

Manchester College of Arts and Technology

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Manchester College of Arts and Technology

North West Region

Inspected January 1999

Manchester College of Arts and Technology is a large general further education college in the city of Manchester. The college produced its first self-assessment report for this inspection. All staff were involved in the process. Most people viewed self-assessment as a separate activity rather than one which built on existing arrangements to assure quality. Inspectors found that the report did not provide a reliable guide to the quality of the curriculum areas inspected, or to the cross-college provision. Some strengths were overstated and the significance of weaknesses was underestimated. Inspectors agreed with only one curriculum grade and one cross-college grade awarded by the college.

The college offers courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Provision in five FEFC programme areas was inspected. Productive links with a wide range of external agencies enable the college to widen participation in further education and promote lifelong learning. Arrangements to provide advice and guidance to potential students are effective. Students are well supported by their teachers and have access to a comprehensive range of services providing support on personal issues. The

proportion of lessons judged by inspectors to be good or outstanding was well below the average for colleges inspected in the previous year.

Attendance rates and class sizes were also below the averages for the sector. Some retention and achievement rates are poor, but there are also some good results. Staff and students work in a pleasant, clean and safe environment. Facilities for IT at the Openshaw campus are excellent. Senior managers have a strong sense of corporate identity and a will to move the college forward. Channels of communication between senior managers and staff are effective. The corporation operates in an open and transparent way. The lack of timely and accurate data relating to students is a serious weakness affecting all aspects of the college's work. The college should: work speedily to bring its management information system up to a satisfactory standard; strengthen its systems of internal control; develop further its quality assurance arrangements and ensure that they are rigorously applied; improve aspects of tutorial and learning support; improve the quality and quantity of resources in libraries and learning resource centres; and make certain that the corporation ensures the financial health of the college.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science, mathematics and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Construction	3	General resources	2
Business	3	Quality assurance	3
Humanities	3	Governance	4
Basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3	Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Manchester College of Arts and Technology is a large general further education college in the city of Manchester. It provides courses in all 10 of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college operates from three main campuses: the city centre, which is close to the boundary with the city of Salford; Openshaw, which adjoins Tameside to the east of Manchester; and Moston, which is close to Rochdale and Oldham in the north. It also offers education and training at other venues in Greater Manchester and further afield. These include a centre for construction in Welcomb Street in Openshaw, a centre for music and performance skills in central Manchester and learning centres which cater for the needs of local communities.

2 The local economy benefits from the broad range of activities which characterise regional capitals. For example, the city of Manchester is ranked as a European financial centre and is the second largest media and cultural centre in the United Kingdom. It is also a traditional manufacturing centre and host to the largest concentration of higher education institutions in Europe. Central and local government and national agencies are major employers. The resident population of the city of Manchester is about 405,000. Of these, about 12% are unemployed. This percentage is the highest of any local authority in the north west and is more than double the national average. The population is made up of many diverse communities. Almost 13% of the population come from minority ethnic groups. Unemployment rates amongst these groups, particularly young Caribbean and Bangladeshi men, are disproportionately high.

3 The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. According to figures published by the government in May 1998, the city of Manchester

is ranked as the third most deprived local authority in England: 40% of households are in receipt of housing benefits. There is a higher than average incidence of teenage pregnancies, mental illness, cancer and heart disease. Only 51% of the city's young people who completed their period of compulsory schooling in 1998 continued in education. This figure is well below the average of 71% for England and 66% for the north west. Only 29% of the city's 16 year olds achieved five or more passes at grade C or above in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations compared with an average of 46% for England. Figures of 13% and 3% for unauthorised and authorised absences, respectively, at schools within the Manchester Local Education Authority (LEA) are almost double the national averages.

4 The current college management structure has been in place since September 1998. The principalship consists of the principal, the vice-principal, the college secretary and three assistant principals. Each assistant principal has responsibility for a specific aspect of cross-college provision: support for students, information systems and resource management. Fourteen departments are responsible for delivering the wide-ranging curriculum. In July 1998, the college employed 764 full-time equivalent staff. About 46,000 students were enrolled at the college. Of these, almost 94% were studying part time. Two-thirds of students were over 25 years of age.

5 The college's mission is 'to enhance the knowledge and skills of the whole community'. To fulfil its strategic aims the college works in partnership with schools, the city council, industry and other providers of education and training to widen participation, promote lifelong learning and raise levels of attainment among the local community. For example, the establishment of post-16 centres in three local high schools enables the college to cater for students in their own locality. A sixth form

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centre at the college's campus at Moston is a joint initiative with a Catholic sixth form college to support Catholic education in the city. Expertise in open learning, contracts with 40 training and enterprise councils (TECs), including Manchester TEC, and with commercial clients, enable the college to cater for students who live or work in Greater Manchester and further afield.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 25 January 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data derived from the individualised student record (ISR) returns as a basis for their judgements relating to students' achievements in 1996 and 1997. Some of these data were unreliable. The college had failed to capture all data relating to students' achievements in 1997 and the FEFC asked the college to resubmit an ISR return before the inspection. This return was incomplete at the time of the inspection. However, inspectors judged that the incomplete recording of students' achievements in 1997 affected courses which were outside the sample chosen for inspection. The college supplied data on

students' achievements for 1998 only for those programme areas included in the inspection. A sample of these data was checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Most of these data were accurate but some could not be verified because evidence was not available or incomplete.

7 The college was notified in November 1998 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 19 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 74 days. It covered aspects of work in five of the FEFC's programme areas. Inspectors observed 105 lessons and examined students' work and college documents. They observed a meeting of the corporation and held meetings with college governors, managers, staff and students. They also met head teachers from local secondary and primary schools and representatives from the Manchester TEC.

8 The following table shows the grades awarded to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 50% were rated good or outstanding. This is significantly below the average of 65% for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. The figure of 8% for lessons judged to be less than satisfactory is above the average of 6% recorded in 1997-98.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	6	4	0	0	13
GCSE	1	1	3	2	0	7
GNVQ	2	4	3	2	0	11
NVQ	1	8	10	0	0	19
Access to higher and further education	3	4	8	1	0	16
Other*	4	16	16	3	0	39
Total (No.)	14	39	44	8	0	105
Total (%)	13	37	42	8	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*

*includes tutorials, higher education, basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Manchester College of Arts and Technology	8.7	70
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

Science, Mathematics and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 23 lessons across a range of subjects and courses. They agreed with most strengths included in the self-assessment report. However, weaknesses in teaching and learning and the poor pass rates on courses were not given enough attention in the college's evaluation of the provision.

Key strengths

- a wide range of courses
- extensive individual support for students
- good retention on vocational courses in information technology (IT)
- high levels of achievement on access courses in science in 1998
- effective course planning
- excellent IT resources at the Openshaw campus

Weaknesses

- some uninspiring teaching
- low retention rates on courses in mathematics and science in 1998
- poor achievements on most courses
- few strategies for sharing good practice between departments
- poor facilities for science at the city centre campus

11 The self-assessment report recognised the comprehensive range of courses as a strength of the programme area. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. In IT, students of differing abilities are well served by the spread of courses which offers progression from entry level to degree level. Short courses are tailored to the needs of a wide range of employers. The provision in science and mathematics caters

effectively for school-leavers and adults. It includes courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), GCSE, general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) awards, and access provision. Aspects of the programme area feature in almost every department in the college but are concentrated in four departments.

12 Courses are planned carefully and take account of students' needs and the requirements of awarding and examining bodies. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that vocational courses in IT provide opportunities for students to apply their skills to realistic problems. Course teams within departments meet regularly to discuss administrative matters, but most teams do not pay sufficient attention to monitoring levels of student attendance, retention and achievement. Staff teaching mathematics often work in more than one department. This provides opportunities to share approaches to teaching and learning but there is no college-wide management of the subject. In science and IT, there are few opportunities for staff from different departments to identify and share good practice. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

13 Teachers give a lot of individual help to students in lessons and at other times. For example, students taking an access course in science who require extra support with mathematics, communication and learning skills are offered this help at times which fit in with their other commitments. The self-assessment report did not refer to any strengths or weaknesses in classroom practice. Inspectors found that most teaching was at least satisfactory but only four lessons were judged to be outstanding. In the better lessons, teachers share their enthusiasm for the subject with their students and make effective use of learning resources to reinforce students' understanding of key concepts and principles. For example, in IT, the use of projectors is effective in

Curriculum Areas

demonstrating features of software to all students in the class. Some teaching is dull. Teachers do too much of the work and do not question all students sufficiently to check their understanding.

14 In IT, completed portfolios of students' work are usually well presented. They show appropriate coverage of the performance criteria required to gain national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Some students' work in science is untidy. Graphs are poorly presented and some mistakes are not corrected. Pass rates on many courses are low, and this significant weakness was not recorded in the self-assessment report. For example, in science and mathematics, pass rates in GCE A/AS level and at grades A* to C in GCSE have not exceeded 21% in the last three years. In 1998, the pass rate for GNVQ intermediate in IT was only 18%. A notable exception is the access course in science which raised its pass rate to 63% in 1998. Many of the successful students gained entry to local universities. Three out of four students who completed the GNVQ advanced IT in 1998 were successful. Retention rates on many IT courses are high but in 1998 they were below 70% in mathematics and science.

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that a particular strength of the provision is the quality of IT facilities at the Openshaw campus. A plentiful supply of modern machines and up-to-date software housed in attractive accommodation provides an outstanding learning environment. The range of software available to students on other campuses is not yet of a similar standard. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, science laboratories at the city centre campus are of poor quality. Blackboards and furniture are of an unacceptable standard, the decor is shabby and there is a lack of display.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ IT and other qualifications including computer literacy and information technology and C&G 726	1	Expected completions	560	1,197	1,454
		Retention (%)	*	*	93
		Achievement (%)	15	30	31
NVQ IT	2	Expected completions	+	14	246
		Retention (%)	+	80	87
		Achievement (%)	+	42	25
GCSE sciences, mathematics and IT	2	Expected completions	110	359	477
		Retention (%)	*	*	63
		Achievement (%)	12	9	15
GCE A/AS level sciences, mathematics and IT	3	Expected completions	90	192	233
		Retention (%)	*	*	67
		Achievement (%)	13	15	29
Access to higher education – science	3	Expected completions	47	51	70
		Retention (%)	*	*	59
		Achievement (%)	52	46	63

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

+results not recorded

*data may be unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 3

16 Inspectors observed 18 lessons covering courses leading to GNVQs, NVQs in a range of construction crafts and higher level qualifications. They found that the self-assessment did not evaluate the full range of the college's provision and did not place enough emphasis on teaching and learning and students' achievements.

Key strengths

- an extensive range of courses
- the flexible delivery of courses leading to technician qualifications
- effective links with external agencies
- excellent retention and pass rates on advanced craft and higher technician courses in 1998
- high-quality learning materials for students to use by themselves

Weaknesses

- inadequate development of students' key skills
- ineffective linking of theory to practical work
- poor rate of student attendance
- poor pass rates on foundation and intermediate level craft courses
- some poorly-organised and maintained workshops

17 Effective partnerships with Manchester TEC, the local authority and industry have enabled the college to create new workshops, extend its range of courses and help students to gain related employment. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, the college offers extensive provision in construction and is a regional centre for some specialist crafts. It is also a national provider of open-learning programmes for a federation of builders'

merchants. The portfolio includes courses leading to GNVQs and NVQs, higher level courses in building studies and land administration and courses leading to professional qualifications. Part-time students aiming for technician qualifications can attend college at times which suit their individual needs. Course management is not yet fully effective. Monitoring of retention, attendance and achievement at course and departmental level is not sufficiently frequent or rigorous.

18 The standard of teaching is satisfactory but only nine lessons were judged by inspectors to be good or better. Most practical lessons are well planned. Students attending courses at Welcomb Street are able to develop a broad range of practical competencies through large-scale projects or work experience. Some practical lessons do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to reinforce their understanding of the theoretical aspects of their craft. In theory lessons, teachers use a narrow range of approaches and make little use of visual aids to explain key points. Significant weaknesses in teaching and learning were not included in the self-assessment report. For example, lesson plans rarely indicate how teachers intend to take account of individual learning needs. Formal reviews of students' progress are held infrequently. Records lack precise targets for the completion of practical activities and portfolios. Insufficient attention is paid to the development of key skills.

19 The self-assessment report highlighted aspects of students' achievements but failed to identify poor retention and low pass rates as weaknesses. Students' attendance during the inspection was poor. The average attendance for classes observed was 66%; in eight lessons, the attendance rate fell below 60%. In 1998, the retention rate for technician studies at the higher level was good at 97%. However, the average retention rate for the whole of the construction provision was 78%. Some courses have unsatisfactory levels of achievement. For example, the average pass rate for craft courses

Curriculum Areas

at foundation level was 14% in 1998. The average pass rate at intermediate level rose above 50% for the first time in 1998. Pass rates on advanced level craft courses and on higher level technician courses rose to 85% and 94%, respectively, in 1998. Many students take part in national and regional competitions and some are successful in gaining awards.

20 Learning packs to support students who study away from the college through the federation of builders' merchants are of particularly high quality. Similar packs serve the needs of craft students who may begin their courses at different times of the year. A wide range of text-based and computer-based learning materials is available to students at the city centre campus but the range of materials at

Openshaw is inadequate. Purpose-built accommodation at Welcomb Street and a wide range of workshops at the Openshaw campus provide realistic working environments for most occupational areas. These strengths were noted in the self-assessment report. Weaknesses in accommodation include: the layout of some classrooms and workshops which prevents adequate supervision of students; the location of the brickwork shop next to the plastering area; cramped and untidy workshops for timber trades; and few specialist facilities for building science and materials testing. Teachers are highly skilled and technically qualified but, as the self-assessment report acknowledged, few have internal verifier qualifications.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Foundation vocational (construction crafts)	1	Expected completions	190	222	151
		Retention (%)	*	*	60
		Achievement (%)	28	33	14
Intermediate vocational (construction crafts)	2	Expected completions	347	267	143
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	37	32	54
Advanced vocational (construction crafts)	3	Expected completions	177	60	70
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	51	72	85
Advanced vocational (technician studies)	3	Expected completions	95	59	38
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	41	29	73
Higher vocational (technician studies)	4	Expected completions	49	34	33
		Retention (%)	*	*	97
		Achievement (%)	53	61	94

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

*data may be unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

21 Inspectors observed 26 lessons. They agreed with many judgements in the self-assessment report but found that some strengths and weaknesses, particularly those relating to teaching and learning and students' achievements, were not included.

Key strengths

- the extensive range of provision
- high-quality teaching on professional and management programmes
- effective course management
- good support for students
- good rates of progression to higher level courses and to related employment

Weaknesses

- inconsistency in the quality of teaching
- some insufficiently-challenging lessons
- below average achievements on secretarial courses
- low retention on some courses
- limited opportunities for work-based assessment on some full-time courses

22 A particular strength of the provision noted in the self-assessment report is the breadth and variety of courses which the college offers. Many students study at home or on employers' premises, with the support of their companies. Many courses aimed at developing skills are delivered in 'flexi centres' in the college where students can attend at times which suit them. Some business courses are offered in the post-16 centres of local high schools. A weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report is the lack of college-based courses at entry level.

23 Courses are well managed. Feedback from students and employers is taken seriously and acted upon when necessary. This strength was

noted in the self-assessment report. Systems to support individual students and to monitor their progress work well. Students from a broad range of courses speak highly of the considerable help they receive from teachers to raise their standard of work.

24 Most teaching is at least satisfactory but only four lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be outstanding. Lessons are usually well planned. A particular strength omitted in the self-assessment report is the high standard of teaching on professional and management courses. Teachers make full use of students' experiences of work to place theoretical concepts in relevant vocational contexts. Most students have plenty of opportunity to develop their oral, communication and other key skills. For example, the use of IT is frequently incorporated into assignments. However, schemes of work do not always indicate how key skills are delivered and assessed.

25 Some lessons fail to take sufficient account of the needs of individuals. For example, the pace of one lesson was dictated by the needs of the slowest students. Teaching failed to stimulate students who worked more quickly and who were ready to develop further their skills and knowledge. In business and secretarial courses, some teachers set tasks which were pitched at too low a level and were not sufficiently demanding of students. These weaknesses in teaching and learning were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

26 Pass rates on business courses fluctuate and show few clear trends. A notable exception is the steady improvement over the last three years in the pass rate for GNVQ advanced which reached 89% in 1998. Across the programme area, pass rates vary from good to poor. For example, the level of achievement of professional development qualifications has exceeded 80% in two of the last three years. However, pass rates for students taking NVQs in administration and single subject examinations to test their secretarial skills rarely rise above

Curriculum Areas

50%. Retention rates on some courses are poor. For example, in 1998, the retention rate for GNVQ intermediate was 59%. Some students leave their courses before the end to take up related employment. Of those students who complete their course, many progress to higher education or to higher level courses in the college. The self-assessment report included only a few references to students' achievements and omitted significant weaknesses.

27 Most teachers are well qualified and have appropriate commercial experience. Many have assessor awards. The use of part-time teachers who work in the business sector is effective in bringing up-to-date and relevant experience to the classroom but arrangements to enable part-

time teachers to develop their teaching skills are not formalised. Learning materials to support students who study away from the college are of high quality, but this is not the case for some of the learning materials used by college-based students. As noted in the self-assessment report, up-to-date hardware and commercial software are readily available to students taking NVQs and courses delivered in 'flexi centres'. Other students have access to appropriate IT facilities but the location of the equipment limits its spontaneous use in lessons. Students taking NVQs in business administration do not have enough opportunities in college to carry out work-based assessments.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Single skills – secretarial	1	Expected completions	336	289	319
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	29	33	47
NVQ administration	1 to 3	Expected completions	116	84	286
		Retention (%)	*	*	86
		Achievement (%)	31	51	50
NVQ accounting	2 to 4	Expected completions	105	78	122
		Retention (%)	*	*	74
		Achievement (%)	*	40	39
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	18	55	39
		Retention (%)	*	*	59
		Achievement (%)	35	40	61
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	50	105	32
		Retention (%)	*	*	84
		Achievement (%)	41	74	89
Professional development qualifications – units	4	Expected completions	237	328	555
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	82	57	86

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

*data may be unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

28 Inspectors observed 19 lessons covering GCE A level, GCSE and access to higher education courses in English, law, politics, psychology and sociology. Inspectors agreed with many strengths identified in the self-assessment report but found that significant weaknesses relating to students' achievements, retention and attendance were given insufficient emphasis.

Key strengths

- the responsiveness of the access course to meeting students' needs
- a programme to develop key skills systematically
- effective support and guidance for students
- the high standard of students' written and oral work
- high levels of achievement on the access course in 1998
- effective management of the access course

Weaknesses

- poor rates of attendance
- low retention rates in 1998
- poor achievements on GCE A level and GCSE courses
- weak management at subject level
- little use of data to monitor and review provision
- a limited self-assessment report

29 The access to higher education course forms the bulk of provision in humanities. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the course attracts students who would not normally participate in further education. A particular strength of the course is its structure, which allows students

some choice in the way they work towards accreditation of their achievements. For example, students are able to gain credit for partial achievement, take a break from study and return to college later to complete the course. Students on all the courses inspected benefit from a planned programme to develop key skills as an integral part of their course. Additional provision enables students on the access course to enhance and develop their IT and study skills. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report.

30 Teaching is sound but only four lessons were judged to be outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that relationships between students and teachers are effective in promoting learning. Teachers are well aware of, and responsive to, individual students' needs. Lessons are well planned but not all are stimulating as claimed in the self-assessment report. In the best lessons, teachers succeed in encouraging all students to participate in lively discussions. They provide a summary at the end of the lesson to reinforce the key points covered earlier. In a foundation level lesson, the teacher chose stimulating materials and activities to develop and reinforce the grammatical skills of students for whom English was not their first language. In many social science lessons, teachers are skilful in presenting difficult concepts clearly. In a few lessons, teachers fail to develop students' analytical skills even when there are opportunities to do so. Some learning materials are too difficult for students to use effectively. Weaknesses in teaching and learning were not recorded in the self-assessment report.

31 The standard of students' oral and written work, particularly at advanced level, is high. However, poor attendance at lessons adversely affects students' achievements. The average rate of attendance for the lessons observed was only 59%. Similar attendance patterns were apparent from registers relating to this and the previous teaching year. Major weaknesses in students' achievements and retention in relation

Curriculum Areas

to GCE A level and GCSE work were not emphasised sufficiently in the self-assessment report. In 1998, retention rates for GCSE, GCE A level and the access to higher education course were low. Performance in GCSE and GCE A level subjects is poor. Achievements of students on the access to higher education course rose to 71% in 1998. A high proportion of students from the access course progress to higher education.

32 The access course is well managed. Staff have a defined strategy to deal with issues which affect retention. Figures for the access course show some improvement in retention in the current teaching year. A weakness not identified in the self-assessment report is the poor management and co-ordination of individual subjects. In English, where there is

some informal co-ordination, staff value the opportunity to identify and share good practice. Statistics relating to students' achievements, retention and attendance are not used consistently in all courses to monitor performance and inform planning.

33 A wide range of learning resources is available to humanities students. The college library houses appropriate books, magazines, newspapers, journals, videos and CD-ROMs. A recently-established study centre used by access students is equipped with two computers which are linked to the internet. This development is in line with the action plan in the self-assessment report. Teaching rooms lack displays of learning materials and students' work related to subject areas.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English	2	Expected completions	22	201	317
		Retention (%)	*	*	60
		Achievement (%)	19	16	31
GCSE law, psychology and sociology	2	Expected completions	13	26	94
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	8	11	17
GCE A level English	3	Expected completions	29	110	191
		Retention (%)	*	*	56
		Achievement (%)	27	20	32
GCE A level law, psychology and sociology	3	Expected completions	55	161	200
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	16	22	24
Access to higher education	3	Expected completions	244	222	204
		Retention (%)	*	*	54
		Achievement (%)	47	41	71

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

*data may be unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

34 Inspectors observed 15 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths included in the self-assessment report but found weaknesses which were not mentioned.

Key strengths

- effective partnerships with external agencies
- clear progress made by most students
- realistic working environments for students with learning difficulties
- professional development for staff working in outreach centres

Weaknesses

- an overemphasis on external accreditation
- a narrow range of teaching methods in some lessons
- insufficient training for vocational staff to respond to the needs of students
- some poor retention and pass rates

35 As the self-assessment report acknowledged, the college is committed to inclusive learning. Most provision to help students develop basic skills has been devolved to vocational areas but separate lessons are still provided in some outreach centres and at the main campuses. The self-assessment did not include many judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors found variable practice in the delivery of lessons. They did not grade any lesson as outstanding.

36 In the better lessons in basic education, teachers have clear aims and objectives and choose relevant activities to develop students' skills. One lesson observed by inspectors

achieved an appropriate balance of practical work and theory. Students measured the dimensions of the room and were asked to convert the measurements to different units. The teacher used the board effectively to develop a method which would enable students to work out solutions by themselves. During the lesson, students were given sufficient support and feedback to enable them to make good progress. A summary of key points at the end of the lesson helped students to recall what they had learned. Other lessons in basic education focus too much on the need to provide evidence for accreditation. In most lessons, there is excessive use of paper-based learning materials and not enough use of other resources, for example interactive and multimedia packages, to develop students' skills in literacy and numeracy.

37 A particular strength of provision for school-leavers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is the quality of the college's initial assessment procedures. The findings from these assessments are used effectively by teachers to design students' individual learning programmes. The assessment of adult students is less detailed. As a result, some students do not make the progress they might during their time at college. Teachers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities work effectively with support staff to plan activities. Most teachers have high expectations of students and recognise their adult status. Work is usually designed to develop students' independence. In some lessons, teachers focus too much on the requirements for accreditation and are not sufficiently responsive to students' needs. This weakness was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. A few lessons observed by inspectors failed to challenge students. Some tasks did not help students to develop different skills from those which they might acquire at home.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that most students are progressing at an appropriate rate. Students with learning

Curriculum Areas

difficulties discover how to express opinions and to exercise choice. Those students with challenging behaviour develop self-control. Students use their craft skills to make high-quality goods which are sold within the college and the community. This activity prepares them well for work. A carefully-prepared programme of work experience also enables students to develop relevant skills, confidence and independence. Some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have progressed to NVQ programmes at foundation level. This strength was noted in the self-assessment report. Some retention rates on basic skills courses are poor. For example, in 1998 the retention rate for students aiming for numberpower at foundation level was below 30%. Pass rates for numberpower stage 1 are very poor. These weaknesses were omitted from the self-assessment report.

39 Effective partnerships with a range of external agencies are particular strengths of the provision noted in the self-assessment report. In collaboration with Manchester Adult Education Service and the youth service, the college delivers basic education in many community and outreach centres. By training youth workers to teach basic skills, the college reaches students who would not normally participate in education. The college's participation in a national project provides opportunities for students with physical disabilities to develop their musical skills by using high-quality specialist equipment. The well-equipped multi-sensory room is used effectively to meet the needs of students with severe learning difficulties.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G 3793 wordpower – foundation	1	Expected completions	+	163	118
		Retention (%)	+	*	100
		Achievement (%)	+	13	**
C&G 3793 wordpower – stage 1	1	Expected completions	22	109	137
		Retention (%)	*	*	47
		Achievement (%)	64	29	42
C&G 3794 numberpower – foundation	1	Expected completions	23	65	85
		Retention (%)	*	*	29
		Achievement (%)	70	37	52
C&G 3794 numberpower – stage 1	1	Expected completions	+	264	190
		Retention (%)	+	*	86
		Achievement (%)	+	4	14
C&G 3795 skillpower – foundation	1	Expected completions	+	33	44
		Retention (%)	+	*	57
		Achievement (%)	+	35	55

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

+results not recorded

*data may be unreliable

**incomplete data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

40 The self-assessment report covered the key aspects of support for students. Inspectors agreed with many strengths, but identified significant weaknesses which were not recorded in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective arrangements for initial advice and guidance
- good tutorial arrangements on many courses
- expert help for dyslexic students
- well-developed services to help students find employment
- valuable links with external support services
- effective use of the chaplaincy and the skills of youth workers

Weaknesses

- inadequate tutorial support in some vocational areas
- shortcomings in some aspects of learning support

41 As the self-assessment report acknowledged, services to help prospective students gain information and advice about the college's provision are carefully developed and effective. An appropriate range of attractive publicity materials caters well for the diverse client groups. Central, standardised admissions procedures ensure that people who are unsure about which course to choose are referred to the guidance service. The college maintains advice and guidance centres at each campus and offers a service at other venues including those used for outreach provision. As well as information about college courses, the guidance centres house prospectuses for other providers of

education and training. A high priority for the college is its work with schools. Staff attend open evenings and other appropriate events to alert potential students to opportunities available to them through the college. Each partner school has regular contact with a named member of the college staff. There are induction arrangements to help new students settle into college. These are carried out more effectively in some areas than in others. This weakness was noted in the self-assessment report.

42 Many students speak highly of the support they receive from college staff. All students have an entitlement to group or individual tutorials which focus on reviewing progress, personal and social education and careers education. Tutorials may be timetabled separately or integrated with other parts of a student's course. Responsibility for the delivery of tutorials rests with individual departments. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that tutorial support is good on many courses. Examples include the access provision for adults and some GNVQ programmes. Some courses allocate substantial time to tutorial work and keep detailed records of students' progress. A set of tutorial standards for 16 to 19 year olds has been developed in the past year. These are operational in the college's sixth form centre at Moston and in the post-16 centres in three local high schools. They have yet to be applied to vocational provision. In some curriculum areas, for example construction, arrangements for tutorial support are inadequate. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. A survey carried out by the college in January 1999 identified 12 departments with courses where tutorial arrangements were in need of improvement. The survey also identified the need to standardise record-keeping, to share good practice and to provide more staff development for tutors.

43 Responsibility for learning support is shared between the departments and the college-wide learning support service.

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Departments carry out initial assessments to identify students who need additional support to help them to learn. Extra help with English and mathematics is then provided either by the department or the learning support service. The service also caters for students who refer themselves. Students with dyslexia are assessed carefully. They receive specialist help from a trained expert who is a member of the college staff, or, where appropriate, from an outside agency. College statistics show that 381 students received help from the learning support service in 1997-98. Attendance at some learning support lessons is poor. Links between departments and the learning support service are not yet strong enough to ensure that all students identified as needing support receive the additional help they need in order to succeed. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses. Support for students for whom English is a second language is inadequate. The college has recently appointed a specialist support tutor to work with access students and is reviewing the rest of its provision.

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that arrangements to support students seeking employment are effective. A 'worklink' service helps people to develop the skills they need to find jobs, complete applications and prepare for interviews. It also advertises vacant posts available in local companies. In 1997-98, about 140 students found work through the service. The college also staffs six 'Job Shops' which are located in different parts of Greater Manchester. Their purpose is to inform people about employment, education and training opportunities in the locality.

45 A successful multi-faith chaplaincy, the services of a youth and community worker employed by the college and strong links with the youth service contribute to the wide range of personal support services which are available to students. Prayer facilities are available at each

campus. Staff in the chaplaincy and the youth and community worker provide points of contact for students who need to discuss problems. They also organise extra-curricular activities and educational projects which help to raise students' awareness of social and health issues. Students in need of professional counselling are referred to specialist agencies. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report.

General Resources

Grade 2

46 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's assessment of general resources but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- significant improvements in the quality of accommodation since the last inspection
- teaching rooms and social and communal areas of a good standard
- a clean, safe environment for staff and students

Weaknesses

- insufficient and outdated books in libraries and learning resource centres
- underuse of space

47 Since the last inspection, in 1995, the college has considerably improved the quality of its accommodation. Substandard buildings at the Openshaw campus were demolished in 1996 and replaced by a new building housing classrooms, laboratories and excellent IT facilities. Extensive refurbishment at the Moston campus has improved the amenities considerably. For example, a new common room in the sixth form centre provides a

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pleasant social and recreational area for students. Improvements at the city centre campus include the upgrading of furniture in classrooms and the reinstatement of the gymnasium and health and fitness centre. Changes to accommodation have taken account of the needs of wheelchair users and others with restricted mobility. Pockets of poor accommodation at the city-centre campus remain. The college captured many of these strengths and weaknesses in the introduction to the self-assessment report on general resources.

48 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college provides a pleasant learning environment for students. The college is clean and tidy and largely litter-free. Some communal areas contain striking sculptures and effective displays of students' paintings. At each campus, reception areas are easy to find, well designed and suitably furnished. Refectories and coffee shops serve the needs of students of different ages and backgrounds. They are well used and are sometimes overcrowded at peak times because they are used as meeting places. At Openshaw there are no recreational facilities for students on the campus. Landscaping, the creation of walkways between buildings and the provision of outdoor seating enhance the surroundings at the city-centre campus. Work to create a similar environment at Openshaw is only partially complete. Security arrangements at all campuses are efficient and effective. Most classrooms are in good order and equipped with basic teaching equipment, such as whiteboards and overhead projectors. Some teaching rooms lack displays of appropriate material to stimulate students' learning.

49 The quality and quantity of resources in libraries and learning resource centres do not fully meet the needs of students. In 1998, a purge of old stock removed more than 4,000 books from library shelves but many out-of-date texts remain. This weakness was not mentioned in the self-assessment report even though there

was ample evidence from surveys of students to justify its inclusion. The budget allocation to libraries and learning centres is small for the size of the college. Some of it remains unspent. Only 416 new books were added to the stock in 1998. Links between teachers and staff who work in libraries and learning resource centres are developing, but arrangements to ensure that resources held centrally are in line with curriculum requirements are mainly informal. The self-assessment report on general resources contained no judgements about the quality of computing and IT facilities for the college as a whole. The facilities at Openshaw provide access to the internet but this facility is not yet available at other campuses. The IT procurement group has made considerable progress in devising a replacement and upgrading strategy to ensure that facilities at all campuses are compatible, up to date and reliable. Implementation of the strategy has begun. At present, few computers are located in teaching rooms.

50 The college has more space than it needs. Its accommodation strategy reflects a commitment to serve the needs of the whole community. The centre for music and performance skills in the north of the city and a learning and training centre in Moston have been renovated with grants from the local council and regeneration companies. Purpose-built nurseries at the campuses at Moston and Openshaw were also funded with money from external sources. These additions to existing accommodation enable the college to work with people from groups who traditionally have not participated in further education. However, they add to the amount of accommodation the college has to maintain. Plans to vacate the city-centre campus and relocate nearby in purpose-built and smaller accommodation are well advanced. To date, work to bring about improvements to the Moston and Openshaw campuses, in line with the accommodation strategy, has caused minimum disruption to students.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

51 Inspectors found that strengths included in the self-assessment report on quality assurance were overstated. They also identified significant additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a well-managed programme to check compliance with the quality assurance framework
- a readiness to seek and act upon students' views
- effective arrangements for staff development

Weaknesses

- inconsistency in the quality of curriculum reviews
- weak links between self-assessment and the quality assurance system
- insufficient reliable data on which to base judgements about quality

52 The college's quality assurance framework satisfies the requirements for registration with the international standards organisation. A key feature of the framework is the emphasis on programme team manuals which are compiled in line with requirements set out in the college's quality manual. A clearly-defined schedule of audits enables teams of trained staff to check compliance. Teams report their findings to curriculum quality boards and a senior curriculum board. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements that the auditing process is effective. Not only has it led to actions to deal with issues of non-compliance but it has also succeeded in raising the awareness of staff to the importance of adhering to agreed processes and procedures. The curriculum boards do not yet act as a fully effective network

for the dissemination of good practice. The self-assessment report acknowledged that programme team manuals in some service areas are not yet fully developed. However, some teams have made good progress. For example, the advice and guidance team have well-established arrangements for monitoring performance against defined standards.

53 Minutes of meetings and evidence in the programme team manuals demonstrate that most teams respond promptly to issues raised by students to improve the quality of provision. Throughout the college, staff actively seek out, and are willing to respond to, the views of students. Teams have the freedom to decide how to gauge students' opinions. There is no requirement for a student representative at course team meetings. Most teams make use of questionnaires to find out students' views of courses. Teams devise the questions themselves, but some do not pay enough attention to evaluating the outcomes systematically. There are no formal arrangements to share best practice and to develop a wider range of techniques in gathering students' opinions of the college. These strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

54 A component of the quality assurance framework is the review and evaluation of courses. A recent development is the introduction of a curriculum review document. It includes a checklist to find out if courses comply with the college's learning policy, and a proforma to capture data on recruitment, retention and achievement. Not all course teams complete this document. Some course reviews evaluate thoroughly the quality of their provision and the effectiveness of previous action plans, but practice varies widely across the college. Many course teams do not pay enough attention to analysing data, measuring performance against benchmarks and setting targets for improvement. Data used to review

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and evaluate courses are not always reliable. Inspectors found mismatches between data held centrally and data held in departments. The variability in the quality of course reviews led inspectors to disagree with the college's judgement that quality assurance procedures are 'rigorously implemented and effectively embedded'.

55 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the appraisal system is effective in enabling individuals to identify the training they need to carry out their roles. The system incorporates lesson observations which included grading for the first time in 1998. Approval to attend training events depends upon there being a correlation between the aims of the course and the achievement of departmental or college objectives. The training budget to enable staff to attend external courses is small. However, an extensive programme of training events is run by the college. Its effectiveness in meeting the college's priorities for staff development is carefully evaluated. The development of individual staff portfolios was claimed as a separate strength from appraisal in the self-assessment report even though there are areas of overlap. Individuals record their involvement in training and professional development activities, their achievements and the extent to which their knowledge and skills could be further developed in the college. In 1998, the college was reaccredited with the Investor in People award.

56 All staff were involved in the self-assessment process. They worked with managers to identify strengths and weaknesses in their areas of work. Most people viewed self-assessment as a separate activity rather than one which built on existing arrangements to assure quality. The self-assessment report used in the inspection was the first the college had produced. Reports for programme areas were concise and easy to follow, but they did not include sufficient evaluative comments about the quality of teaching and learning. Findings from

lesson observations were rarely mentioned. The reports lacked a rigorous analysis of student achievement and retention rates to support judgements. Priorities for action were included in each section of the report and clearly cross-referenced to strategic objectives.

Governance

Grade 4

57 Inspectors and auditors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses of governance in the self-assessment report but they identified significant additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- open and transparent working
- regular assessment of the corporation's strategic role

Weaknesses

- the corporation's failure to ensure the financial health of the college
- insufficient statistical data in non-financial reports
- failure to establish appropriate benchmarks and targets for college performance

58 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 all its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not fulfil all its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. Based on the college's financial performance over the last three years, the corporation has not met its statutory responsibilities in relation to the financial health of the college. Financial data published in the college statistics show deficits

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of more than £1 million in each of the last three years. The published accounts for 1997-98 show negative reserves of £1.8 million.

59 Members consider the college's needs when determining the membership of the corporation. There are 18 members including the principal and a nominee from Manchester TEC. There is one staff member but no student member. At the time of the inspection, there were three vacancies. Collectively, members possess a wide range of skills and experience that includes the areas of management, personnel, law and education. This strength was included in the self-assessment report. Vacancies are advertised publicly. A search committee uses clear criteria for selecting new members and implements a written procedure for making appointments. The search committee has identified people to fill two of the existing vacancies. New members receive appropriate induction. All members have access to a wide range of reference materials housed in the members' room at the city-centre campus. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, the corporation has no formal mechanisms for communicating directly with staff or with students. Some individual members share their specialist expertise with teaching staff to guide new developments.

60 As claimed in the self-assessment report, the corporation is well supported by the clerk who is also the college secretary. The corporation discharges its responsibilities through seven subcommittees which have clear terms of reference. Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's judgement that business is conducted openly. Minutes and papers relating to meetings of the corporation and its committees are held in college libraries and their availability to staff and students is advertised. The corporation has approved standing orders to guide its business. It recently updated a code of conduct. The register of interests invites submissions from members, their close relatives and senior staff; the number of responses is good. The finance and general

purposes committee reviews the most recent management accounts at each meeting. The audit committee does not always monitor effectively actions by management in response to audit recommendations. This weakness was not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

61 Members play a full role in determining the strategic direction of the college. Annually, they review the mission statement and take an active part in developing and finalising the strategic plan. These strengths were mentioned in the self-assessment report. The twice-yearly appraisal of the principal by the chair of the corporation is based on the achievement of strategic objectives. Members monitor strategic developments closely. For example, they have scrutinised and discussed extensive redevelopment proposals for the city-centre campus.

62 The corporation has not received sufficiently precise reports to enable it to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the achievements of its students. The absence of reliable data relating to students has hindered this aspect of the corporation's work. Benchmarks and targets to enable members to assess the non-financial performance of the college and to spot trends have not been agreed. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report on governance, but difficulties in providing appropriate statistical information were acknowledged in the section on management. The remit of the recently constituted curriculum and quality committee of the corporation is to set standards for college provision, report on outcomes, oversee the quality assurance procedures and monitor the implementation of the equal opportunities policy.

63 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's judgement that members regularly assess their own training needs and the effectiveness of governance. The corporation has a programme of residential training and planning events which are well attended. Annually, as part of these events, members

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consider how aspects of governance may be improved. The questionnaires used for this purpose in March 1998 had not been analysed and presented to the corporation at the time of the inspection. However, the curriculum and quality committee is dealing with a number of issues raised by individual members.

Attendance at corporation and committee meetings is monitored, but targets are not set for this or other aspects of the corporation's work. Attendance is good. Average attendance at corporation meetings over the last two years was 84%. All meetings in the past three years have been quorate.

Management

Grade 3

64 Inspectors agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that some weaknesses were understated and identified additional ones.

Key strengths

- strong leadership
- effective channels of communication
- productive links with a wide range of external partners
- an effective equal opportunities policy and action plan

Weaknesses

- inadequate management information
- insufficient attention to keeping teaching and learning under constant review
- an underdeveloped system of internal control

65 Senior managers are clear about the direction in which the college should move to fulfil its mission. On his appointment in April

1997, the new principal instigated a fundamental review of management and embarked upon a process of restructuring. The principalship was reduced from 15 to six and departments were reorganised and clustered into three curriculum groups. The structure became fully operational in September 1998. Twelve of the 14 heads of department are new. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, members of the principalship have a strong sense of corporate identity and the will to move the college forward. They have introduced new policies and procedures and a system of mentoring for new heads of department and teachers. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear.

66 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that communications are effective. Staff are well informed and able to contribute appropriately to strategic and operational planning. The principalship, heads of department and heads of service areas are members of the management team which meets fortnightly. These meetings are well attended and briefings on the outcomes are readily available. Departments are split into divisions which have a cycle of meetings to enable information from management meetings to be shared promptly with staff. Part-time teachers are invited to all meetings and paid to attend particularly important ones. Two fortnightly newsletters keep staff well informed about cross-college issues. One newsletter is written by the principal. The other includes contributions from staff. Staff welcome the open and collaborative style of management and the easy access they have to the principal and some other managers. Recent developments to the IT system are improving communications between staff working at different campuses.

67 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has incurred significant deficits in each of the

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last three years. Between 1996 and 1998, the college's average level of funding fell from £17.66 per unit to £16.71 per unit. The median average level of funding for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1997-98 was £16.62 per unit. Since 1996, staffing costs have fallen by £0.9 million although the total number of staff has increased slightly. The current three-year financial forecast indicates that surpluses will be achieved in each year. Detailed management accounts are prepared and reviewed by the principalship. The results of the work of the college's external and internal auditors indicate that the college needs to improve its systems of internal control. In response, the college has strengthened resources within its finance team and produced detailed financial regulations. Arrangements to monitor budgets have been revised recently. They require further development to ensure the adequacy of budgetary controls.

68 As the self-assessment report acknowledged, the college's management information system is inadequate. It is not yet able to provide reliable and timely information. Managers lack accurate data to plan and develop courses, identify trends in retention and achievement and set realistic targets for improvement. In line with its action plan in response to self-assessment, the college is beginning to rectify this weakness. A priority is to update and extend the capacity of the IT systems. The appointment of relevant managers has enabled the college to make some progress but the task is not yet complete. Managers do not have direct access to computerised information. The reliability of information about attendance and retention of students in the current year depends on the accuracy of registers. Clear guidelines for their completion exist but are not always followed. Transferring information from registers to the computerised system takes too long to give managers up-to-date information about the work of their departments or of the college as a whole. Senior managers are not yet able to monitor and

review students' experience, progress and achievements systematically. There are few procedures to identify and disseminate good practice within curriculum groups or across the college as a whole. These weaknesses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

69 Particular strengths noted in the self-assessment report are the benefits of the college's links with a wide range of external partners. An example is the number of courses in different vocational areas which are provided by the college and funded by the TEC. The college is also a highly successful provider of New Deal courses. Many partnerships exist to attract more people into education and training. The collaborative venture to establish post-16 centres in three local high schools illustrates the college's commitment to work with young people who would normally leave school at 16. The need to raise standards of achievement and improve efficiency in these post-16 centres is recognised by the college.

70 The policy on equal opportunities is well publicised and taken seriously. Effective arrangements are in place to monitor implementation of the action plan which relates to the policy. This strength was noted in the self-assessment report. Successful measures to attract people of different gender, race and culture to the college include a course in construction for young women, and a training course for carers from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some teachers provide valuable role models for students from inner-city minority ethnic communities.

Conclusions

71 The college's self-assessment report was adequate as a starting point for planning and carrying out the inspection. It included sections on each of the FEFC's 10 programme areas and on aspects of cross-college provision. Some sections were not sufficiently comprehensive, failed to capture judgements about the full range

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of provision or omitted key features. The self-assessment report overstated some strengths and underestimated the number of weaknesses. Out of a sample of 164 lesson observations carried out by the college, 83% were judged to be good or outstanding. This profile is much better than the profile of lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with only one of the curriculum grades and one of the cross-college grades awarded by the college. Differences between college grades and those awarded by inspectors arose because the college either omitted or underestimated the significance of weaknesses.

72 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	10
19-24 years	15
25+ years	67
Not known	7
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	36
Intermediate	38
Advanced	17
Higher education	7
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	2
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	290	3,578	8
Agriculture	4	121	1
Construction	427	7,321	17
Engineering	349	4,998	12
Business	306	15,429	34
Hotel and catering	89	311	1
Health and community care	370	3,980	9
Art and design	363	1,541	4
Humanities	412	4,689	11
Basic education	192	1,058	3
Total	2,802	43,026	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 46% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	310	44	7	361
Supporting direct learning contact	184	26	1	211
Other support	175	11	6	192
Total	669	81	14	764

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£27,265,000	£27,307,000	£26,779,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£17.66	£17.10	£16.71*
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	67%	66%
Achievement of funding target	107%	110%	100%
Diversity of income	33%	31%	31%
Operating surplus	-£2,225,000	-£1,077,000	-£1,159,000

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)

*provisional data

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