressing students worked on a range of activities which included devising a quiz to test the knowledge of their fellow students on perming techniques and product ranges. In a few lessons teachers overlooked opportunities to link theory and practice with industrial standards and to build on students' experiences in the workplace. The teaching of key skills has been integrated effectively with the hairdressing and beauty curriculum. Some teachers are currently working towards acquiring a specialist key skills qualification to improve their knowledge and skills. Students' progress and achievements are effectively monitored and recorded in all practical lessons. However, there is no assessment or formal accreditation of their achievements in the workplace. There are few opportunities in the first year for the assessment of some hairdressing students. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses. There is an effective system for internal verification. There are also established systems for individual students' action-planning which are implemented across the section, but they are insufficiently rigorous.

37 The self-assessment report did not identify the high standards of students' written work. Portfolios are clearly presented, well organised and demonstrate a good understanding of the subject matter. Inspectors found examples of the effective use of IT skills in beauty and

Curriculum Areas

complementary therapy portfolios. Students demonstrated competent and safe working practices in all practical lessons. The standard of their practical skills is high.

38 Teachers have appropriate industrial and professional qualifications and experience. Technical support is effective. Technicians possess assessor qualifications and this extends assessment opportunities for students working at the hairdressing and beauty reception points. The hairdressing and beauty salons provide satisfactory accommodation. A well-equipped

room with a range of learning materials provides students with good access to audiovisual and IT facilities. Pass rates on most courses are good and, for example, on NVQ level 2 courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy higher than national averages. The self-assessment report did not recognise that retention rates on some courses are declining and below national averages. The monitoring of students' destinations is not always adequate, though strategies to address this are now in place.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ hairdressing	1	Expected completions	27	33	38
		Retention (%)	96	73	74
		Achievement (%)	42	96	86
NVQ hairdressing	2	Expected completions	94	39	19
		Retention (%)	80	77	58
		Achievement (%)	71	60	100
NVQ beauty therapy	2	Expected completions	35	43	58
		Retention (%)	63	63	83
		Achievement (%)	57	94	85
NVQ hairdressing	3	Expected completions	18	6	9
		Retention (%)	78	100	89
		Achievement (%)	75	17	100
NVQ beauty therapy	3	Expected completions	*	29	33
		Retention (%)	*	86	73
		Achievement (%)	*	92	83
Vocational awards international certificate in body massage	1 to 4	Expected completions	*	12	72
		Retention (%)	*	67	69
		Achievement (%)	*	100	92

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

39 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering provision in health, social care and childcare. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- good teaching on most courses
- well-organised and varied work experience
- high pass rates on the diploma in nursery nursing
- effective systems for monitoring students' progress
- detailed action-planning emanating from lesson observations
- effective integration of key skills

Weaknesses

- insufficient checks on students' learning in some lessons
- low retention and pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course
- weak curriculum management on one full-time course

40 The college offers a wide range of provision in health, social and childcare from foundation level to higher national certificate. Access courses in health and social work are carefully planned to meet the varying needs of students returning to study. Students can attend on either a full-time or part-time basis and can complete the course over one or two years. Most courses are well managed; staff maintain good records and hold regular team meetings. The self-assessment report did not identify weaknesses in the continuity of the management of the national diploma in childhood studies course. Changes of staff seriously disrupted the teaching and assessment of students and had a

detrimental impact on retention and achievement rates for this course in 1998. The college has since taken appropriate action to remedy this.

41 The quality of teaching on most courses is good. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a variety of appropriate learning activities to stimulate students and keep them interested. For example, in one lesson students worked on structured activity sheets in order to explore their own personal values. This was followed by a discussion in which the appropriateness of these values was considered in the context of childcare. The lesson enabled students to explore and become clear about the distinction between personal and professional issues. In some lessons, teachers made insufficient checks on students' learning; in others, the teacher adopted a passive role, there was little interaction with students and this resulted in the students being insufficiently challenged. Observation and assessment of lessons is well established, and results in detailed and accurate summaries of strengths and weaknesses, followed by effective action-planning.

42 Inspectors agreed with the college that well-organised and effectively monitored work experience makes a significant contribution to students' learning. A work placement officer ensures that there are good levels of liaison with placement providers. Students' experiences in work placements are appropriately incorporated into assignments and classwork. As indicated in the self-assessment report, effective systems are in place to monitor students' progress. Records are adequately maintained and acted upon. Key skills are integrated with all programmes. Inspectors found examples of key skills being effectively developed within a relevant vocational context. For example, in one GNVQ intermediate lesson, students developed their skills in reading, listening and discussion in the consideration of a health topic. Students read articles on the dangers of over exposure to the sun and its link to skin cancer. They were then

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required to summarise key points which were presented to a partner who listened and then questioned them.

43 Many students demonstrate good presentational skills which contribute to the production of assignment work of a high standard. Oral presentation skills were also well developed. For example, one group of mature students responded well to the task of planning and preparing individual presentations to the rest of their class. They were required to research a chosen topic and present their findings according to specified criteria. This was an appropriately demanding task in which students supported and learned from each other. As noted in the self-assessment report, staff have relevant vocational experience and qualifications. Three members of staff have recently undergone training in basic skills in order to improve their ability to respond to students' individual learning needs. Accommodation is generally fit for purpose. Most rooms have comfortable seating, are carpeted, and are adequately equipped. Base rooms are allocated to early years and health and social care courses. A few rooms have well-prepared displays of students' work, whilst others tend to lack a vocational identity.

44 Overall, retention and achievement rates are improving and, in most courses, are equal to or above national averages. There are consistently high pass rates on the diploma in nursery nursing course. In 1998, the pass rates for GNVQ advanced health and social care was significantly above the national average. The self-assessment report acknowledged the low but improving retention and pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate health and social care programme. Current statistical indicators for 1999 reflect a general improvement in retention.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Expected completions	34	12	19
		Retention (%)	47	50	68
		Achievement (%)	25	50	62
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education	2	Expected completions	21	21	33
		Retention (%)	76	76	85
		Achievement (%)	63	100	75
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Expected completions	22	23	23
		Retention (%)	77	57	70
		Achievement (%)	44	70	94
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions	37	44	41
		Retention (%)	89	80	70
		Achievement (%)	88	97	95
National diploma childhood studies	3	Expected completions	18	16	18
		Retention (%)	83	73	50
		Achievement (%)	60	78	100
Access to professional health studies	3	Expected completions	*	25	27
		Retention (%)	*	80	74
		Achievement (%)	*	60	45

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Media and Performing Arts

Grade 2

45 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering courses in media, performing arts and popular music. Although inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, they attached greater significance to some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- consistently good teaching
- the well-planned curriculum
- opportunities for high-profile performance work
- good progression from vocational programmes to higher education
- a good standard of equipment

Weaknesses

- some unsuitable accommodation
- insufficient technician support for performing arts and popular music

46 There has been a rapid growth in the media and performing arts provision. The college offers a good range of full-time national diploma courses in media, performing arts and music, and a first diploma in performing arts. Students are encouraged to take additional academic subjects at GCE and GCSE levels. There are also a number of part-time vocational courses, for example, in media and recording techniques. By following associated board and rock school music examinations students improve their repertoire of skills and work towards specialist qualifications. The curriculum is well planned. Course teams meet regularly and decisions are minuted and effectively implemented. Action plans take account of comments from external verifiers as well as the college's internal academic audits. Individual progress is regularly monitored and students are provided with effective academic support through regular tutorials.

47 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of teaching across all programmes is consistently good and is much appreciated by students. Staff teams work effectively together and have a strong sense of vocational identity. Teachers effectively integrate theory with practical work. For example, drama students learned how to interpret a stage lighting plan and observed the effects of rigging stage lanterns in a variety of ways. Teachers vary their methods appropriately and combine formal teaching with more open-ended activities in which students explore different themes and experiment with a variety of techniques. Most assignment briefs are based on a practical knowledge of the industry and have clear grading criteria. For example, music students worked to a simulated commission which required them to compose a piece of music to accompany a documentary film. Teachers made good use of students' interest and prior experience. For example, students used their own experience of buying compact disks to inform their studies of selling products in the music business. Performing arts students particularly benefit from the liaison between the college and the local professional theatre where the artistic director auditions students for college productions. Media students contribute regularly to local radio and cable television broadcasting as part of their studies. Music students are required to develop their administrative skills by taking complete responsibility for organising an annual public festival of local bands. Students are encouraged to participate in study trips abroad. Students are highly-motivated in their studies.

48 Teachers are suitably qualified. Relevant staff development activities help them to keep up to date. Part-time teachers are predominantly current practitioners and this ensures that studies are vocationally relevant. There is a good standard of specialist equipment. Music technology students make good use of new computers that meet the standards of the music industry. However, there

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are significant problems caused by the generally inappropriate accommodation. Music technology is located in three separate rooms on different floors which makes it difficult for teachers to work efficiently. The drama studio is too small to rehearse large-scale productions and the college hall is unavailable at crucial times within the academic year. Dance lessons have to be taught away from the main campus. Most of the accommodation is uncomfortable. There is a lack of suitable accommodation for activities such as note-making and other study skills. There is no suitable accommodation for individual tutorials. The level of noise that carries from music lessons is intrusive and disrupts other lessons. Most of these weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Although the college provides technical support for major productions, performing arts and popular music courses have insufficient regular technical support to maintain equipment and musical instruments. This weakness was acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

49 Most students who complete full-time vocational courses gain the qualification. Pass rates for GCSE drama and national diplomas in media and popular music are consistently high. Pass rates on the first and national diplomas in performing arts are now close to the national average. Retention rates were good on most courses in 1998, except for GCE A level courses. Progression from national diploma programmes to higher education is particularly good, as recognised in the self-assessment report. Students gain places at prestigious specialist institutions such as the Central School of Speech and Drama. Students benefit from extensive opportunities to exhibit their skills in public venues for both small and large-scale productions and events. Drama students gave a successful performance of the play *Road* to an invited audience. There was a high standard of musicianship in a performance of *West Side Story*. Video work produced by media students

is of a good standard. Students regularly give performances in local community venues such as hospices and schools and are raising funds for Kosovan refugees through a series of outdoor concerts.

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A summary of achievement and retention rates in media and performing arts, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE drama	2	Expected completions	26	8	12
		Retention (%)	85	100	83
		Achievement (%)	82	100	100
First diploma performing arts	2	Expected completions	11	12	20
		Retention (%)	91	75	90
		Achievement (%)	60	89	83
National diploma performing arts	3	Expected completions	*	15	20
		Retention (%)	*	73	90
		Achievement (%)	*	78	83
National diploma popular music	3	Expected completions	*	16	15
		Retention (%)	*	69	93
		Achievement (%)	*	89	100
National diploma in media	3	Expected completions	17	16	24
		Retention (%)	82	100	90
		Achievement (%)	38	93	96
Advanced film/media studies (aggregate)	3	Expected completions	44	39	18
		Retention (%)	57	25	67
		Achievement (%)	92	70	83

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Languages and EFL

Grade 3

50 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering the range of programmes in English as a foreign language (EFL) and modern languages offered by the college. They agreed with many of the judgements noted in the self-assessment report, but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses in EFL and modern languages
- good teaching on most EFL courses
- consistently high pass rates on some GCE A level courses
- well-resourced multimedia language centre

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in modern languages
- poor pass rates on some EFL courses during the last three years
- poor retention rates on some courses
- low attendance rates on some courses

51 The college offers a wide range of courses and levels of study in modern languages and EFL both day and evening, as identified in the self-assessment report. Of particular note is the range of courses in modern languages offered through the Open College Network and the language modules on vocational courses. Programmes are well managed through regular meetings between the section manager and the workgroup leaders, who co-ordinate the work of five full-time and 16 part-time staff. The teaching of each modern language is co-ordinated by a lecturer. Part-time staff attend team meetings. Issues are discussed systematically, although the analysis of retention and achievement data is insufficiently rigorous. Schemes of work are available for all courses but some lack reference to the resources and

materials needed to achieve the course objectives, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report.

52 In most EFL lessons the teaching was good and teachers' expectations of students were high. For example, in a lesson designed to develop reading skills the lecturer used a personal story of feelings of guilt about something he had done in his youth to elicit a list of adjectives to describe emotions. After discussion, students were asked to read in groups different texts and to complete a worksheet, ticking the emotions felt by the character in the story they had read. EFL lessons are thoroughly planned and make extensive use of work in pairs and groups. Teaching in many modern languages lessons was not sufficiently lively. In a few lessons, teachers did not use the language students were learning as the main means of communication and, as a result, students lacked confidence in using it. Teaching materials were well produced and appropriate to the level of studies in both EFL and modern languages lessons. Written work is marked punctually and returned with comments that help students to improve their performance. However, students' attendance was low and averaged only 65% in the lessons observed.

53 Specialist resources are well used, as recognised in the self-assessment report. A recently developed multimedia language centre has 10 personal computers with interactive compact disks and a listening facility and this is well used by both EFL and modern languages students. There is good technical support for the running of the centre. Teaching rooms are well furnished and appropriately equipped. The library has a good range of current periodicals and magazines, but its stock of language books for certain foreign languages, especially Italian and Spanish, is poor. Established links with Europe have not been well used apart from a recent visit to Spain by a group of students studying Spanish as part of a GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism course.

Curriculum Areas

54 The college's self-assessment report recognised certain strengths in students' achievements, notably high pass rates in GCE A level French, Italian and Spanish in 1998, and good achievements in Open College Network programmes and inspectors agreed. At GCSE, pass rates at grades A to C have been above the national average in most modern languages for three years. However, the college failed to identify the consistently poor pass rates in preliminary English test and certificate of proficiency in English programmes during the last three years. Pass rates on certificate in advanced English courses have been below the

national average for three years and on first certificate in English courses for 1996 and 1997. The retention rates for many courses in both modern languages and EFL are below national benchmarks: for example, the rate for all GCE A levels was only 60% in 1997 and 61% in 1998. There has been, however, a significant improvement in retention on Open College Network modern languages courses, with rates rising from 34% in 1996 to 57% in 1997. The statistical data for the current academic year 1998-99 also show improvement on many courses.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
All Open College Network for foreign languages	1	Expected completions	*	143	167
		Retention (%)	*	34	57
		Achievement (%)	*	59	58
Preliminary English test	2	Expected completions	20	34	63
		Retention (%)	80	79	60
		Achievement (%)	44	48	45
All GCSE modern languages	2	Expected completions	76	85	71
		Retention (%)	72	60	61
		Achievement (%)	64	82	72
First certificate in English	2	Expected completions	45	76	51
		Retention (%)	80	55	80
		Achievement (%)	36	43	48
Certificate in advanced English	3	Expected completions	13	17	32
		Retention (%)	62	65	56
		Achievement (%)	13	27	22
Certificate of proficiency in English	3	Expected completions	28	18	20
		Retention (%)	71	72	70
		Achievement (%)	70	62	93
All GCE A level modern languages	3	Expected completions	76	85	71
		Retention (%)	72	60	61
		Achievement (%)	67	73	96

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

*course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

55 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses noted in the report have been addressed.

Key strengths

- appropriate and relevant pre-course information and guidance
- the range and responsiveness of student services
- excellent learning support in lessons
- effective assessment and support for students' literacy and numeracy needs
- effective careers guidance for full-time students

Weaknesses

- practice in tutorial provision
- inadequacy of accommodation used for student services
- underdeveloped careers education programme

56 Since the last inspection, the college has improved the management of services to support students. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that prospective students in the college and the workplace receive appropriate, impartial and relevant pre-course information and guidance. Publicity materials are clear and informative. Students feel well informed about courses through recruitment events such as open evenings and 'taster' days. There are specialist advisers for different groups of students, such as the adult guidance worker. Admissions procedures are effective. Student services staff arrange interviews for full-time students with course tutors and provide initial guidance for prospective students. Applications are dealt with quickly and their progress is followed up. There is, however, no mechanism

to match initial enquiries to final enrolments to test the effectiveness of the service. Work-based trainees have full access to the wide range of college support services.

57 Most students receive a comprehensive induction to the college and central support services, which helps them settle in quickly. All students, including work-based trainees, are given a student diary which incorporates the charter and gives a wide range of useful information about the services available. Course teams receive helpful guidelines and checklists for induction activities but not all course teams follow them. Some course handbooks do not adhere to the college guidelines. Initial assessment procedures to identify the additional learning needs of work-based trainees are effective. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the range and provision of learning support is good. Efficient and sensitive methods are used to identify students who need learning support. All full-time and some part-time students complete a diagnostic assessment in literacy and numeracy as part of their induction. Tutors encourage students to develop their key skills at the appropriate level and refer those who need extra help to the college's well-resourced key skills unit. In 1998, there were over 500 referrals. Support is available for students on an individual basis or in small groups. Support tutors also work alongside vocational tutors to provide support in lessons. Trained staff assess the needs of students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. The number of students attending additional learning support lessons on a regular basis has increased significantly this academic year. Each student has an individual learning plan and individual progress is reviewed regularly by support tutors. Students' progress is well documented but there is no effective system for measuring the impact of the support on students' performance.

58 The college has a range of materials and services to meet the individual requirements of students with learning difficulties and/or

Cross-college Provision

disabilities. Students with sensory impairment and other disabilities receive excellent support in lessons. Learning support assistants work effectively with course tutors and individual students to enable them to gain from all possible learning opportunities. Staff in the sensory resource unit adapt equipment to meet individual needs. The college recognises that there is insufficient staffing to support adequately the needs of students who progress from separate specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to other programmes.

59 The personal support services for students are comprehensive, a strength noted in the self-assessment. The range includes medical support, advice on money and benefits, counselling, careers guidance and advice and support with accommodation, transport and childcare. The advisory services are well promoted in the college. The counselling and welfare services offer students effective personal and financial guidance. There are effective links with local agencies. Clear records are kept of the extent to which the services are used, but there is no systematic evaluation. The college has plans to rectify deficiencies in accommodation which prevent the continued development of the services offered. These shortcomings include the inappropriate location of the medical room within the student services offices, the lack of confidential interview rooms, the failure to give the information centre sufficient prominence, and the smallness and crowded conditions in several offices.

60 There is effective careers guidance for full-time students. The college has productive links with the local careers service which provides careers guidance interviews and runs group sessions with tutorial groups. Good support is provided for students who wish to progress to higher education. Vocational tutors use their industrial experience and work contacts to advise students and trainees on their future plans. The college has not yet fully implemented a plan for a careers education programme,

building on the good practice in careers planning used with GCE A level students.

61 The recently-introduced tutorial framework is central to the college's strategy for improving retention. Since its introduction in 1998 there has been a 2% increase in retention rates compared with the previous year. Each curriculum section is responsible for organising its own tutorial programme by adapting the model provided by the college for tutorials to suit the needs of its students and courses. All students have a personal tutor and all full-time students have a weekly timetabled tutorial. However, tutorial support is not fully effective in all curriculum areas. Some tutors do not plan their tutorials properly or conduct their tutorials effectively. Some do not help students to produce action plans for learning and some fail to monitor students' attendance. The college identified these weaknesses in its recent audit of courses and has required course teams to produce action plans for improvement.

General Resources

Grade 2

62 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the strengths had been overstated. Inspectors identified one additional key weakness.

Key strengths

- improvements to the main site since the last inspection
- good IT provision
- a well-resourced library and resources centre

Weaknesses

- some poor-quality teaching
- accommodation on the main site
- lack of access for those with restricted mobility to many areas

Cross-college Provision

63 The college's main campus which occupies a large site of approximately 25 acres is set in attractive surroundings and planted with mature trees. A nearby annexe, Hightrees House, is used for the visual and performing arts provision. Financial and management studies courses are held in a leased building at Forward House, 3 miles from the main site. A number of improvements have been made to the main site since the last inspection, as identified in the self-assessment report, although the significance of some improvements was overstated. In addition to its capital allocation from the FEFC, the college has spent over £1.6 million from reserves on capital projects. These include upgrading the refectory area, improvements to the college's IT provision, the establishment of a new key skills area, the redevelopment of the library and learning centre and the provision of a new student common room. The installation of a closed-circuit television system in the college and in the adjoining car park has helped to ensure security, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The accommodation strategy recognises that some space is underused. The strategy has also identified the need to re-allocate the use of some areas on the main site as a result of changing demands for space. The college has an effective maintenance programme which is reviewed annually. Minimum standards have been laid down for general teaching areas. A programme of works is being planned to ensure that these minimum standards are achieved. Most class rooms are of an acceptable standard, although some have little visual display. Although some huts have been removed since the last inspection, a number are still in use and the accommodation they provide is not conducive to learning. The self-assessment report did not address this weakness, although it is referred to in the accommodation strategy.

64 There is a clear IT policy and IT facilities in the college are good, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. The college has made a substantial investment in this area in

excess of £850,000 during the last two years. Part of this investment has been funded through collaborative projects. The curriculum network has recently been upgraded and most computers on the main site, and at Forward House, are linked to it. All computers have been upgraded to ensure that they are year 2000 compliant. There are 510 computers available for students' use, a ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of approximately 1:8. Students have good opportunities to use computers outside timetabled classes. Access to electronic mail and internet facilities are being extended, and the college is in the process of developing an academic intranet. This will enable staff and students to obtain learning materials from anywhere within the college, or from off site. IT facilities are available within all staff workrooms. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the level of technical IT support needs to be increased to keep up with the demands of staff and students.

65 The library and resources centre has recently been remodelled to a high standard. Over 40,000 books and 2,500 video titles are available and students can gain access to them through a computerised catalogue. These are supplemented by a wide range of other resources including newspapers, periodicals and CD-ROMs. There is a well-equipped staff development room and areas for group and quiet study. The centre is effectively managed and there are formal procedures in place for liaison between centre and curriculum staff. There are also close links with the key skills unit. Inspectors judged that stock in most curriculum areas was good. There is also a small resources centre at Forward House.

66 As the self-assessment report indicated, social facilities for students have improved since the last inspection. A new student common room with easy chairs, vending machines and a pin table has been provided. The refectory has been remodelled and there is a good range of other catering facilities, including a snack bar

Cross-college Provision

and restaurant run by the college's hotel and catering section. The self-assessment report acknowledged that sports facilities on the site are restricted. There is a small sports hall, three tennis courts and various grassed areas which the students can use. Other facilities off site are hired.

67 Many parts of the main site are not accessible to those with restricted mobility. In particular, the science laboratories can only be reached by stairs. Proposals to build another lift are being considered. The college is in the process of installing magnetic stays to the swing doors in the main building to make movement easier for those using wheelchairs. The college recognises the restricted access as a weakness.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

68 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated. The college has taken action to address the weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- firm commitment to, and recent improvements in, quality assurance arrangements
- robust arrangements to assess the quality of teaching and learning
- thorough course audit procedures
- detailed investigation and monitoring of complaints
- emphasis on staff development

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements in business support areas
- insufficient analysis of data on students' achievements

- lack of rigour in some course reviews
- inadequate monitoring of action plans
- underdeveloped use of performance indicators and targets for improvement

69 Inspectors agreed that significant improvements have been made to the quality assurance arrangements since the college was reorganised in 1997. A senior manager has overall responsibility for quality assurance and the philosophy of the college is to expect all staff to take responsibility for quality. The college's commitment to quality is reflected in its key strategic objectives. The policy on quality is displayed prominently throughout the college. A regular newsletter raises staff awareness of quality assurance matters.

70 Self-assessment was introduced in 1998 in preparation for the inspection. Inspectors agreed that self-assessment is not yet an integral part of the college's planning process for either college or work-based programmes. Teaching and support teams produced comprehensive self-assessment reports which contributed to the college's self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is a substantial and generally self-critical document, although most strengths and weaknesses lack an evaluative judgement. The evidence to substantiate the strengths and weaknesses is not explicitly stated. Action plans in the self-assessment report do not identify always the person responsible for taking action or target dates for completion. The college has taken steps to address this weakness and action plans are on the college intranet and are monitored regularly.

71 In 1998, improved standard procedures for annual course reviews were introduced. However, they are not implemented effectively across all areas of the college. The monitoring of action plans from reviews is insufficiently robust. On all course reviews there has been insufficient analysis of the data on students' achievements and little use is made of national

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averages and benchmarking data to support judgements. Target-setting at course level is underdeveloped and targets for improvement are seldom included in course reviews. Some progress has been made and in January 1999 all course teams set targets for the first time for enrolment, retention and achievement. The college acknowledges that procedures to routinely monitor and review targets are at an early stage of development. Course teams meet regularly and their business is well documented but some fail to complete action plans promptly. These shortcomings were identified in the self-assessment report. The college conducted a thorough curriculum audit to check for compliance with the quality assurance arrangements and this has resulted in detailed and critical reports which give guidance on necessary improvements. Students' views about their courses and the college are carefully analysed and prompt action is taken to address the areas where students express dissatisfaction. However, the self-assessment report recognised that there are no systematic procedures to gather employers' and parents' views about the college and its courses. Employer and trainee evaluations for work-based training programmes are based on low sample sizes in some areas.

72 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the lesson observation scheme, introduced in 1998, is thorough. Almost all full-time and part-time staff have been observed. The observations provide the basis for an excellent analysis of the quality of teaching and learning across the college and this has informed judgements in the self-assessment report. Staff development arising from the observations has led to improvements in the quality of teaching. Action plans to address shortcomings in teaching practices have been drawn up but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. There has been insufficient dissemination of examples of good practice to improve teaching across the college.

73 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that performance indicators and service standards in business support areas are underdeveloped. This weakness was identified in the previous inspection report. Standards have been set for accommodation and cleaning and frequent checks are made to ensure that these are maintained. Business support staff have benefited from a staff development day on performance standards but the college acknowledges that in other areas progress on this has been slow.

74 The college charter has recently been revised after consultation with students. More precise and measurable quantitative service standards have been identified to improve the monitoring of charter commitments. The standard of service that students, employers and parents or carers can expect from the college are explicitly stated. Inspectors agreed that the college's complaints procedure is clear and investigation procedures are thorough. Response times for dealing with complaints are monitored carefully. Complaints are meticulously analysed and recommendations are made and followed up to avoid a recurrence.

75 The college has a well-established staff appraisal system. There are good staff development opportunities for teachers on both college and work-based programmes and an adequate budget to support them. Staff development is prioritised against the college's strategic objectives. During 1997-98, approximately 84% of business support staff, and 91% of full-time and 48% of part-time teaching staff attended a staff development activity. Although, staff development activities are well documented, the self-assessment report recognises the need to evaluate their effectiveness. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1997.

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Governance

Grade 2

76 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified an additional strength and weakness.

Key strengths

- effective clerking arrangements
- constructive links with staff and students
- the appropriate committee structure
- comprehensive procedures for openness in governance
- effective involvement in the development and monitoring of the strategic plan

Weaknesses

- lack of systematic monitoring of college performance
- lack of evaluation of governors' own performance
- over-reliance on tabled papers

77 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.

78 The corporation has a membership of 15 and there are currently four vacancies. Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds and their expertise is effectively used by the college. A formal skills audit has not yet been used to establish an 'ideal profile' for corporation membership but this is in progress. Co-opted members serve on the search committee to provide an additional viewpoint from outside the college. The range

of skills of members is considered when making new appointments. The college has not publicly advertised vacancies but has relied on approaches to local organisations in seeking nominations. The corporation meets at least termly. Meetings are supported by well-written reports and appropriately-detailed minutes. In the past there has been an over-reliance on tabled papers which have accounted for one in 10 of the papers considered. This weakness was identified in a report to governors but was not included in the self-assessment report. Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college that the corporation has established an appropriate committee structure. The corporation has deployed governors on committees in a way that makes the best use of their expertise. Each committee has terms of reference which have been approved by the corporation.

79 The self-assessment report acknowledged that governors are well informed of the key issues concerning the college through a programme of training events. However, there is insufficient identification of the training requirements of individual governors and no systematic evaluation of any training undertaken. Inspectors agreed with the college that there are effective links between governors, staff and students. Governors have good links with curriculum sections in the college and discuss strategic planning, self-assessment, students' achievements and enrolment targets with staff. Governors also attend social functions within their curriculum section and this close involvement is much appreciated by staff and students. The corporation's student and staff committee regularly meets representatives of the students' union. Before corporation meetings, governors routinely visit an area of the college to improve their overall knowledge of the college. Senior staff make regular presentations to corporation meetings.

80 The corporation has effective, independent clerking arrangements, a strength not identified

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in the self-assessment report. Following a review of its clerking arrangements in 1998 the corporation appointed an external clerk. The clerk has wide experience of clerking duties and has commenced a programme of updating corporation policies and procedures. The clerk to the corporation services all committees. Additional specialist clerking support is provided to the audit committee.

81 Governors have established comprehensive procedures for openness as recognised in the self-assessment report. Corporation and committee minutes, with the exception of confidential items, are made available for public inspection. The clerk to the corporation maintains a register of the financial interests of governors. The register is updated annually, and is available for public inspection. The register has not yet been completed by staff. Governors have established a code of conduct, which embraces the seven principles of public life stated in the Nolan Report, a code of ethics, a public interest disclosure policy, and standing orders. These are all contained in the members' handbook. There is a well-established annual public meeting which is well attended. The corporation also produces an annual report.

82 Inspectors agreed with the college that governors are closely involved in the preparation of the strategic plan. Governors, together with senior managers, annually participate in strategic planning conferences. There is regular monitoring of the progress made towards achieving the corporate objectives through consideration of the principal's report to the corporation and the plan is adjusted to reflect changing patterns to student enrolments. The self-assessment report recognised that the corporation's monitoring of the college's performance against a range of targets and indicators is underdeveloped. The corporation has not yet confirmed which reports they require to monitor the overall performance of the college. Governors have acknowledged the need to agree procedures and have recently

established a committee for curriculum and quality for this purpose. Governors have set targets to monitor their own performance but have not reported to the corporation on the progress they have made in reaching these targets.

83 The corporation receives relevant financial information. The budget and three-year financial forecast is considered and approved by the corporation on the recommendation of the finance and general purposes committee before the start of the financial year. The corporation has established clear financial targets and parameters within which to operate to ensure solvency and these are closely monitored.

Management

Grade 2

84 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements but thought that some strengths were overstated. Progress has been made to address most weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but inspectors identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- regular review and monitoring of strategic objectives
- thorough monitoring of resource utilisation
- effective communications across the college
- effective liaison and collaboration with other education and training bodies
- access to and use of management information reports
- regular and frequent financial management information

Weaknesses

- aspects of financial planning

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- inaccurate collection and recording of students' data at some section and course levels
- lack of progress on the development of unit costing

85 The college reorganised its management structure in 1997 and this has led to a number of improvements. For example, the appointment of an assistant principal has given a higher profile to curriculum management and planning. By the time of the inspection the majority of job roles had been updated to reflect the new management structure, the college having previously identified roles which were out of date as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Staff generally understand how the management structure works and the responsibilities of managers. Inspectors judged that curriculum management was generally effective. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the deployment of staff and other resources is now more effectively monitored. The college's caseloading model for measuring the responsibilities and tasks of teaching staff is implemented and monitored by section managers. There is poor practice in applying the model in some sections and some staff do not understand clearly how particular duties are allocated. There has been little progress since the previous inspection report on the calculation and use of unit costs, although this is identified as an objective in the strategic plan.

86 Inspectors agreed that the strategic plan is comprehensive and supported by detailed objectives and operational statements. These objectives are regularly reviewed and monitored. Detailed operational statements and targets for each section manager are monitored by assistant principals. Although there are precise performance indicators and targets for the improvement of retention and achievement for individual courses, these have only recently been introduced and there has been insufficient time to assess how well they have been met.

87 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is effective communication across the college. An extensive system of meetings, working parties, a corporate intranet and two annual staff conferences contribute to the flow of information. For example, meetings in the vocational training unit are well documented and have clear outcomes. Good use is made of a staff newsletter, feedback from surveys of staff opinions and termly briefings for part-time teachers. Regular consultation takes place with recognised trade unions. Staff from across the college are well represented on the academic board. A revised staff handbook has been produced in response to a weakness identified in the self-assessment report.

88 Inspectors agreed that there is effective liaison, consultation and collaboration with other education and training bodies and community organisations. The college enjoys a constructive working relationship with the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise. There are productive projects with collaborative partners, other further education colleges, Peterborough City Council, a community education partnership, schools and a higher education franchise with the University College Northampton. There is good liaison between the college and employers over work-based training.

89 Managers in the college make effective use of access to a wide range of useful management reports some of which are generated from the college's management information system. This was recognised in the self-assessment. Many reports are available on the corporate intranet. Systems for recording and analysing students' data are sound, but inspectors identified inadequacies in the collection and input of students' data at section and course level, and in the data on examinations in the management information system. There have been improvements in the collating of ISR data during the current year but inaccuracies in registers remain.

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90 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Comprehensive management accounts are produced monthly and are considered by the operational management team. More recently, reports have been produced on the financial contributions of the various areas of the college. Budget holders receive timely reports on expenditure, and expert advice when required. Comprehensive financial regulations and procedures have been established. The college's internal auditors have raised a number of weaknesses in the creditor system which the college is working to address. The college's financial forecast for 1998-99 identified a number of risks to the college's financial performance and included a contingency plan to address the financial effects should these risks materialise. In the event, the college recognised early in the 1998-99 financial year that these risks had materialised, leading to a significant deterioration against the 1998-99 budget. It also became clear that the original assessment of the financial risks had been understated and that contingency plans were insufficient. Senior managers have since developed a financial strategy to bring the results for 1998-99 budget in to line with the original forecast. The college continues to hold substantial reserves and is highly solvent.

91 Inspectors agreed that the college has a strong commitment to equal opportunities. There are a range of policies and procedures to promote equal opportunities but their effectiveness is not systematically monitored. There have been insufficient specialist training opportunities for staff. The extent to which the policy for equal opportunities is implemented in the curriculum is reported to the staff and students committee of the corporation. Equal opportunities employment matters are considered by the joint consultative committee. While there are clear procedures for the recruitment of staff and the monitoring of staff

statistics, no reports are made back to the corporation on this subject. There is insufficient monitoring of the take-up of work-based training by under-represented groups in further education.

Conclusions

92 The self-assessment report used by inspectors was the first one produced by the college. The inspection team found that the report provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. Staff and corporation members were substantially involved in the self-assessment process. In some parts of the report judgements were not particularly incisive. Subsidiary reports and position papers for sections and business support functions provided useful additional information and, in some cases, sharper judgements. Supporting evidence was presented clearly. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements. Some additional weaknesses were identified by inspectors and some identified by the college were understated. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the cross-college grades given by the college where a worse grade was awarded. In four of the eight curriculum grades inspectors awarded a worse grade.

93 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 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	26
19-24 years	18
25+ years	55
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	25
Intermediate	28
Advanced	27
Higher education	7
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	13
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	311	864	15
Agriculture	17	20	0
Construction	91	556	8
Engineering	184	908	14
Business	430	1,334	21
Hotel and catering	178	123	4
Health and community care	443	517	12
Art and design	214	225	5
Humanities	349	1,011	17
Basic education	14	291	4
Total	2,231	5,849	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 16% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (February 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	181	4	47	232
Supporting direct learning contact	49	4	1	54
Other support	113	3	3	119
Total	343	11	51	405

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£13,167,000	£13,652,000	£13,440,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.80	£18.52	£17.27
Payroll as a proportion of income	71%	67%	68%
Achievement of funding target	98%	98%	100%
Diversity of income	29%	29%	31%
Operating surplus	-£27,000	£399,000	-£22,000

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

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

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

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

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

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	474	947	1,384	1,535	2,027	3,256
	Retention (%)	86	73	73	75	67	77
	Achievement (%)	46	53	57	33	48	57
2	Expected completions	1,715	1,643	1,354	2,444	2,175	2,131
	Retention (%)	79	75	77	75	76	75
	Achievement (%)	52	62	61	43	66	60
3	Expected completions	1,096	1,105	1,242	1,594	1,756	1,423
	Retention (%)	78	78	66	81	75	73
	Achievement (%)	59	62	69	40	48	58
4 or 5	Expected completions	64	25	29*	787	830	686*
	Retention (%)	91	72	90*	88	84	79*
	Achievement (%)	58	67	23*	44	46	42*
Short courses	Expected completions	355	424	688	1,934	2,478	2,243
	Retention (%)	92	91	89	93	94	86
	Achievement (%)	73	54	68	68	73	65
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	417	429	571	750	614	447
	Retention (%)	88	86	96	88	76	83
	Achievement (%)	31	55	15	36	50	48

Source: ISR

*ISR data may not be available

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