

# Phoenix College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1998-99**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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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

## Phoenix College

### *Greater London Region*

#### **Inspected March 1999**

Phoenix College is a sixth form college in the London borough of Merton. The college is one of the smallest in the sector. The college's self-assessment process is based upon annual faculty reviews. The self-assessment report produced for the inspection involved college governors, managers and most staff. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report, but found that some strengths were given undue prominence and insufficient emphasis was given to major weaknesses, such as low retention. Inspectors identified additional serious weaknesses in the college's governance and management.

The college offers a range of courses to school-leavers. Some students travel from other London boroughs to attend the college, and the college offers a broad range of courses over a range of levels. Since the last inspection, the college has introduced some additional vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels. The college makes provision in seven of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Three curriculum areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. There is some sound teaching, and most courses are well managed. The pass rates on many courses are good and, overall, students' achievements have improved over the last few years. Since the previous inspection, significant improvements

have been made to the IT facilities which are available to students. Governors have contributed to strategic planning and managers liaise effectively with external organisations. Governors do not, however, give sufficient attention to their monitoring of the college's provision. The college should improve: the quality of some teaching and learning; retention rates on many courses; the quality of tutorials; the rigour of its lesson observation scheme; the effectiveness of corporation committees; clerking arrangements for the governing body; management information systems; the use of targets; and financial planning and reporting.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics and science	3	Support for students	3
Business	2	General resources	2
Humanities and social sciences	3	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	4
		Management	4

## The College and its Mission

1 Phoenix College is a sixth form college in the London borough of Merton. It was established in 1990 as a result of reorganisation of the borough's secondary education provision. The college is located in grounds covering an area of some 6.3 hectares. Since incorporation student enrolments have fluctuated between 279 and 425, with 344 students enrolled in the current year. The college has successfully identified the difficulties associated with being a small sixth form college in a very competitive market. The strategic focus of the college during the past 18 months has been directed towards a merger with a neighbouring institute of further education. The failure to bring about the proposed merger at the end of 1998 caused considerable disappointment to the corporation, managers and staff. The corporation is currently reconsidering its options for the future.

2 The college is one of the smallest colleges in the further education sector and its narrow mission reflects this. Its mission is to: 'provide a challenging and stimulating learning environment for 16 to 19 year olds. The college will deliver high-quality education in a caring and supportive context, motivating our students to progress to higher education and providing effective guidance in the promotion of individual confidence and self-esteem'.

3 Of the college's current students, 52% are female, 50% are from minority ethnic groups and almost all are aged 16 to 19. Of the college's students, 53% come from socially and economically deprived areas. The college is located in the London borough of Merton which falls into two geographical areas. The north-west ranges from reasonably affluent to very affluent households whilst the south-east suffers from levels of social and economic deprivation.

4 The college offers 22 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and 10 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses. In addition, the college offers a range of general national vocational qualification

(GNVQ) courses at intermediate and advanced levels and a small number of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. The college has 23 full-time equivalent teachers, in addition to the principal, vice-principal and eight full-time equivalent support staff. The college is divided into three faculties and each is led by a faculty co-ordinator who reports directly to the principal. The vice-principal leads a team consisting of the senior tutor, pastoral support tutor and individual tutors who provide support and guidance for students. The principal, vice-principal, faculty co-ordinators, senior tutor, GNVQ co-ordinator, staff development officer and learning support co-ordinator form the college's management group.

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 15 March 1999. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The college encountered difficulties in producing reliable individualised student record (ISR) information for 1996 and 1997. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1998 and amendments to the ISR data for 1996 and 1997. The corrected data and those for 1998 were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. Inspectors used the amended data in arriving at judgements, but these have not been included in tables. The inspection was carried out by eight inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 30.5 days. Inspectors observed 29 lessons, and examined students' work and college documentation. They met college governors, managers, staff and students. They also spoke to representatives of local organisations which have links with the college.

# Context

6 This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 59% were rated good or outstanding, and 10% were less than satisfactory. This profile of grades is lower than the profile nationally.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	1	10	7	3	0	21
GNVQ and other vocational	3	3	2	0	0	8
Total (No.)	4	13	9	3	0	29
Total (%)	14	45	31	10	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*

# Context

8 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 (%)
Phoenix College	10.6	73
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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



# Curriculum Areas

## Mathematics and Science

### Grade 3

**9 Inspectors observed nine lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the report did not give sufficient weight to weaknesses in students' achievements and retention.**

#### Key strengths

- good GCE A level biology and chemistry pass rates
- effective numeracy provision
- some well-planned lessons
- some well-equipped laboratories

#### Weaknesses

- low retention on some courses
- some ineffective teaching
- insufficient use of information technology (IT)
- inadequate feedback from teachers on students' marked work

10 The college offers GCE A level and GCSE mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. Students who find GCE A level subjects too demanding are able to take a GCE advanced supplementary (AS) qualification instead. Many GCSE students study mathematics at intermediate level, and chemistry and biology at foundation level. Students capable of higher level GCSE grades receive additional specialist teaching support. Those students wishing to enrol to resit GCSE mathematics are given a diagnostic assessment. As an outcome of the assessment, some students are directed towards the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numeracy course. A mathematics 'drop-in' workshop is available twice a week and students are encouraged to attend the workshops for support.

11 Faculty meetings are held regularly and minutes are produced. The self-assessment report noted that the faculty regularly reviews the appropriateness of course syllabuses and implements changes where necessary. Despite this, there is no alternative science provision for students who are not suited to the GCSE courses. Few students study GCE A level physics and those who do are sometimes amalgamated with those on GCE AS courses.

12 Most teaching is satisfactory and some is good. The better lessons are carefully planned and teachers frequently check the understanding of the students. In a few lessons, teachers imparted their obvious enthusiasm for the subject to their students and employed an effective variety of appropriate teaching methods to ensure students participated fully in the lesson. The teaching of numeracy is particularly effective. Some lessons are poorly planned, and fail to meet their objectives. A very restricted range of teaching styles was employed in some lessons and students made little progress. Teachers rarely use IT as a teaching aid, although IT equipment is available. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, teachers set homework regularly, although the standard of written feedback given to students is sometimes unsatisfactory. Assessment is sometimes poorly recorded by teachers.

13 Data produced by the college for inspection show that students' achievements in GCE A level chemistry and biology have been good over the last two years and there has been some improvement in the pass rate for GCE A level mathematics. Students' achievements in GCE A level physics are declining. Generally, retention rates for GCE A level subjects are low and declining. Students' achievements at grades C or above in GCSE science subjects are low. The college's data indicate, however, that retention rates on GCSE science courses have improved. The self-assessment report acknowledged some of these weaknesses in student achievement and retention rates, but

# Curriculum Areas

failed to compare achievements with national averages for the sector and to provide an overall analysis for the programme area.

14 Science laboratories are well equipped but the layout of benches sometimes makes it difficult for students to carry out practical work. The classroom used for mathematics contains suitable display materials to assist the students' learning. Textbooks are available in classrooms for students to use. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers are well qualified and are supported effectively by technicians. In general, relationships between staff and students are good.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in mathematics and science, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE mathematics (grades C or above)	2	Expected completions	*	*	84
		Retention (%)	*	*	76
		Achievement (%)	*	*	47
GCSE biology, physics and chemistry (grades C or above)	2	Expected completions	*	*	66
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	38
GCE A level mathematics	3	Expected completions	*	*	30
		Retention (%)	*	*	60
		Achievement (%)	*	*	85
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	58
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	*	*	24
		Retention (%)	*	*	75
		Achievement (%)	*	*	94
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	*	*	21
		Retention (%)	*	*	38
		Achievement (%)	*	*	71

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

\*data not available

# Curriculum Areas

## Business

### Grade 2

**15 Inspectors observed nine lessons covering courses leading to GNVQs at advanced and intermediate levels, the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) computer literacy and information technology qualification and GCE A level in business studies. Inspectors mainly agreed with the college's self-assessment report, although they considered that it failed to highlight a few weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- well-managed courses
- some good achievement rates
- good use of IT, supported by high-quality resources
- well-produced portfolios of students' work
- effective development of key skills

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on GCE A level course
- poor punctuality of some students

16 The college offers GNVQ and GCE A level business courses for full-time students, most of whom are aged 16 to 18. Since the last inspection, the college has introduced a GNVQ advanced programme, and students on the GNVQ intermediate course are now able to study for the RSA computer literacy and information technology qualification. Further development of the curriculum is constrained by the limited availability of specialist teaching staff. In the main, the curriculum is well managed. There are clear schemes of work, which include the course aims and objectives set out by the examining and validating bodies. These are made available to students. As

recognised in the self-assessment report, assessment and administrative processes are carried out rigorously and expeditiously and the college receives good feedback from external verifiers.

17 Most teaching is good or better. Many lessons are well planned and their aims and objectives are made clear to students so that they know what is expected of them. As recognised in the self-assessment report, teachers use an effective variety of appropriate teaching methods, including role-play, group work and presentations by students. This variety helps to sustain the interest of students and ensure their participation in lessons. In one lesson, students demonstrated good communication skills and confidence in their understanding of business plans. The students presented their work to a local banker who contributed significantly to the lesson through his experience of the topic. In the few less effective lessons, learning was adversely affected by the poor punctuality of some students and an overemphasis by teachers on the use of past examination papers. During lessons, teachers encourage students to develop key skills, and some good standards are achieved in IT. Effective support is also given to those students with underdeveloped numeracy skills. Students are assessed and tested regularly throughout their courses, so that they are fully aware of the progress they have made. Students also benefit from the individual attention teachers give them. Attendance in a few lessons is poor.

18 Retention rates on many GNVQ courses are satisfactory. However, the retention rate on the GCE A level course is poor. Most students who remain on their courses succeed in obtaining the final qualification, and some GNVQ students achieve merit and distinction grades. All students can undertake work experience, though it is not essential for GCE A level students. Students on GNVQ courses undertake two weeks' relevant work experience which was acknowledged in the self-assessment report as

# Curriculum Areas

providing opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills in the workplace. The college recognises that the diversity of organisations providing work experience is too restricted and is attempting to provide a greater range of placements for students. Many students' files and portfolios are of a high standard and are well presented. Most portfolios demonstrate that students have carried out research at an appropriate level.

19 The learning resources for the business provision are mostly good. As noted in the self-assessment report, students benefit from an appropriate range of IT resources available in classrooms and the library. All courses have a base room where students have access to the internet and a range of good-quality learning materials. The bookstock in the library is too limited in its scope. Teachers are well qualified in their subjects and hold appropriate assessor and internal verifier awards.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate business studies	2	Expected completions	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCE A level business studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	29
		Retention (%)	*	*	34
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GNVQ advanced business studies	3	Expected completions	+	+	13
		Retention (%)	+	+	62
		Achievement (%)	+	+	88

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

+course not running

\*data not available

# Curriculum Areas

## Humanities and Social Sciences

### Grade 3

**20 Inspectors observed 11 GCE A level and GCSE lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but they identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned courses
- some good teaching
- good GCE A level pass rates
- effective range of learning materials

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention rates in many subjects
- unsatisfactory GCSE results
- teachers' failure to take account of the different abilities of students
- inadequate marking of some students' work

21 The management of the curriculum area is shared across the two faculties of languages, art and design, and of world and business studies. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report that courses and lessons are planned effectively, and that schemes of work are comprehensive. Subject co-ordinators have considerable autonomy in planning and managing the courses for which they are responsible. There are detailed course files which provide helpful guidelines for teachers. Since the last inspection, low enrolments have led to the withdrawal of GCSE courses in psychology and history and the GCE A level government and politics course.

22 In general, the quality of teaching is good. Most lessons are lively and have a sense of momentum and they sustain the students' interest. In the better lessons, teachers employed a variety of appropriate activities which enabled students to experience different

ways of learning. In an English lesson, students presented impressive arguments for and against Hamlet's culpability for the deaths occurring in the play. In some lessons, teachers offered constructive advice to individual students and small groups on assignments they had been set. Teachers questioned students effectively to check on their learning and understanding. They ensured that students understood the assessment requirements of the course. In an English literature lesson, students demonstrated an impressive awareness of the demands of the examination. In general, students' contributions to class debates were effective and confident.

23 In the less effective lessons, activities were insufficiently demanding, and teachers did not display high expectations of their students. Teachers failed to take the differing aptitudes and abilities of the students into account sufficiently when deciding on learning materials and tasks for them. They rarely exploited the opportunities which the small classes, some of which contained as few as five or six students, afforded for stimulating learning activities such as small-group discussion and project work.

24 The retention rates of students on GCE A level courses are poor. For example, of the 22 students starting the two-year GCE A level course in sociology, only five students completed the course. In the same year, the retention rate for GCE A level psychology was 33%. Of the students completing GCE A level courses in psychology, sociology, English language and literature, and geography, the pass rates are good. The retention rate for GCSE English is satisfactory at 78%, although the retention rates for GCSE psychology and sociology are low. Overall, the proportion of students who achieve grade C or above in GCSE subjects is poor. The self-assessment report failed to recognise the poor retention rates. The college has carried out an analytical comparison of students' final examination grades with those of their entry qualifications. The data produced, however, do not provide conclusive evidence of any

# Curriculum Areas

significant added-value factor in students' achievements. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' written achievements are good. In general, teachers provided little useful feedback to students on their written work. There is inconsistency in the way marks or grades are presented, with some teachers using grades A to E, and others applying percentages or marks out of 25. As a result, students are sometimes unclear on how their marks relate to possible examination grades.

25 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects. They hold appropriate academic and teaching qualifications and most have good teaching experience. Teachers undertake active staff development regularly. The teaching accommodation is appropriate, and there is good access to a range of teaching resources. Course base rooms contain a wide array of learning materials, including books which are made freely available to students.

## **A summary of achievement and retention rates in humanities and social sciences, 1996 to 1998**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English, psychology, sociology	2	Expected completions	*	*	90
		Retention (%)	*	*	69
		Achievement (%)	*	*	39
GCE A level English language and literature, English literature, geography sociology and psychology	3	Expected completions	*	*	94
		Retention (%)	*	*	44
		Achievement (%)	*	*	90

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

\*data not available

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

**26 Inspectors agreed with some of the findings in the college's self-assessment report. They considered, however, that weaknesses in recruitment, attendance and retention were understated and they found some weaknesses which the college had not identified.**

#### Key strengths

- effective admission, enrolment and induction procedures
- good impartial advice and guidance for students
- effective language support for students

#### Weaknesses

- lack of clarity in guidance issued to staff
- poor planning and unsatisfactory delivery of some tutorials
- limitations in the welfare, counselling, and careers advice services

27 The college's student support services are managed by a small team comprising the vice-principal, a senior tutor and a senior support tutor. The corporate objectives for the college include a commitment to providing 'good pastoral care to support effective learning and to improve retention'. However, inconsistent information is provided on the role of the form tutor and the tutorial procedures. Important guidance notes for staff published in the staff handbook have not been adequately updated since the last inspection.

28 Students and the parents of those who are aged 16 to 18 are introduced to the college through an appropriate range of information on the college and its courses. There is a well-attended open evening where parents and prospective students are given effective and impartial advice and guidance. Links with

schools include regular visits by college teachers and a variety of taster courses on which school pupils can experience college life. Applicants for courses are interviewed by the vice-principal, the senior tutor and other specialist staff, where appropriate. Inspectors agreed with the college that the admission and enrolment procedures are mainly effective. Induction to the college and to subject areas is good; students understand what is expected of them and settle into work quickly. They are provided with a diary and the college's charter. For a small number of students who start late, the induction arrangements are less effective.

29 Since the last inspection, the college has strengthened its tutorial system. Tutors are now required to set and monitor 'minimum targets' for students' achievements. Inspectors agreed with the college that the scheme provides a clearer focus for tutors and helps them to identify students who are underachieving. Students value the support they receive from their tutors. A tutor review scheme, including a programme of tutorial observations, and a self-evaluation checklist for tutors, was introduced last year. This scheme is not yet fully established. The quality of tutorials varied widely. Some tutorials were poorly planned and delivered and there were instances of low attendance and a lack of punctuality on the part of students.

30 In lessons, students received some good language support. The college is recruiting an increasing number of students from socially and economically deprived areas of south London, including students whose second language is English, refugees and asylum seekers. Additional learning support needs for these students are identified at an initial interview, at enrolment and during induction. The college uses the Basic Skills Agency tests to identify students' literacy and numeracy support needs. Mathematics and English workshops are available for students who need additional learning support in these subject areas. The

# Cross-college Provision

college provides effective support for students who have very little understanding of the English language. The self-assessment report acknowledged that the range of some support services, such as counselling and welfare, is too limited. The college has a few students with specific learning difficulties and they are successfully integrated with students on mainstream courses.

31 The college's self-assessment report failed to recognise that, since the last inspection, some aspects of careers advice and guidance have been less effective. College staff said that during the last year, staff shortages at the local careers company had sometimes made its services unreliable and that they had found it difficult to co-ordinate them with those provided by the college. Since September 1998, however, the careers advice and guidance have improved. The partnership agreement between the college and the careers company is working more effectively and some integration of careers advice and guidance with the college's support services is now taking place.

## General Resources

### Grade 2

**32 Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that although some strengths were significant, others were overstated and that the college had failed to identify some important weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good accommodation
- wide range of sports facilities
- extensive computer facilities
- effective library study centre

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate maintenance planning
- ineffective recording and monitoring of room usage and equipment

33 The college occupies a large pleasant site of approximately 6.3 hectares. There are four teaching blocks, linked by covered walkways at ground and first-floor level. Two blocks date from the 1930s, the science block was added in the late 1960s, and a new teaching block was built in 1990 when the college was established as a sixth form centre. As noted in the self-assessment report, students have access to a range of sports and recreational facilities. These include a sports hall, two soccer pitches and four tennis courts. Although the sports hall is still in use, the floor is suffering from severe subsidence and is considered to be beyond economic repair. A recent, purpose-built nursery on the site provides opportunities for work experience for students. Wheelchair users can gain access to most of the accommodation. There is an Islamic prayer room located in one of the main buildings.

34 The self-assessment report identified as a strength the lettings now undertaken to provide additional income to the college. At the time of the inspection, Merton Education Business Partnership and the New Start project were using rooms as offices, and a local language school and church also hired college accommodation regularly. In general, however, accommodation is underused, a fact acknowledged by the college. There is no up-to-date monitoring of the extent to which teaching accommodation is utilised. Staff have good office, storage and common room space.

35 There is no detailed maintenance programme for the college's estate, although some maintenance has been carried out when the need for it became evident. The expensive and necessary underpinning of the main hall has largely consumed the present year's budget allocation. In its self-assessment report, the college did not identify that formal procedures for reviewing health and safety issues are underdeveloped.

36 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the college's provision of computers for students represents a



# Cross-college Provision

strength. There are currently 93 networked computers available for students' use, providing a high ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers of 3.6:1. The specialist IT rooms are well equipped and spacious. Students have a brief induction course to the network. Internet access is appropriately controlled and it is available throughout the network. Students are well supported by teachers and appropriate learning materials when using the computing facilities. Equipment is well maintained and repairs are carried out promptly. The college does not maintain a detailed register of IT equipment and software to assist staff in planning replacement and for security purposes.

37 Since the last inspection, there have been considerable changes to the library study centre. Four adjoining spaces have been redesigned to provide a range of welcoming accommodation and facilities. The 'careers zone' is in an area where individuals and small groups may work. There are four computers providing fast information retrieval. The bookstock has been significantly improved by the removal of old stock, the establishment of a new reference section and the separation of the fiction and periodical sections. There are 12 carrels for the use of those who wish to work silently. The centre is well managed and its usage is carefully monitored. The self-assessment report recognised the need for further development of the library resources and the college is demonstrating considerable commitment to sustaining their improvement. Some of the income the college gains from external lettings has been used to improve the library facilities.

38 Students have access to two common rooms, a canteen and the extensive grounds. Many students use the refectory as an area in which they can socialise and work. It offers background music, is light and airy, and provides an adequate catering service.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

**39 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered that some strengths were overemphasised, however, and found some weaknesses which the college had not identified. For example, the self-assessment report paid insufficient attention to the quality of teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- the effectiveness of the quality assurance system in leading to improvements in students' achievements
- thorough approval process for faculty reviews
- well-organised and effective staff development
- well-regarded system of staff review

#### Weaknesses

- slow progress in the further development of the quality assurance system
- lack of progress in remedying poor retention rates
- lack of rigour in the setting of targets and the monitoring of progress against them

40 The college's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in the college's corporate objectives and current operating statement. The improvement of students' achievements and retention rates, and of quality assurance procedures are included in these objectives. Achievements of students who complete their courses have been improving. In 1996 and 1997, students' achievements were above the national average for sixth form colleges. The self-assessment report failed to

# Cross-college Provision

acknowledge that, since the last inspection, the college has made slow progress in further developing its quality assurance procedures. In 1997, the college implemented changes to its tutorial procedures with the aim of improving retention rates. The college has yet to assess whether these changes have been successful. Target-setting for students' achievements and retention has been recently introduced, but it remains underdeveloped. Quality assurance procedures now encompass the college's support services, although service level standards for these have not been identified. The quality assurance system is integrated with the strategic planning cycle.

41 The college has an established procedure for course and subject reviews, undertaken by course and subject leaders. The college acknowledged in its self-assessment report that some subject reviews are insufficiently self-critical. Course and subject reviews inform the annual faculty reviews. The process for approving faculty reviews is thorough and includes meetings between the faculty co-ordinators and subject and course leaders, and between faculty co-ordinators and the principal, who is responsible for quality assurance in the college. Faculty co-ordinators present their reviews to the corporation. The faculty reviews outline developments over the year, and include sections on the staff development undertaken, curriculum enhancement activities, analysis of examination results, and copies of external verifier reports. Some targets for improvement are imprecise and unrealistic. There is infrequent review during the year of the extent of progress towards achievement of targets.

42 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there have been some improvements resulting from the implementation of the quality assurance procedures. For example, the organisation of one course was changed as a result of the evaluation of students' views, and the development of a value-added system has led to changes in the curriculum in some areas.

Since the production of the self-assessment report, the college has improved its internal verification processes which are now more consistent and effective. The college has implemented a system of lesson observation for all teachers. Findings from the observations are, however, largely descriptive and insufficiently evaluative. Most students understand the college's complaints procedure and the few formal complaints made by students are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

43 The college achieved the Investor in People award in November 1997. This reflects a revised staff review and professional development system which is well regarded by staff. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the system is thorough and well documented. All staff have termly reviews with their faculty co-ordinators and an annual review which is conducted by the principal. Staff development is well administered and recorded. It includes evaluations by staff of their training activities and details of these are regularly disseminated to the rest of the faculty. There is no overall analysis of the benefit of staff training activities to the college.

44 The self-assessment report was comprehensive and covered all activities of the college. It clearly identified strengths and weaknesses and proposed actions to remedy weaknesses. The action plans do not address all the weaknesses identified. Some of the strengths cited in the report are no more than normal practice and some important weaknesses in the college's provision are not mentioned. Governors were involved in the assessment of governance and approved the final draft of the self-assessment report.

# Cross-college Provision

## Governance

### Grade 4

**45 Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found, however, a few strengths and some significant weaknesses which the college had not identified.**

#### Key strengths

- the effective contribution by governors to strategic planning
- productive links between governors and the college's staff and students

#### Weaknesses

- the failure of governors to give sufficient attention to the quality of the college's provision
- ineffective operation of corporation committees
- failure to confirm the appointment of governors
- lack of training opportunities for governors
- unsatisfactory clerking arrangements

46 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It does not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has not responded to some key governance issues raised by the FEFC's audit service in its previous report.

47 The corporation has six independent governors, one training and enterprise council (TEC) nominee, one co-opted governor, one parent governor, two staff governors, and a student governor. The principal has chosen not

to be a governor. There are two vacancies, which the corporation is seeking to fill.

Governors have a wide range of relevant experience and expertise in areas such as accountancy, law, marketing, and business. Governors assessed their performance at a meeting of the corporation in July 1998. A draft self-assessment report for governance was developed by senior college managers and discussed and amended at the meeting.

48 Governors were closely involved recently in reviewing the college's mission statement and in developing its strategic plan. A steering group, comprising governors, staff and students, was established to determine the strategic objectives, monitor the formulation of the plan and review its first draft. The corporation has not established an effective process to monitor the extent to which progress towards the objectives in the college's annual operating statements are achieved. Its primary means of doing so are through the principal's termly reports and the annual faculty reviews. However, the principal's reports lack detail and the annual faculty reviews do not give an adequate overview of students' retention rates and achievements across the college. Governors acknowledge that the focus of their attention over the last 20 months has been on merger proposals rather than on the overall quality of the college's provision.

49 The productive links between governors and the college's curriculum areas are a strength which was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Governors have identified work experience opportunities for students. One governor has contributed to students' learning on psychology courses through the delivery of a seminar on psychometric testing. Governors have consulted with staff on strategic issues relating to options for the college's future and they maintain links with staff and students through attendance at exhibitions of students' work, award ceremonies and open days. Inspectors agreed with the college that

# Cross-college Provision

governors receive too little training to assist them to maintain an awareness and understanding of the recent developments in the further education sector affecting their role and the college.

50 The corporation does not have effective procedures for the appointment of governors and has failed to appoint governors to replace those whose terms of office have expired. It has not established a formal search committee for identifying potential governors, and has not performed a skills audit of its membership. The corporation does not have a written appointment process, job descriptions, or defined terms of appointment for governors.

51 The corporation has recently approved a code of conduct. There is a register of interests which has been completed by all governors and by college staff with positions which involve significant financial responsibility. The corporation has a finance and general purposes committee, audit committee and remuneration committee. The committees do not operate effectively. There are no standing orders to guide the conduct of meetings. The committees do not operate within defined terms of reference and the corporation is unable to ensure that it is discharging all of its responsibilities. The most recent annual budget and financial statements have been approved by the corporation without having first being considered and recommended for approval by the finance and general purposes committee. The audit committee did not review the annual internal audit report in time for members of the corporation to consider their recommendations before the approval of the financial statements. The audit committee has not monitored sufficiently the performance of the internal audit service or the external auditors. Its membership has inappropriately included the chair of the corporation. The principal's performance has been appraised by the chair of the corporation. The remuneration committee has not met recently to consider the findings of the appraisal of the principal. These

weaknesses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

52 Governors are provided with agenda and supporting papers well in advance of their meetings. The production and despatch of minutes are also timely. However, inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the role of the clerk needs further consideration. Clerking arrangements have not been satisfactory. The clerk to the corporation is also the college bursar and is a part-time member of staff. His duties and responsibilities as clerk have not been formally established through a job description. Since his appointment he has not received any formal training and development for his clerking duties.

## Management

### Grade 4

**53 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some strengths had been overstated and they found some weaknesses which the college had not identified.**

#### Key strengths

- strong commitment by staff to the college's mission, values and aims
- clear lines of accountability
- effective liaison with external organisations

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate use of targets and performance indicators in the annual operating statement
- ineffective monitoring of equality of opportunity
- ineffective management information system

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- inadequate financial planning, monitoring and reporting
- non-compliance with Treasury standards for internal audit

54 The strategic focus of the college during the past 18 months has been on a merger with a neighbouring college. However, the most recent strategic plan does not specifically mention the possibility of a merger with another college. A very brief update to the strategic plan was produced in 1998-99 which identifies preparation for a merger as a strategic aim but provides no details of how it is to be achieved. An annual operating statement is prepared and reviewed each year following consultation with staff. The operating statement does not contain clear objectives or appropriate measurable targets. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff have a strong commitment to the college's mission, values and aims. Staff understand and support the mission of the college, which was revised in 1997 following the last inspection.

55 As identified in the self-assessment report, the college has a clear management structure. Staff understand their roles and their lines of accountability. Owing to the small size of the college, many staff have more than one role, often in diverse areas of activity. Staff have job descriptions which are reviewed during the annual appraisal procedure. Communications within the college are effective. The principal addresses staff weekly. Staff meetings are held every six weeks to consider strategic and operational issues. A weekly information bulletin and termly newsletter are produced. An annual diary of events is circulated to staff at the beginning of each academic year. Minutes of the college management group and corporation meetings are displayed on noticeboards. Some cross-college committees do not have terms of reference and meet infrequently.

56 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The most senior member of staff with responsibility for finance is employed by the college on a part-time basis. He has additional responsibilities for the administrative staff, the college's management information system, and premises management, and is also the clerk to the corporation. He is not a member of the college management group.

57 Management accounts are produced monthly but they do not provide sufficient information to enable the finances of the college to be effectively monitored. Whereas an income and expenditure account is prepared, a balance sheet and cashflow statement are not. The income and expenditure account does not include forecasts to the end of the financial year. The accounts are not supported by a written commentary. The management accounts are reviewed by the principal but not by the college's management group and they are not routinely distributed to governors. The college's average level of funding for 1998-99 is £17.83 per unit. The three-year financial forecast to 2000-01 submitted by the college assumes no change in this figure. The college's internal auditors have not ensured that their reviews of the college's financial control system have been carried out in accordance with Treasury standards.

58 The self-assessment report recognised that the management information system does not meet the needs of the college. ISR data are often inaccurate and returns to the FEFC are sometimes late. There is no information management strategy. An information and communications technology group has been established recently but has not yet improved the quality of management information. A systematic information needs analysis has not been conducted. Staff and resources are sometimes ineffectively deployed. Some classes are extremely small.

# Cross-college Provision

59 The college has established effective links with a range of appropriate external organisations involved in education and training. Constructive relations exist with local high schools. The principal is a member of the Merton High Schools Heads Group. There are occasional exchanges of staff between the college and local schools. The local authority regards the college as co-operative and accessible and regularly liaises with it on issues related to post-16 education. Since the last inspection, the college has formed good links with a number of higher education establishments. Initiatives, such as a science academic partnership with Kingston University, have been undertaken to improve students' knowledge and understanding of higher education. The college has a good relationship with the local TEC.

60 The college has an equal opportunities policy which is distributed to all staff and students. The college does not, however, carry out any formal review of the effectiveness of the policy. It does not have a co-ordinated approach to the identification of equal opportunities issues and these are not taken into account when courses are developed. Publicity materials do not reflect the college's promotion of equality of opportunity. Approximately half the students at the college are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

## Conclusions

61 The self-assessment report was thorough and covered all areas of the college's work. Inspectors found it useful in their planning of the inspection. The report was well organised and clearly presented. Each section began with a brief summary on progress made since the last evaluative review. The report included plans for improving provision but these did not specify action to remedy all the weaknesses identified. The evidence to support the strengths and weaknesses was clearly

referenced. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses, but found that insufficient emphasis had been given to students' achievements and retention rates. They considered the college's grading of two of the three curriculum areas inspected to be overgenerous. Inspectors identified serious weaknesses in the areas of governance and management that had not been identified by the college. Grades awarded by inspectors for three aspects of cross-college provision were one grade lower than those given in the self-assessment report.

62 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	3
16-18 years	94
19-24 years	3
25+ years	0
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	2
Intermediate	33
Advanced	65
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
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	102	4	31
Business	60	0	17
Hotel and catering	7	2	3
Health and community care	10	0	3
Art and design	39	3	12
Humanities	107	3	32
Basic education	7	0	2
Total	332	12	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 53% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	23	0	0	23
Supporting direct learning contact	3	0	0	3
Other support	5	0	0	5
Total	31	0	0	31

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£1,384,000	£1,273,000	£1,262,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£31.21	£20.09	£19.00
Payroll as a proportion of income	81%	74%	70%
Achievement of funding target	77%	137%	91%
Diversity of income	5%	7%	6%
Operating surplus	-£152,000	-£126,000	-£7,000

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)



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