

Plater College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

**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 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

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

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Plater College

South East Region

Inspected November 2000

Plater College is the only Roman Catholic college among the six long-term residential colleges in receipt of funding from the FEFC. Students are recruited from all over the United Kingdom and from overseas. The college's self-assessment process is not well established. Although the self-assessment report was helpful to the inspectors in planning the inspection, it was more descriptive than judgemental. Students as well as staff took part in the self-assessment process. The governors, however, did not discuss and approve the report. By the time of the inspection, a number of weaknesses had been rectified.

The college's main programme is the certificate of higher education. There is also an expanding short course programme. Most students are aged over 20 years. Staff and governors are deeply committed to ensuring that students are enriched by residential learning and membership of a community deriving strength from the social teaching of the Catholic Church. Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. The proportion of lessons judged by inspectors to be good or outstanding is significantly better

than the national average and higher than at the last inspection. Students receive good academic guidance with clear and constructive feedback on their work. Students' achievements are high on the certificate programme. Students receive a high level of support within the residential community. The college is successful in widening participation. A high proportion of students progress to higher education or employment. Feedback from students is acted upon and leads to improvements. The training needs of staff are identified effectively through the staff appraisal process. Governors are strongly committed to the fulfilment of the college's mission. The college has many external academic and ecumenical links. The college should: link ancillary courses more effectively to main programmes; strengthen course review and evaluation; increase resources for careers guidance; improve accommodation for the teaching of IT; introduce comprehensive quality assurance arrangements; monitor the extent to which the college honours its charter commitments; ensure governors understand and discharge their key responsibilities; strengthen financial management; make operational planning more detailed.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Theology and social studies; pastoral studies	2	Support for students	2
		General resources	2
Politics and economics; social administration	2	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	4
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Plater College is a Roman Catholic adult residential college which is located in Oxford. The college opened in 1921 as a result of initiatives by the Catholic Social Guild. It is now a specialist designated college within the further education sector under the trusteeship of the archbishops of Westminster, Cardiff, Liverpool and Birmingham. The college provides long and short residential courses for adults, some of whom have been held back from fulfilling their academic potential by social and economic circumstances. The college also works with individuals and groups who wish to make a more effective contribution to society by putting into practice the social teaching of the Catholic Church. Many Plater College students progress to careers in public and ecclesiastical life, education and the caring professions.

2 The Roman Catholic Church supports the provision of lifelong learning for all members of society. Of the six adult residential colleges in England in receipt of funding from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the college is the only one that is Roman Catholic. In November 2000, there were 23 full-time equivalent staff at the college, of whom 11 full-time equivalent were teachers. Students come from all over the United Kingdom and from overseas. The college has some reciprocal arrangements with Ruskin College and purchases some services from Oxford College of Further Education. Students are able to use some facilities of the adjacent Oxford Brookes University. The college is recognised by the University of Oxford as an institution for higher studies. Students have access to some of the university's facilities and provision. There is a student and staff exchange programme with two adult colleges in Germany and Finland. Plans are well advanced for a postgraduate degree in Catholic social teaching validated by the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

3 The college offers courses leading to the certificate in higher education and the diploma in higher education, both accredited by the Open University. This year, a level 3 access to higher education programme has been introduced, accredited by the National Open College Network (NOCN). There is a growing short course programme, also accredited by the NOCN, and courses include those on credit union management, mediation and drug awareness. The Westminster Pastoral Foundation accredits a counselling course. Students with learning difficulties are particularly welcomed. In 1999-2000, the college had 556 student enrolments. These included 72 full-time students, most of whom were resident on the campus. Most students are over 20 years of age, 40% are women and 13% are from minority ethnic communities; 11% of students are not Roman Catholic and some are from other denominations or faiths.

4 The college is located beside a wooded private road 1 mile from the centre of Oxford. The teaching and accommodation buildings date from the middle 1970s. The chapel and student common room are more recent additions. The college plans to build a new short course centre and to upgrade accommodation to provide additional facilities for adults returning to study. Recent work has made buildings accessible to all.

5 The college's mission is 'to strive to be a centre of excellence for those returning to education and to provide a holistic experience of support and enrichment within a strongly Catholic ethos'. The college welcomes all students who wish to develop themselves as individuals and share in the mission of contributing to the general good of the community.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in November 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report, reviewed information about the college held by the FEFC and studied data on student retention and achievement rates provided by the college. The college has not been required to provide data for the individualised student record (ISR). Data prior to 1998-99 were unreliable, but subsequent data were confirmed by that in primary sources such as class registers, and information from awarding bodies. The inspection of the curriculum areas was based on a sample of four of the five pathways leading to the certificate in higher education. Lessons were inspected on some short courses that are part of the pathways leading to this certificate. In 1999-2000, of 227 students who had completed short courses, 70 had not yet received confirmation of their achievements

from the NOCN. Details of students' achievements on short courses are incomplete. For this reason, a table of retention and achievement results for the short course programme has not been included in this report, although it is an increasingly significant part of the college's provision. Six inspectors and an auditor carried out the inspection, working for a total of 27 days. Inspectors observed 18 lessons. They examined students' work and documentation on the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, residential support staff, current students and former students.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 18 lessons inspected, 78% were good or outstanding. No lessons were less than satisfactory. This profile is better than the sector profile for colleges inspected during 1999-2000.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Lessons (No.)	5	9	4	0	0	18
Total (%)	28	50	22	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Plater College	15.1	92
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Theology and Social Studies; Pastoral Studies

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed nine lessons covering theology and pastoral studies. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found some additional weaknesses. Inspectors found that one weakness had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- excellent academic support
- good pass rates on the pastoral studies pathway
- well-planned and well-organised courses
- exceptionally clear, detailed and constructive feedback
- effective use of the Internet

Weaknesses

- failure to match tasks to students' abilities in a few lessons
- missed opportunities for development of study skills

10 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching is good. Teaching is planned carefully to ensure that students engage in suitably varied and appropriate activities that excite their interest and extend their knowledge and skills. Lectures, workshops, seminars and tutorials are used effectively. Handouts are well designed and contain key references and website addresses. In a theology lecture, information technology (IT) was used well to display key learning points. These were also covered in a detailed handout. The teacher questioned the students effectively to make sure they understood the lesson. In the workshops

following this lecture, the students were able to develop their understanding of the gospels further. They were given demanding tasks, which challenged them to think, explore concepts and use their skills to the full. During group work, students demonstrated good research skills. In a few lessons, learning tasks were not differentiated to suit the aptitude and needs of individual students in the class. These lessons lacked excitement and momentum and students were given little opportunity to explore concepts together through group work and discussion. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

11 Students receive excellent support from their teachers. Tutorials are held weekly. Tutorial groups consist of no more than four students. The teacher discusses with students their concerns and issues regarding the module they are working on. In one tutorial, the teacher made useful notes for the students, recorded these on a computer, and obtained additional information from computerised databases. Each student was then given a copy of the detailed notes. Students said how much such tutorial guidance helped them with their studies. Students also have a personal tutor. Students, and especially those who had been away from education for some considerable time, said they found help from the personal tutor crucial to their success. Teachers monitor students' performance carefully and give students additional help if required. Students benefit from the ready availability of teachers and find the college's residential environment helpful to them as learners. Staff ensure that the curriculum reflects the college's mission. Students on the pastoral studies pathway have relevant work placements. These are usually in the local parishes and involve the students in visiting parishioners in their homes.

12 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the marking of students' work is thorough. Most teachers give students very detailed constructive comments on

Curriculum Areas

their work and explain clearly how they can improve it. Most students produce work of a high standard, displaying good levels of knowledge and understanding. Pass rates on the theology pathway have fallen from 94% in 1999 to 57% in 2000. In 1999-2000, five students left for personal reasons but four of these, with support from the college, returned next year to resume their studies. Pass rates on the pastoral studies pathway have been consistently good over the last three years and in 2000, were 88%. Many students progress to higher education and employment. Many of the students progress to the second year of a degree course.

13 As the self-assessment report states, these two pathways are well managed and carefully organised. The two pathway co-ordinators provide effective leadership. Staff have carried out some valuable curriculum development to make it possible for students on one pathway to take some modules from the other pathway.

Students are provided with comprehensive information about the content of the modules. Many classes consist of students from both pathways. Lesson plans are thorough and teachers' notes are detailed. In response to students' comments on the lack of visual aids in lessons, a weakness identified through self-assessment, teachers now make good use of IT in their presentations. There is now more use of CD-ROMs, videos and the Internet in lessons. Teachers frequently schedule lessons in the IT workshop so that students can use the Internet to widen the scope of their research.

14 Teachers are very experienced, and are highly qualified in their subjects. Accommodation is good. It is well maintained, pleasantly decorated and contains relevant displays of students' work. The library has an appropriate range of books. Students are also able to use libraries and attend lectures at the two universities in Oxford.

Curriculum Areas

Politics and Economics; Social Administration

Grade 2

15 Inspectors observed nine lessons on two pathways leading to the one-year certificate in higher education, and short courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective development of students' study skills
- good academic support for individual students
- students' high achievements on access and certificate programmes
- students' success in progressing to higher education or employment

Weaknesses

- some unimaginative teaching
- inadequate review and evaluation of courses
- insufficient use of IT in lessons

16 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teaching is a strength. Modules are well structured and their content and objectives are clearly specified. Teachers have substantial expertise in their subjects. They demonstrate enthusiasm for, and a commitment to, their work. On the short courses, students come from a wide range of backgrounds and teachers aim to help all students succeed, irrespective of their previous attainments or personal circumstances. In one lesson, the teacher clearly explained the purpose of the lesson and was careful to ensure that all students in the group contributed to a discussion. Students were encouraged to offer constructive criticism of one another, and this

activity promoted positive working relationships amongst the students in the group. Some teaching was dull. The learning tasks were monotonous and failed to help the students extend their knowledge and skills. For example, in a social administration lesson, the teacher merely read through a textbook with the students and did not give them enough opportunity to ask questions, or contribute and explore their own ideas through discussion.

17 Students receive help with their studies through tutorials, seminars and workshops. In a workshop for students with learning difficulties, students discussed issues arising from a video on the subject of the moral approach to civic society. Tutors guided the students' discussion with sensitivity. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, tutors are successful in helping the students to increase their self-confidence and develop their study skills.

18 The college also offers short residential courses in the social sciences, validated by the NOCN. 'Changing Communities' is a three-day course based on an Open University first year module in social science. This programme has been extended to include 'Stepping Stones', a two-day introductory event to enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress to the 'Changing Communities' course. These courses have attracted students from some groups under-represented in further education.

19 Assessment procedures are fair and students understand what is expected of them. Staff made good use of external moderators on the short course and certificate programmes to help them achieve consistency in their assessment practice. The self-assessment report, however, failed to acknowledge some poor curriculum planning. For example, some lesson plans fail to make reference to course objectives and lesson aims, and the learning activities through which these will be realised. Some reviews of modules and pathways are

Curriculum Areas

insufficiently detailed. There is no process for setting targets for students' achievements.

Action-planning to improve modules and pathways lacks rigour.

20 Students are well motivated and take part with enthusiasm in learning activities. All students benefit from the opportunity to develop their verbal and written communication skills, and most students' written work is good. Pass rates on the two pathways are good. In 2000, the pass rate on the social administration pathway was 93% and on the economics and politics pathway, it was 100%. In 2000, the retention rate on the economics and politics pathway was 80%. A significant number of students progress to higher education and employment. The self-assessment report

identified students' achievements as a strength in this curriculum area.

21 Teaching staff are well qualified and have appropriate experience. Several short course tutors also have counselling experience. Students have adequate access to an appropriate range of learning materials. They make effective use of Internet material in their assignments. There is insufficient use of IT in some modules on the pathways. For example, some teachers make little use of wordprocessed handouts or overhead transparencies, and students are not given sufficient encouragement to use IT within lessons. On short courses, some tutors make insufficient use of IT learning aids for students with learning difficulties.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

22 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Staff have made good progress in rectifying the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- commitment of staff to widening participation
- good enrolment and induction process
- students' support for one another within the strong communal life of the college
- the effectiveness of the chaplaincy
- effective learning support
- the effectiveness of tutorial arrangements in helping students develop study skills

Weaknesses

- inadequate resources for careers education

23 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the college's long-established commitment to, and success in, widening participation constitute a significant strength. The college was founded to provide residential education of university standard for adults who may have been held back from fulfilling their academic potential by social and economic circumstances. In 1999-2000, 24% of new entrants had no qualifications above national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1. The college advertises widely in the educational and Catholic press. It recruits many of its students, however, through its close links with national and international agencies of the Catholic Church and several charitable foundations. When applicants first contact the college, trained staff provide them with extensive and sensitive advice and guidance. Each potential student is encouraged to visit the college to meet staff and students and to

experience 'taster' courses before making a decision. The college has an access fund to assist students who may be prevented from completing their course because of financial hardship beyond their control.

24 There is a detailed and well-managed induction programme. Informal contact is maintained with each student following interview. A three-day residential accredited course prior to the start of the academic year provides a helpful introduction to college life and the opportunity to meet future fellow students. Formal induction of students at the start of the academic year includes activities to help students settle in, to build confidence and to develop study skills related to their programme of study.

25 The college places great emphasis on the importance of community life and its role in furthering the Christian ideal of ensuring each individual can develop as a unique human being. The college's pastoral policy is rooted in this Christian ideal. The pastoral committee, which includes student representatives, oversees its implementation. The college aims to help students to grow in personal responsibility and encourages them to play a full role in the life of the college. It provides them with a detailed programme of enrichment activities, and these include visits and talks by visiting speakers. The junior common room committee organises social and recreational activities with assistance from the staff in the student support office. Students speak appreciatively about their experience of the college's communal life and of how the support they give one another enables them to cope with the personal and academic challenges they face.

26 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that arrangements are thorough for ensuring that the learning support needs of students are met, and are a key strength. Students are assigned a personal tutor and are guided by an academic tutor in their chosen

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course of study. Personal and academic tutors work closely together to encourage students to take advantage of available support. Through the weekly study skills and tutorial programme, academic tutors monitor students' progress closely. There are opportunities for individual students to receive support, 'surgeries' for mathematics, literacy and study skills, and lessons in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). All students are required to achieve a wordprocessing award if they do not possess one. About 95% do so, the few remaining students receive special assistance in completing assignments and examinations. For those students intending to progress to higher education, the college provides courses in computing, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) English and mathematics in collaboration with a local college of further education. In total, about 20% of students receive some form of additional learning support. Equipment is available for students with visual or hearing impairment. All learning support is co-ordinated and monitored to ensure that students are enabled to meet the high expectations the college has of its students.

27 Personal tutors act as the students' personal advisers. They encourage students to become self-reliant, help them with their personal difficulties and refer them to professional specialist counsellors when appropriate. The pastoral co-ordinator, currently the chaplain, oversees the pastoral care of all students. A religious sister and a team of volunteers assist him in this role. The chaplaincy plays a significant role in meeting the spiritual and pastoral needs of the college community, including those of staff and students of other denominations or faiths. There is daily Mass and other liturgical celebrations take place regularly. The college chapel provides a peaceful retreat for students and staff. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the chaplaincy in all its aspects represents a significant strength.

28 During the last year, the college has introduced a formal careers education and guidance programme for all students, in collaboration with the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The careers library has a wide range of reference materials on higher education. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report, however, that the careers library has few materials to help the increasing proportion of students, 35% in 1999-2000, intending to enter employment.

General Resources

Grade 2

29 Inspectors agreed with the overall judgements in the self-assessment report, but found an additional weakness. Some identified weaknesses had been rectified by the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- good residential learning environment
- responsive residential maintenance and support services
- good library and research facilities
- accessibility of teaching and residential facilities to students with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- deficiencies in some accommodation
- inadequate accommodation for the teaching of IT

30 Inspectors agreed that the college provides a good learning environment for students. It is situated in an attractive, sylvan site close to the city centre and adjacent to Oxford Brookes University. The college was designed and built 25 years ago. The modern chapel was built in 1989. As well as teaching, administrative, catering and recreational facilities, there are four residential blocks and a four-bedroomed

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house. The site provides for 74 single and four double study bedrooms. The college leases additional bedrooms and teaching space in a local convent. Students have access to a range of sports and leisure facilities at Oxford Brookes University and the local further education college. Tutors have rooms that are suitable for tutorial meetings and there is a small general staff room.

31 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the library provision is a strength. It houses the archive for the Catholic Social Guild and the GK Chesterton collection, both national resources. There are 12,500 books in the library. Fifty journals are taken and there are 120 videotapes and a growing CD-ROM collection. The library space includes a small informal area and a careers room. IT resources are in an adjacent room. There is a chartered librarian. The new computerised cataloguing and indexing system lists 25% of the bookstock. There are two terminals where students can check the availability of items. Students are highly satisfied with the library service though they would like more copies of key texts. The allocation of £100 for each student is high compared with the average for further education colleges. New stock is selected after discussions with staff. Tutors have an agreed budget allocation. Some stock needs updating. The library is open every day until 23.00 hours. There is no electronic security system. The college does not consider one to be cost effective. Students can also use other Oxford university libraries for research. They are encouraged to do this and tutors go with them as part of the induction process.

32 There is a thorough and detailed information and learning technology strategy, which focuses particularly on teaching and learning. Most computers are networked and give access to the Internet. Students' rooms in two of the residences have been cabled to give students access to the Internet. Support staff and tutors can be mailed electronically. There

are 16 networked computers in the resource centre and three free-standing computers in the local convent, for students to use. Some of this equipment needs upgrading. A temporary part-time media workshop teacher has been recently appointed to improve the IT skills of staff. The strategy is beginning to have a positive impact on teaching and learning methods. There are plans to provide IT training for all teachers by the summer of 2001. Technical support is contracted out, but the college is reviewing this arrangement. The computer room is not suitable for group teaching. There is no alternative room available. This weakness was not included in the self-assessment report.

33 Much of the accommodation has been well maintained and is in a good state of repair. Some areas need upgrading. The residential houses have insufficient sound insulation, and the students' recreation area needs refurbishment. These deficiencies in the accommodation are acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Some of the actions identified in the college's accommodation strategy, 1997 to 1999, have been implemented. Others have been postponed because of insufficient funds. Despite the constraints, the college has effected improvements to make its premises more accessible to people with restricted mobility, including a lift in the main building to enable access to the library and IT resource centre. As the self-assessment report states, the college has reviewed and improved its facilities for blind and partially sighted people. The college's second accommodation strategy, 2000 to 2003, includes planned improvements and upgrading to existing accommodation, and the building of a new short course centre, part funded by the Catholic Women's League. The strategy draws on a detailed analysis of the college requirements and takes into account issues raised by students.

34 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, due attention is paid to meeting the needs of residential students. Student

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representatives from each house raise general issues of concern with the estates manager. Day-to-day repairs are given high priority. There is a planned and costed maintenance schedule, which includes annual checks of specialist equipment. Catering and housekeeping are contracted out. Recent changes to the staffing arrangements have been made in response to issues raised by students. Health and safety practices are rigorously monitored by staff. The college's health and safety policy is updated every three years and agreed by the governing body. Governors do not receive an annual report on health and safety matters.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

35 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- successful action to improve teaching and learning
- thorough staff appraisal process
- productive use of students' views
- comprehensive systems for internal moderation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements
- poor action-planning to improve the quality of provision
- lack of rigour in some course reviews
- inadequate monitoring of performance against charter commitments

36 Since the last inspection, staff have developed greater understanding of how they

can monitor and improve the college's work. They have made progress in devising and implementing quality assurance procedures. Improvements to teaching and learning have been prioritised. The arrangements for the accreditation and validation of academic programmes are now more appropriate and include extensive monitoring of teaching and learning. Senior staff and persons from outside the college observe lessons. Teachers also watch one another's lessons. The college has established clear criteria for judging the quality of lessons. Inspectors judged 78% of lessons to be good or outstanding compared with 65% during the last inspection.

37 There has been slow progress in developing an overall quality assurance system. A senior manager now has responsibility for quality assurance. The quality assurance committee considers issues relating to the quality of provision and recommends appropriate action. Recently, all staff have been given a handbook on quality assurance. This handbook is incomplete, however, and does not cover all the quality assurance procedures. The governing body has not yet approved the quality assurance policy. The self-assessment process is not yet an integral part of the quality assurance system. A recently formed student services committee complements the board of studies and the academic board. The monitoring of standards for housekeeping and catering has been made more rigorous. Standards for some aspects of the college's services have not been established. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that the quality assurance procedures do not cover the library.

38 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report, that methods of collecting feedback from students about the college are effective, and that students' suggestions for improvements are acted upon. The college has improved its methods of collecting feedback to make them easier for students to use. For example, the college has

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introduced a mid-term module review that includes a questionnaire for students that they may answer anonymously. Questions relate to the quality of teaching and students' experience in lessons. Actions are taken in response to concerns the students raise. For example, changes have been made in the way courses are organised and in the timing of assessments to identify students' learning support needs. Students are not always given feedback on actions taken on their suggestions. There are clear procedures for dealing with complaints. Students know whom they should see if they have a complaint. Complaints are acted upon promptly. Two complaints files are kept, one specifically for equal opportunities issues. There is no systematic monitoring of actions taken or formal reporting of issues raised through complaints. There is a college charter, a copy of which is included in the student handbook. It does not explicitly specify standards of service. There is no systematic monitoring of the extent to which the college honours the commitments it makes in its charter. These weaknesses relating to the college's charter were identified in the previous inspection.

39 The college's procedures for assessment and internal moderation are thorough and their effectiveness is monitored closely. Action points from external examiners' and moderators' reports are followed up and dealt with promptly. Processes for reviewing modules and pathways are not standardised. Some reviews are not carried out with enough rigour. They lack detail and are insufficiently analytical. Some review reports are evaluative and aid the planning of improvements to the curriculum and to teaching and learning, but others are merely cursory. Action-planning following the reviews does not include the setting of targets for improving the quality of provision and for the attainment of specific standards.

40 In May 2000, the college produced its first self-assessment report following the guidelines in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-*

assessment. The college has not yet established an annual self-assessment process. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process but the full governing body did not discuss the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is insufficiently evaluative and is not detailed enough. Many judgements are general rather than specific and they are not substantiated by clear evidence. Action-planning is weak with no reference to timescales, milestones or persons responsible for implementing action and monitoring its effectiveness. The updated version of the self-assessment prepared for the inspection lacks detail. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the college has not agreed performance targets or specific standards that its services should attain.

41 There is a well-established and thorough appraisal process for all staff. This is a strength that was not identified in the college's self-assessment. The findings from lesson observations are taken into account in the appraisals of all teaching staff. There is no scheme for carrying out evaluative observation of the work of administrative staff and managers. The training needs of staff are identified through the appraisal process. The college provides a range of appropriate training opportunities for all staff. Increasingly, staff training takes place through in-house events, which are seen as providing better value for money. The objectives for the college's staff development programme are not clearly linked to the college's strategic objectives. The college has applied for Investor in People status but acknowledges it needs to do further work to meet all the requisite standards for this award.

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Governance

Grade 4

42 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that some strengths were overstated. They found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- governors' strong commitment to the fulfilment of the college's mission
- governors' constructive relationships with college management

Weaknesses

- absence of induction and training for governors
- unsatisfactory aspects of the governing body's conduct of business
- insufficient attention to some key responsibilities
- ineffective oversight of the college's finances by the governing body

43 Governors are strongly committed to the fulfilment of the college's mission and to safeguarding the college's Catholic ethos, which permeates all aspects of the college's activities. Governors are well informed about curricular developments.

44 The college has its own instrument and articles of government, which were made under the authority of its four trustees who are Roman Catholic archbishops. The governing body has a membership of 22, including the principal. There are currently five vacancies. The governing body's composition reflects the college's national and local profile, with the inclusion of two bishops and representatives from business, the public sector, universities, and the Catholic Women's League, as well as two staff governors. There is no student

governor but two students are invited to governing body meetings as observers. The governing body has established a recommending committee to assist with the recruitment of governors. The corporation has not carried out a formal audit of governors' skills to identify skills it would be useful for new governors to have.

45 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that induction and training of governors constitute a weakness. There is no induction process for new governors, nor is there a standard induction information pack. Governors have only recently been asked to identify their individual and collective training needs. There has not been a systematic training programme for governors.

46 There has been insufficient forward planning of governing body business. There is no annual schedule which identifies the key items of business for consideration at governing body and committee meetings. The governing body has agreed some standing orders to guide the conduct of its business, but these are not comprehensive. There is no annual report on governors' attendance at governing body and committee meetings, nor is there an attendance target. The governing body has made slow progress in responding to the Nolan committee's recommendations on openness and accountability. It has not adopted an adequate code of conduct, incorporating the seven principles of public life. The governing body has established a register of interests, but several governors have failed to make adequate declarations. An independent clerk to the governing body has been appointed recently and has started to deal with some of these deficiencies.

47 Governors have a constructive relationship with the principal, staff and students. Governors have supported the college during restructuring. The chair of the governing body visits the college on a regular basis, maintaining

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close contact with staff and students. The chair carries out an annual appraisal of the principal's performance and competency as a manager. Governors attend college events including award ceremonies and the twice-termly college feast.

48 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The governing body does not conduct its business in accordance with its instrument and articles of government. It also does not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The governing body has not paid adequate attention to some of its key responsibilities under the financial memorandum, particularly in relation to the college's finances. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The governing body has not kept under regular review the pay arrangements for senior postholders and other staff, including their financial implications. Governors consider reports on the college's financial performance at meetings of the finance and general purposes committee and the governing body. However, governors have not ensured that these financial reports include key financial information such as an out-turn forecast of income and expenditure. Governors do not receive monthly financial reports. There was no report on the college's financial position to the governing body in the spring term 2000. There has been insufficient attention to audit committee matters. The audit committee's terms of reference are not comprehensive. The audit committee has not established a systematic process for monitoring management action on audit recommendations. It failed to produce for the governing body an annual report on its activities last year, including its assessment of the effectiveness of the college's internal control system.

49 Governors understand the distinction between governance and management and have been appropriately involved in both strategic planning and monitoring of the college's

development. However, although reports are received on some key areas, for example marketing and recruitment, there is a lack of systematic monitoring of the overall performance of the college. The governing body was insufficiently involved in the consideration and approval of the college's self-assessment report, including the section on governance. Governors have yet to establish performance indicators against which to monitor their performance.

Management

Grade 3

50 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were understated. They identified an important additional weakness.

Key strengths

- effective management restructuring
- open and responsive management style
- extensive network of partnerships and contacts
- active approach to developing the college's provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of operational targets
- weak financial management

51 The management of the college was restructured earlier this year. There is now a management team of eight people, each with clear titles and functions. This group meets once a month to monitor the performance of the college. Other groups also meet regularly to ensure the full involvement of all staff in the activities of the college. The restructuring has led to improved efficiency and more effective communication. The new management

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arrangements are working well. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that management roles and responsibilities are now clearly defined and well understood by staff who, in turn, appreciate having some measure of authority delegated to them. Managers operate in an open, responsive and self-critical way. Since the streamlining of the management structure, college policies have been implemented more consistently. Management of the college has significantly improved since the last inspection.

52 The college has a clearly defined mission, which is derived from Catholic Christian objectives. It emphasises the importance of ensuring that all students are given help and support to develop as individuals, and that they are enriched morally and spiritually, in accordance with Catholic social teaching. The well-being and success of the students are central to this mission. Though Catholic in character, the college is inclusive, welcoming Catholics and those who belong to other denominations or faiths, or none. Managers and staff give full support to this mission and are committed to its fulfilment. By diversifying its curriculum through provision of the short course programme, the college has demonstrated a commitment to the promotion of inclusive learning and this is in accordance with the principles of its mission.

53 The college's strategic plan has been updated and includes a needs analysis to help the college ensure that the curriculum it offers meets the requirements of potential students. The strategic plan includes an operating statement for 2000-01 but this is not translated into a detailed plan with specific targets against which progress can be measured. Staff have carried out a useful analysis of enquiries from potential students in order to identify the college's potential market. The findings of this analysis have been taken into account in the college's marketing plan which accords priority to the widening of participation and to meeting

the needs of unemployed adults who wish to return to study, lay church activists, Christians of all denominations, and adults with few or no qualifications who wish to undertake legal courses. In order to accommodate its growing provision of short courses, the college has reduced its targets for enrolments to long courses.

54 The college has made progress in using its management information effectively. In accordance with the requirements of the FEFC's funding methodology, the college recently submitted its first ISR returns to the FEFC. It has purchased appropriate software to improve the management information system.

55 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The financial accounting system does not meet the college's financial reporting needs. Financial reports are produced using a combination of manual and computerised systems which has an adverse effect upon the quality and availability of financial information for management and governors. Inadequate financial reporting during 1999-2000 led to a substantial operating deficit not being identified until after the end of the financial year. Financial forecasts do not include contingency plans to deal with any risks, nor is there a comprehensive risk management plan. The college's financial regulations have recently been updated but are not yet complete.

56 The college has recently updated its equal opportunities policy. The policy firmly reflects the Catholic Christian values of the college which stress 'the fundamental equality of all human beings' and the college's dedication to meeting the needs of its diverse community. The policy includes a clear code of practice relating to all aspects of the organisation of the college.

57 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the extensive range of local, national and international

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contacts the college has, is a strength. These contacts include those with churches, universities, other residential colleges and a wide range of projects involving work with those in society who are poor and deprived. International links are well developed and exchange visits took place earlier this year for a group of 15 students and staff to the Christian Social Institute in Turku, Finland. Partnership arrangements with the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome have led to the development of a postgraduate degree course in Catholic social teaching, which the college plans to offer in the next academic year.

Conclusions

58 The college produced its first self-assessment report using the guidelines in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* in preparation for the inspection. The process of self-assessment is not yet well

established at the college. Staff were involved in the production of the self-assessment report. The final draft of the self-assessment report was not submitted to governors for their approval. The self-assessment report provides a useful introduction to the college's work. It is, however, more descriptive than judgemental. Many of the statements of strengths in the self-assessment report relate to practices that should be normal and which are in no way exceptional. Some of the weaknesses in the report had been rectified by the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the grades awarded by the college. The grade they awarded for one area of cross-college provision was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

59 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 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	0
19-24 years	16
25+ years	80
Not known	4
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	0
Level 3 (advanced)	4
Level 4/5 (higher)	96
Level not specified	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 2000)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Humanities	77	140	100
Total	77	140	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 15% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	11	0	0	11
Supporting direct learning contact	1	0	0	1
Other support	11	0	0	11
Total	23	0	0	23

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£834,000	£884,000	£932,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Payroll as a proportion of income	43%	49%	48%
Achievement of funding target	84%	84%	79%
Diversity of income	49%	47%	41%
Operating surplus	£10,000	-£2,000	-£65,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – not applicable

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
4	Number of starters	0	0	0	90	89	72
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	*	87	72
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	*	84	86

Source: college

**data may not be reliable*

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