

# New College, Durham

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1999-00**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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*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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 104 college inspections

## 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 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 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

## New College, Durham

### *Northern Region*

#### **Inspected April 2000**

New College, Durham is a general further education college, close to the centre of Durham. The college operates on two sites. In preparation for the inspection the college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report. It is clear and self-critical and provided a good basis for planning the inspection. Governors contributed to the report, as did all staff through their membership of course or support area teams. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The college grades and those awarded by inspectors were the same except for two curriculum areas where one higher grade and one lower grade were awarded by inspectors.

The college offers provision in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Courses in six of these areas and in basic skills across the college were inspected. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected. Since the last inspection the college has had a period of significant change. Links with the community are now strong. Teaching is generally sound and the management of courses is effective. In health and social care the provision is

outstanding. Pass rates are high and improving on most courses. Good practice in developing and recording key skills is a characteristic of most courses. Senior managers are committed to improving quality and they support the quality assurance procedures. Communications at all levels are open and effective. Students have good access to a wide range of support services. Governors display a strong commitment to the college. The college should improve: poor retention on many courses; reliability and accuracy of its management information; arrangements for learning support; ineffective tutorial provision; strategic planning and governors' monitoring of its progress; some aspects of quality assurance; and access for students with mobility problems.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	3
Business administration	2	Quality assurance	2
Management and professional studies	2	Governance	3
Hospitality and catering	3	Management	3
Health and social care	1		
Modern languages and teacher education	2		
Basic skills	3		

## The College and its Mission

1 New College, Durham is a general further education college. It has two sites close to the centre of Durham City. The majority of the further education provision is delivered at the Framwellgate Moor site and the higher education provision at the Neville's Cross site. Plans are well advanced to consolidate all of the college's provision on the Framwellgate Moor site. The college is responsible for education and training in eight of Her Majesty's Prisons in the north east of England. It has recently expanded its community-based work, most of which is based in local schools.

2 The college serves a population of 488,800 within the County of Durham and the wider communities of the North East region. Many students on advanced further education and higher education courses are recruited from outside the region. The unemployment rate in 1999 for County Durham was 7.5%, compared with the national rate of 5.9%. The county has low levels of educational attainment, with 36% of pupils achieving five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grades A to C compared with the national rate of 48%. This level is also reflected in the attainment of national vocational qualifications (NVQs); 33% of adults in the county are qualified to NVQ level 3 or equivalent compared with 42% nationally. The proportion of people in work across the region who are undertaking job-related training currently stands at 14%. The average figures for the county mask significant differences within the communities served by the college.

3 The college operates in a competitive educational environment. Within the city of Durham there are four schools with post-16 provision in addition to private training providers. Three other colleges of further education are within 15 miles. The college plays its full part in a variety of local partnerships. It works with other colleges and agencies on a

project to widen participation in education and training and is currently leading a further project to extend non-schedule 2 provision. The college works in close partnership with the local education authority (LEA) and the County Durham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) on a number of initiatives including Learning City and Lifelong Learning Partnership. The college has also been involved in a wider regional initiative which brings together a number of institutions exploring the rationalisation of engineering provision.

4 The college offers provision in nine of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the exception being agriculture. Courses range from foundation to advanced level in most areas. It also offers a wide variety of higher education programmes, ranging from higher national certificates and diplomas to honours degrees and postgraduate programmes funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), National Health Consortia and the Teacher Training Agency. Students progress to higher education both within the college and to other institutions. The college provides 'off-the-job' training for modern apprenticeships and national traineeships, as well as provision for New Deal clients. The college provides courses for pre-16 pupils across a number of programmes. Its learning support unit organises help for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the whole range of provision. The college employs the equivalent of 659 full-time staff, of whom 354 are engaged in direct learning contact.

5 The college's mission is 'to provide lifelong learning for all the people we serve'. This mission is supported by 10 strategic aims, which contribute directly and indirectly to widening participation, increasing access to learning and raising standards.

# Context

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in the week beginning 3 April 2000. The inspection team had previously reviewed the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR) and supplemented by data provided by the college on students' achievements for 1999. These were checked against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The data were found to be largely accurate. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by 15 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 58 working days. They observed 102 lessons,

examined students' work and evaluated a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students. Eight inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked jointly with the FEFC team to inspect engineering, construction, business administration, dental nursing, and hospitality and catering. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 102 lessons inspected, 62% were judged to be good or outstanding and 3% less than satisfactory, compared with the national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	6	6	0	0	15
GNVQ	3	5	9	1	0	18
NVQ	1	7	6	0	0	14
Other vocational*	10	20	9	2	0	41
Other**	0	8	6	0	0	14
Total (No)	17	46	36	3	0	102
Total (%)	17	45	35	3	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

\*includes tutorials

\*\*includes basic skills and higher education

# Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
New College, Durham	8.8	76
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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



# Curriculum Areas

## Science

### Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering GCSE and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, together with extension science courses accredited by the National Open College Network (NOCN). Inspectors generally agreed with the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

#### Key strengths

- good pass rates in 1999
- modern, well-resourced laboratories
- effective science extension courses

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- most lessons too teacher dominated
- narrow range of intermediate level courses

10 The college provides GCSE courses in single science and human physiology and health, GCE A level courses in biology, chemistry, human biology, physics and environmental science, and extension science courses accredited by the NOCN. The limited provision at intermediate level provides insufficient opportunities for students to progress to advanced single-science courses. The extension science courses available in biology, chemistry and physics effectively support students beginning their GCE A level courses. Students' enrolments, achievements and progression are thoroughly analysed by subject teams. Enrolments on science courses are recovering from a considerable earlier decline, and applications for September 2000 show a further significant increase. Links with local primary and secondary schools are good.

11 The quality of teaching in science is satisfactory. Attention is given to the logical

development of scientific ideas and subject matter is explained clearly. However, as the self-assessment report recognises, teachers use too narrow a range of teaching and learning methods. Teacher exposition was used frequently and went on for too long. Students are often passive recipients of teaching rather than contributing to discussions or involved in activities. Lesson plans are not always available. They do not include clear statements of aims and objectives, and these are rarely shared with students. Teachers consistently provide effective one-to-one support to students finding difficulty with subject material. All students expressed their appreciation of this support. Information technology (IT) is used effectively in GCE A level biology and human biology lessons. The visual imagery provided by computer graphics greatly helps students understand complex ideas. Students' work is marked promptly with clear and supportive comments; they are made fully aware of assessment processes. Teachers of GCE A level environmental science participate in the European Union's Leonardo Project. They have collaborated with other teachers in Italy, Germany, Denmark and Spain to produce a CD-ROM on environmental protection and improvement. This enriches the teaching of environmental science. Practical work is well organised and enjoyed by students who are highly focused on their tasks. However, inspectors noted instances where health and safety practice was poor. A lack of co-ordination between some subject areas results in variation in the quality of lesson planning.

12 Students are punctual and attendance is satisfactory. They generally work diligently in lessons and achieve appropriate standards in most areas of their work. Key skills are well developed through tutorial work. Students perform well in external examinations. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' achievements in all subjects are good. In 1999, pass rates were consistently higher than national averages.

# Curriculum Areas

Analysis shows that almost all GCE A level students performed better than indicated by predictions based on their GCSE results. However, many students fail to complete courses and retention rates are below the national average.

13 All science teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced, and they take advantage of staff development opportunities to broaden their subject knowledge. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that technicians are well qualified and technical support is good. The science laboratories are grouped together and are spacious, light and airy. They have modern equipment including dedicated computer workstations. The laboratories all have a strong subject identity. However, there are few examples of students' work on display.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in science, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE science single award	2	Number of starters	63	15	20
		Retention (%)	84	20	75
		Achievement (%)	17	33	53
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	29	10	16
		Retention (%)	83	40	69
		Achievement (%)	15	50	86
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	18	6	13
		Retention (%)	78	50	69
		Achievement (%)	27	*	100
GCE A level human biology	3	Number of starters	36	7	18
		Retention (%)	58	100	61
		Achievement (%)	39	43	83
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	22	7	10
		Retention (%)	64	71	60
		Achievement (%)	46	80	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 3

**14 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in mechanical, electrical, motor vehicle and computer-aided engineering. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths had been overstated and some weaknesses had not been identified. The TSC inspectors observed work-based training in motor vehicle and general engineering.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned assignments on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) programmes
- good and improving pass rates on a number of courses
- modern, up-to-date workshops in most areas

#### Weaknesses

- low retention rates
- insufficient checks on students' learning
- some poor accommodation

15 The college offers a wide range of courses at foundation, intermediate, advanced and higher national level. Enrolments on the majority of courses are good. The curriculum is well managed through effective course teams. Internal verification and student tracking systems are in place and work well. A useful course handbook explains course structure and assessment requirements. Course team meetings are scheduled regularly and part-time staff attend. Individual tutorials have been introduced for full-time students. Formal tutorials for some part-time students have only just begun. Diagnostic screening is provided for all students but does not lead to effective learning support. Forty-five students were initially identified as needing additional help but only three have taken up the support offered.

16 Inspectors found teaching and learning to be generally sound. The self-assessment report recognises significant strengths in teaching and learning but inspectors considered this to be overstated. Of the 13 lessons observed, eight were judged to be good or outstanding. The best lessons had detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Teachers demonstrated sound subject knowledge and ensured individual students were helped. Teaching was linked to assessment, and learning was reinforced well by the use of good summaries. In one lesson, students worked in pairs on an exercise to identify component parts of a motor vehicle steering mechanism. This was improved by the use of excellent overhead transparencies, handouts including large-scale drawings and a partially assembled steering rack. Students used well-prepared workbooks in lessons on computer-aided design and manufacture and computer numerical control to progress at their own pace. In a key skills lesson, students worked to complete a well-designed research and costings task using the Internet.

Assignments on GNVQ programmes are well planned. Standard assignment sheets inform students of the performance criteria and key skills being assessed. In weaker lessons, schemes of work and lesson plans lacked detail and some were ineffective. Teaching was uninspiring and the practical experience of the students was underused. Teachers relied heavily on ineffective questioning. In a few lessons a small number of students dominated the questioning, which inhibited other students' learning.

17 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that pass rates are improving. The 1998-99 average pass rate for craft level 1 courses is 86% and for technician level 3 courses is 76%, both above national averages. However, pass rates on craft level 2 and technician level 2 courses are poor and declining. Some courses have low retention rates. NVQ level 1 programmes had very poor retention, at 29%. Student files and portfolios of

# Curriculum Areas

work are well presented. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of feedback on students' work. Standard documentation is used for written feedback to students but it is not always completed adequately. Comments on how students might improve their work are not always clear.

18 The provision has adequate and sufficient resources. There are good workshops for computer-aided design and manufacture, electronics, robotics and mechanical

engineering. The mechanical engineering workshop has a range of machines with digital readouts. The robotics room has recently been refurbished and has a range of robots and software. However, some accommodation is unsatisfactory, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. One workshop roof is poor and leaks. The computer-aided design classroom is uncomfortably warm. Classrooms adjacent to workshops experience high noise levels.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in engineering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G craft	1	Number of starters	14	61	228
		Retention (%)	86	67	85
		Achievement (%)	83	78	86
C&G craft	2	Number of starters	52	83	148
		Retention (%)	100	81	91
		Achievement (%)	67	66	40
NVQ	2	Number of starters	63	56	32
		Retention (%)	65	64	50
		Achievement (%)	54	38	73
Intermediate technician	2	Number of starters	50	29	47
		Retention (%)	80	90	87
		Achievement (%)	35	36	29
Advanced technician	3	Number of starters	72	52	85
		Retention (%)	63	73	83
		Achievement (%)	68	59	76
NVQ	3	Number of starters	17	9	#
		Retention (%)	88	88	#
		Achievement (%)	60	100	#

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)  
#course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Administration

### Grade 2

**19 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in administration, single secretarial subjects and business IT programmes. They agreed with the conclusions of the self-assessment report but judged that some weaknesses in teaching were not recognised. Inspectors from the TSC observed work-based training in administration.**

#### Key strengths

- effective course organisation
- well-structured teaching on most courses
- high pass rates in IT and single-subject secretarial awards
- good use of work experience

#### Weaknesses

- unimaginative teaching on courses for medical secretaries
- unsatisfactory pass rates on NVQ level 3 administration and medical secretaries programmes
- some poor specialist resources

20 Provision in administration includes diplomas in medical secretarial studies and reception as well as NVQ administration programmes at levels 2 and 3. Single-subject secretarial awards and IT courses are mainly part-time. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that courses are offered in a way that meets the needs of a wide variety of students. For example, the daytime programme in office skills offers courses leading to a range of different qualifications which start at different times in the year. An evening NVQ level 3 programme allows employees to gain accreditation for learning in the workplace. Courses are well organised and teams meet weekly. Helpful handbooks support staff

teaching on all main programmes. Schemes of work, particularly for computer literacy courses, are detailed in content and useful.

21 Teaching on business IT and single secretarial subjects is well structured. College-devised workbooks include a broad range of practice assignments at various levels of difficulty. They also provide good guidance on how to make effective use of different software packages. Teachers use whole-class exercises to strengthen students' ability to use grammar and spelling correctly. For example, a task on homophones helped students understand the right context for using a range of similar sounding words such as 'principal' and 'principle'. Students starting a text processing course are taught the rudiments of correct keyboard skills before starting on further study. Teaching on the medical secretaries' programmes is unimaginative, a weakness not recognised in the self-assessment report. Some topics did not take sufficient account of new developments in reception practice; others lacked variety in teaching methods or material relevant to students' own learning experiences. The marking of students' work is usually thorough, although occasionally teachers provide insufficient comments to help students improve.

22 Students on full-time programmes enjoy extensive periods of work experience, which they use productively. The evidence from work experience is used to accredit different vocational skills and knowledge. Portfolios of students' work on administration courses are well presented. Some of the project work produced by the medical secretaries is of a high standard. Students' achievements in IT and single-subject awards are good and significantly above national averages. For example, in 1999 the pass rate in text processing at stage 1 was nearly 20 percentage points above the average and 15 percentage points above for computer literacy in 1998. Higher level awards in wordprocessing and text processing consistently

# Curriculum Areas

show pass rates averaging above 80%. The self-assessment report recognised that pass rates on the medical secretarial studies diploma in 1998 were poor, but they improved in the following year. Pass rates on the diploma in health services reception in 1999 and administration at NVQ level 3 in the two previous years were below national averages. Retention is near to national averages on most programmes.

23 All teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. All full-time teachers hold assessor awards and an appropriate number

are qualified internal verifiers. Although the computer software used for business IT courses is of a modern standard, only a small proportion of the computers used are networked. As a result, teachers have to make multiple disk copies of practice assignments for each student. Some of the audio machines are unreliable. The business training office is small and contains only basic equipment, and this restricts the range of tasks students can perform in college.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in business administration, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	162	441	536
		Retention (%)	88	82	86
		Achievement (%)	84	75	73
Integrated business technology	2	Number of starters	95	95	105
		Retention (%)	88	91	95
		Achievement (%)	67	69	70
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	40	34	21
		Retention (%)	90	88	86
		Achievement (%)	64	76	67
Diploma in health services reception	2	Number of starters	43	31	31
		Retention (%)	88	81	68
		Achievement (%)	68	84	62
NVQ administration	3	Number of starters	26	34	32
		Retention (%)	77	91	81
		Achievement (%)	50	32	65
Diploma in medical secretarial studies	3	Number of starters	16	18	19
		Retention (%)	75	78	79
		Achievement (%)	64	25	64

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

# Curriculum Areas

## Management and Professional Studies

### Grade 2

**24 The inspection covered GNVQ business courses at intermediate and advanced levels, GCE A level in business, and management and professional courses. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the three self-assessment reports covering the programme area but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of programmes
- good standard of teaching
- high pass rates
- effective reviews of students' progress
- excellent specialist learning materials

#### Weaknesses

- low retention rates on the GNVQ advanced course
- poor pass rates on the GCE A level business course

25 The college offers a wide range of courses in business, management and professional studies. Students make good use of the opportunities available to progress to higher level courses. These include professional qualifications and degrees. Teachers maintain good links with professional bodies. Staff on groups of related courses work effectively with employers through advisory groups. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report. Courses are well managed and teachers work together to share expertise. Course leaders regularly review progress towards targets for attendance, retention and students' achievements. Full-time students appreciate

enrichment activities, such as the Young Enterprise scheme. GNVQ students undertake a period of related work experience.

26 Of the 12 lessons observed, inspectors judged nine to be good or outstanding. These were well planned and well prepared. Student activity was appropriately varied and the pace of lessons lively. Teachers were careful to reinforce learning at regular intervals, and they checked students' progress. Learning materials prepared by teachers are excellent. Students on accounting courses have access to a comprehensive collection of clearly indexed past papers. Students on the GNVQ intermediate course use a range of specially prepared booklets. Teachers made good use of their experience in commerce and industry when teaching. Students on management courses undertake projects that make extensive use of their workplace. Full-time students receive good levels of support from their teachers. Students' work is carefully supervised and marked. In a few lessons, teachers made insufficient use of students' experiences of work. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

27 The quality of students' written work is good. Pass rates are high on most courses. As identified in the self-assessment report, pass rates on the GNVQ advanced course are significantly higher than the national average. In 1999, achievements exceeded the national average on the GNVQ intermediate course. Pass rates on NVQ accounting courses at level 4 are now double the national average. Pass rates on the certificate in personnel practice are higher than the average. On management courses, pass rates have steadily improved. A student on the supervisory certificate course won the Yorkshire and North East regional award for best project. Pass rates on NVQ level 3 supervisory management courses in 1997 and in 1998 were poor. In each of the last three years, less than half the students who started a course in GCE A level business studies passed.

# Curriculum Areas

Pass rates on a range of marketing courses are significantly below the national average. Retention improved on the GNVQ advanced course in 1999 but has since declined significantly.

28 All teachers have degrees or relevant vocational qualifications and most have a teaching qualification. Many hold assessor awards. Part-time teachers are well integrated with course teams. GNVQ students have easy

access to modern IT facilities. There is a good range of up-to-date books and computer-based research materials in the libraries. Classrooms for GNVQ courses are furnished to a high standard. Many classrooms have up-to-date course-related displays. However, other classrooms are drab and shabbily furnished. A small number are too small for the number of students in the class.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in management and professional studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ accounting	2	Number of starters	43	50	48
		Retention (%)	91	80	88
		Achievement (%)	59	58	57
Supervisory management introductory award at certificate level	2	Number of starters	100	63	147
		Retention (%)	100	100	99
		Achievement (%)	55	79	88
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	32	34	18
		Retention (%)	72	56	94
		Achievement (%)	90	100	100
Supervisory management certificate	3	Number of starters	25	35	20
		Retention (%)	88	94	90
		Achievement (%)	55	91	100
NVQ accounting	4	Number of starters	71	64	66
		Retention (%)	94	83	89
		Achievement (%)	13	21	64
Certificates and diplomas in management including NVQs	4 and 5	Number of starters	73	79	77
		Retention (%)	100	97	96
		Achievement (%)	55	60	90

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)



# Curriculum Areas

## Hospitality and Catering

### Grade 3

**29 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in hospitality and catering. They generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection some weaknesses had been addressed. Inspectors identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses. TSC inspectors observed work-based training in hospitality and catering.**

#### Key strengths

- effective course organisation and management
- systematic assessment, tracking and verification of students' progress
- productive individual support for students in lessons
- good and improving students' pass rates on NVQ courses

#### Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching methods
- insufficient checks on students' learning in lessons
- low pass rates on the GNVQ courses
- some poor and declining retention rates

30 The college offers a wide range of courses in hospitality and catering from foundation level to higher national certificate. These include full-time and part-time provision in food preparation, food and beverage service, and supervisory skills, and courses leading to GNVQs at foundation and advanced level. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that links with industry are strong. The hospitality and catering advisory group are working with the course team on strategies for improving recruitment to the industry. There are good links with local schools. Courses are

effectively managed and well documented. Course teams meet regularly. They set clear targets for achievement and retention. Courses are appropriately structured and relevant. Systems for the assessment, tracking and verification of students' progress are effective. Documentation supporting assessment is well organised and comprehensive.

31 Assessment briefs are clearly written and are of an appropriate standard. Teachers regularly review portfolios of work with individual students. The good standard of presentation reflects the increased help they give to the students. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching is mostly satisfactory. Lessons are generally well planned and the majority develop the students' interest and understanding. Teachers provide effective support for students. In practical lessons, students respond well to the expectations set by teachers and they develop appropriate technical skills. Food service is often taught individually; students appreciate this and make good progress. In all lessons, students with learning difficulties are well supported. Students at more advanced levels work independently. For example, in the training kitchen, a mature student working towards an NVQ level 4 qualification supervised other students with good support from the teacher. However, in a number of lessons, teaching is dull and unimaginative. Teachers do not use a wide enough range of teaching methods to capture students' attention. They do not check sufficiently on students' learning. IT is rarely used as a learning resource within lessons.

32 Students' written work is of a good standard. Most portfolios of work are well organised, a strength not recognised in the self-assessment report. Students use their good organisational skills to keep their logbooks and evidence up to date. Students' work displays competent IT skills. Students' achievements on the NVQ levels 1 and 2 food preparation and

# Curriculum Areas

cooking courses have shown significant improvement over the past three years. In 1997, pass rates on these programmes were significantly below the national average. In 1999, they were above the national average on both programmes. Inspectors agreed with the weakness recorded in the self-assessment report that pass rates and retention rates are poor on GNVQ courses.

33 Teachers of hospitality and catering have appropriate academic, assessor and internal verifier qualifications. There has been

considerable and appropriate staff development that has included industrial experience, updating on awarding body requirements and achievement of higher qualifications. Students have good access to up-to-date computer facilities in the learning centre. The practical accommodation for hospitality and catering is adequate. However, some general classrooms are poorly decorated and lack visual interest. The library has a good range of books, although many are out of date.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in hospitality and catering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ catering and hospitality food preparation and cooking	1	Number of starters	59	54	56
		Retention (%)	88	78	80
		Achievement (%)	54	67	98
GNVQ hospitality and catering foundation level	1	Number of starters	17	14	11
		Retention (%)	75	100	55
		Achievement (%)	83	86	55
NVQ catering and hospitality food preparation and cooking	2	Number of starters	52	50	22
		Retention (%)	75	70	50
		Achievement (%)	44	63	100
GNVQ hospitality and catering	3	Number of starters	15	19	19
		Retention (%)	87	63	63
		Achievement (%)	42	33	58

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

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## Health and Social Care

### Grade 1

**34 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in childcare, health and social care, and dental nursing. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. TSC inspectors observed work-based training in dental nursing.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned courses
- some outstanding teaching
- effective use of students' experience to develop vocational understanding
- extensive opportunities for key skills assessment and accreditation
- well-managed work experience
- rigorous monitoring of student performance
- good student retention and pass rates on all courses

#### Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

35 There is a wide range of courses in this area. Students are able to progress from foundation level through to higher education and professional training courses as well as to employment. Part-time, full-time and flexible arrangements for learning encourage enrolments from students from groups that have previously been under-represented in further education. Courses are well planned and effectively managed. Schemes of work, lesson plans and revision prompts for each course module are used regularly. Course teams meet frequently to monitor students' progress and review their courses. They monitor progress towards targets set to improve student attendance, retention and achievement rates. Course reviews are thorough and well informed.

Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there are effective community links. Students are able to develop skills working with a variety of client groups in a range of care settings. An advisory panel helps staff to gather information on working practices, education and training and to obtain employers' views on course organisation.

36 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching is a strength. In most of the lessons observed, teaching was good or outstanding. Teachers make effective use of students' experiences to develop vocational understanding. In an NVQ workshop, the teacher used a paper model made by children to tell fortunes as a prompt for students to think how everyday play activities can introduce mathematical concepts. Students then enthusiastically identified similar opportunities to recognise mathematical shapes, using the correct mathematical terms. Student learning in the workplace is well managed. Students have individual action plans for their placements and agree short-term targets to improve their skills. Work supervisors, college tutors and students work in partnership to monitor skill development in the workplace. Well-structured assignments link college and workplace learning. There is rigorous monitoring of students' performance. Personal tutors meet regularly with students and keep detailed records of their progress. Inspectors confirmed that teachers encourage students to make use of a range of opportunities to assess and develop key skills. They do this through coursework, work experience, fund-raising activities and careers interviews, as well as within all vocational course units. In a few lessons, opportunities to develop application of number skills are missed. Students demonstrate high levels of specialist knowledge and skills in lessons. Teachers mark work accurately and provide constructive written feedback to students to help them make improvements. Attendance in lessons is rigorously monitored and reasons for non-attendance followed up.

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37 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that pass rates on all courses are good. They have improved significantly in the last three years. For example, on the nursery nurse diploma course pass rates improved from 58% to 97%. Retention rates on all courses are above national averages. Rates for students on the dental nursing certificate course and the diploma in nursery nursing have shown consistent improvement over the past three years. Although retention on the GNVQ advanced course has declined over the three-year period, it remains above the national average. The college is taking action to redress the decline in retention through improving

student guidance on entry and support services. Students' attendance in lessons observed was 82% compared with a national average of 78%.

38 Most lessons are delivered in well-equipped classrooms. Some lessons were in accommodation shared with other groups. Noise interference caused distraction in these lessons. Complaints about poor library stock were resolved as a result of students evaluating the provision of research information in the library for a health and social care assignment, leading to improvements. A quiet study area for students has been provided as a result of comments made in course reviews.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and social care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation	1	Number of starters	10	30	23
		Retention (%)	80	67	83
		Achievement (%)	63	90	95
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	22	36	35
		Retention (%)	86	88	83
		Achievement (%)	74	83	90
National certificate for dental nurses	2	Number of starters	22	13	21
		Retention (%)	64	69	86
		Achievement (%)	43	67	85
Certificate in basic counselling	2	Number of starters	17	56	62
		Retention (%)	100	96	100
		Achievement (%)	41	96	100
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	47	32	32
		Retention (%)	81	78	75
		Achievement (%)	88	65	89
Diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	71	71	58
		Retention (%)	75	81	87
		Achievement (%)	58	89	97

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

# Curriculum Areas

## Modern Languages and Teacher Education

### Grade 2

**39 Inspectors observed 13 lessons, covering a range of languages in GCE A level and GCSE, lessons in modern languages accredited by NOCN, teacher education and the certificate for teachers of English as a secondary or other language. Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of language courses
- well-organised and well-managed courses
- good language teaching using a range of authentic materials
- high retention on teacher education courses
- good pass rates on the NOCN language courses

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient use of the target language in some lessons
- too much teacher exposition in foreign language lessons

40 The college offers a wide range of part-time language courses, including Japanese, Greek and Swedish. Progression routes are good. The section also delivers languages as part of the GCE A level and GCSE provision and some vocational language units. For example, students on the GNVQ advanced art and design course complete an 11-week NOCN language unit in Italian. The business language unit has developed languages at nearby primary schools and runs courses for teachers of English from Hungary. The unit also provides tailor-made courses for local businesses. Courses are well

organised and well managed. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed and shared with students. The self-assessment report identified problems in integrating part-time language teachers with the teaching team. This has been resolved through the creation of a part-time teachers' handbook and in improved attendance at termly meetings where good practice is shared.

41 Of the 13 lessons observed, inspectors judged nine to be good or outstanding. Teacher education lessons are well structured and effectively planned. Teachers use a range of teaching methods successfully, including group and pair work and effective class discussion and debate. Language lessons were also well planned, with a range of activities and good use of authentic materials. All GCE A level and most NOCN lessons taught by full-time staff were conducted in the target language, but some native-speaking part-time teachers failed to use the language for routine communication. This resulted in an over-emphasis on grammar at the expense of developing conversational skills. In the best lessons, teachers created a productive and stimulating environment for learning and encouraged students to contribute orally. Good use was made of the day's issue of *El Pais* downloaded from the Internet for stimulating topical discussion in a GCE A level Spanish lesson. IT is well used in the production of teaching materials both on language and teacher education courses. Students usually wordprocess their main assignments. In the weaker lessons, teachers provided insufficient opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning. In some language lessons, too much activity was centred on the teacher.

42 Since the previous inspection, the number of different language qualifications offered to adult learners has been rationalised. From 1998, all adult courses have been accredited using NOCN qualifications. This change has led to improved retention and achievement. Pass rates rose to well above national averages at all

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levels in 1998 and at two levels in 1999. As identified in the self-assessment report, retention on teacher education courses is good. Overall, enrolments have increased significantly. GCE A level numbers have fluctuated in recent years. Good results were achieved in 1999 and a high proportion of students received higher grades. Five of the 15 students progressed to degree courses with substantial foreign language elements. Retention in GCSE languages is declining.

43 Accommodation is a strength. Language lessons are conducted in a pleasant suite of purpose-built rooms, with three well-equipped language laboratories. The well-resourced learning centre includes satellite, interactive video and a number of computers with Internet access. The specialist education section in the library is extensive. Full-time teachers are well qualified and experienced.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in modern languages and teacher education, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NOCN in foreign languages	Entry	Number of starters	#	*	319
		Retention (%)	#	*	84
		Achievement (%)	#	*	81
NOCN in foreign languages	1	Number of starters	#	*	155
		Retention (%)	#	*	79
		Achievement (%)	#	*	77
NOCN in foreign languages	2	Number of starters	#	*	100
		Retention (%)	#	*	78
		Achievement (%)	#	*	66
NOCN in foreign languages	3	Number of starters	#	*	173
		Retention (%)	#	*	73
		Achievement (%)	#	*	79
C&G 7307	3	Number of starters	90	81	99
		Retention (%)	90	88	93
		Achievement (%)	68	75	75
GCSE languages	2	Number of starters	71	34	44
		Retention (%)	88	79	68
		Achievement (%)	36	59	67

Source: ISR (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

#course not running

\*data unreliable

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## Basic Skills

### Grade 3

**44 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, they considered that some strengths were overstated and identified additional weaknesses in teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- high levels of support for individual students
- wide range of well-organised, accessible teaching and learning materials
- effective course management

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate target-setting for students
- insufficient range of learning opportunities
- some poor retention rates

45 Provision for basic skills includes lessons for students whose primary learning goal is literacy and numeracy. Much of the provision takes place in the study skills centre. An increasing number of short courses are held both in the college and in community venues. These include family literacy, writing courses and provision for people with mental health problems. There are 260 students using this short course provision. Two full-time courses are designed specifically for basic skills students; 'pathways' and 'study skills'. Pathways is for students who are not yet ready to access mainstream courses; currently there are 46 students on this course. A further 14 students are on the study skills programme which provides a foundation in basic and key skills for those who underachieved at GCSE. The college also offers workshop support in basic skills to students on mainstream courses who have been identified through initial

screening or by referral. A range of accreditation is available. It includes City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) Wordpower and Numberpower at all levels, NOCN accreditation for mathematics and English and the Associated Examining Board achievement tests. Students on courses where basic skills are integrated with the curriculum are working towards accreditation for mathematics and English.

46 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the provision for basic skills is managed effectively. The programme manager and a dedicated team of tutors co-ordinate the curriculum. Through regular team meetings they review and monitor the provision. Minutes indicate effective discussion leading to agreed action. An increased proportion of the provision is taught by full-time teachers. Initial assessment is too general and does not take account of the differing demands of the curriculum areas. This makes the identification of students who may need help less effective. Some curriculum areas encourage support within courses. For example, support for art and design students occurs in the art workshop. For one student the work initially focused on the demands of assignments. This resulted in improved punctuation and fewer spelling errors. However, there was low take-up of basic skills support for students on mainstream courses.

47 The college identified support for individual students as a strength. All lessons in literacy and numeracy workshops are planned to meet individual needs. Initial assessment helps define the needs, and this is followed by a negotiated programme of learning. Students work at their own pace and follow their own learning plan. The quality of individual support is high. However, learning objectives are too broad, and there are few short-term measurable targets. Where accreditation is used, insufficient recognition is given to students' incremental progress. Teachers do not make enough opportunities to encourage effective

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independent learning. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

In literacy and numeracy workshops, an over-emphasis on individual work limits interaction and peer support. Tutors do not often provide sufficient variety in activities for younger students. Workshop lessons for these students are too long. There is over-reliance on worksheet activities, with little imaginative use of IT and insufficient use of audiovisual resources. Outside the workshops, lessons are at an appropriate level. Classroom practice is more varied than in workshops. This allows many more skills to be practised. Topics are chosen to create interest; visits and exhibitions are used to good effect. Teachers design assessments that match student ability. Comments on students' work are supportive and include clear guidance on strategies to help them improve.

48 Attendance is good for full-time students, but poor for part-time students. Absences are always followed up promptly. Retention is variable and low on some provision. Data on students' achievements show a significant upward trend. For example, pass rates at entry level in literacy improved from 31% in 1997 to 62% in 1999. For numeracy the change was from 31% to 79%. There is no achievement table because of difficulty in aggregating basic skills qualifications.

49 Teachers have appropriate qualifications in the teaching of basic skills. There is a wide range of well-organised and labelled worksheets. However, only a small amount of materials is vocationally specific. Good-quality accommodation in the workshops provides appropriate space for individual work, but there are few facilities for small groups to work.



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## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**50 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some of the strengths were overstated and additional weaknesses were identified. Actions to address some of the weaknesses had begun.**

#### Key strengths

- much-improved school liaison providing good information to potential students
- comprehensive induction for full-time students
- effective support for students with mobility and/or sensory impairment
- well-managed advice and guidance on careers and welfare
- productive work placement programme

#### Weaknesses

- some ineffective tutorial practices
- poor take-up of learning support
- insufficient monitoring and evaluation of attendance

51 The student support function in the college is well managed. Publicity materials are attractively designed and informative. A help desk at the Framwellgate Moor site deals effectively with many initial enquiries. Students are referred to the information and guidance centre adjacent to the help desk for further guidance. School liaison activities have improved significantly since the previous inspection. A number of pupils from local schools now attend a coherent programme of link courses. The college is responsible, in partnership with others, for the education and training of a number of students under 16 years of age who are disaffected with school life.

52 Induction of full-time students is good. It is delivered in a variety of ways. Most courses

have an induction week but others spread the activities over a longer period. The induction of part-time students is less well structured. Full-time students and a small proportion of part-time students complete diagnostic tests to identify those who have additional learning needs. Approximately 25% of the students screened in this way require additional support. A number of programme areas have identified during their self-assessment process that students are reluctant to take up the help offered. Inspectors agreed that the proportion of students taking up support is low. The college has identified link tutors for each programme area who are expected to ensure that the best methods of delivering the additional support are deployed. However, this arrangement is too new to judge its effectiveness. There is no regular, systematic college-wide evaluation of attendance or the numbers of students transferring between courses. Attendance follow-up is reliant on concern notes being delivered to tutors. Transfers are only monitored on selected courses.

53 A director of tutoring manages tutorial support. There is insufficient time allocated for the role. The tutorial work of the college was evaluated in 1997. Recent training and development activities have been well received. Tutors have no forum allowing them to meet regularly to share good practice or ensure that there is a consistent approach to tutoring. Inspectors observed six pastoral and three subject-specific tutorials. The profile of grades awarded shows there is a considerable variation in quality. Students generally speak positively of tutorial support. However, GCE A level students find the bureaucracy associated with the first-year tutorial programme tiresome. As the college's self-assessment report identified, tutorial support is not systematically provided for all part-time students.

54 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the provision of careers, welfare and

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personal counselling services is well organised. The small guidance team works effectively. Students receive up-to-date and accurate guidance on financial matters. The college adds considerable sums to the access funding it receives from the FEFC, it provides free transport to the outlying districts, and a number of students receive free meals. A counsellor is available for three days each week. Although a few students have to wait too long for interviews, the service is generally effective. The college has mapped the careers education requirements of courses to establish what is delivered within courses. Partnership agreements have been reached with the external careers service to fill most of the gaps identified by this mapping process. Each year there is a long waiting list for the college nursery.

55 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the large team of support workers which assists students with specific learning difficulties and those with sensory and mobility impairment is well managed and effective. Students value a well-established system for identifying and assessing the needs of students with dyslexia. At the time of the inspection, 19 students had hearing impairments and 11 students were visually impaired. In addition, there were a number of students in wheelchairs or who had mobility impairments and learning difficulties.

56 Each division provides a wide range of additional activities available to students on full-time courses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that work experience is a valuable part of these courses. Students on academic courses such as those leading to GCE A level qualifications also take part, organising their own work placements. Only a small number fail to find suitable placements. Key skills courses, visits, field trips, competitions and additional foreign languages are all examples of activities available for students in addition to their primary learning objective.

## General Resources

### Grade 3

**57 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- well-equipped general teaching rooms
- ease of access to IT
- extensive library resources

#### Weaknesses

- difficult access for those with impaired mobility
- low rate of room utilisation
- some buildings in poor structural condition

58 The college is based on two sites about 2 miles apart. The main fabric of the buildings is poor. For example, there are large areas of flat roofing that are not waterproof. Most of the buildings are old and, although they have been extensively adapted over many years, they retain features that make them difficult and expensive to maintain and operate. The complex of buildings on the Framwellgate Moor site has developed over a period of time. Parts are in good decorative order but a number of areas are in need of significant refurbishment.

59 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the access for those with mobility problems is difficult and in many areas impossible. The frequent changes of level and the number of stairs on each site create difficulties. Access to the library facilities on both sites is poor. The college has been slow to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. It has recognised this weakness and is now taking action to improve its facilities.

60 The entrance to the Framwellgate Moor site is welcoming and attractive. A full range of general college information is available from

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helpful staff. There is also a bookshop and a small kiosk. A travel agency is operated by students as part of their training. The refectory is appropriately furnished and provides an attractive environment, although it is overcrowded at peak times. The students' union is a two-storey building that is underused. The college's health and fitness club has a well-equipped gymnasium. There is also a sports hall and dance studio. The Neville's Cross site has appropriate social areas for students, but those on the Framwellgate Moor site are inadequate. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

61 Most general teaching rooms are well equipped and well furnished, providing a good learning environment. The college has established a rolling programme of furniture and IT replacement. Procedures are in place to ensure that expenditure is linked to value for money. There is ready access to a range of high-quality audiovisual equipment to support teaching and learning. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that accommodation on both sites is significantly underutilised. The accommodation strategy commits the college to relocating its work at Neville's Cross to the Framwellgate Moor site.

62 The college has well-established libraries and study facilities on each site. These provide an attractive learning environment. Quiet areas are available, as well as high-quality computers with appropriate software. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is an extensive range of books and other learning resources. Students are able to find what they need by using a comprehensive computerised cataloguing system. The libraries are well managed and students find staff helpful. Expenditure on books and other resources is well above the average. Arrangements for teachers to inform the library of the resources they need are well organised and effective.

63 The college has recently invested heavily in IT. The ratio of computers to full-time students

is 1:6, and most of the equipment is less than three years old. Inspectors confirmed that staff and students have good access to IT, including electronic mail, the college intranet and Internet. The development of a common network allows students to use computers throughout the college. In addition, students on the Framwellgate Moor site are able to book computers in an IT workshop where support staff are available to assist them.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 2*

**64 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but found some additional weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- strong commitment to quality assurance and staff development
- comprehensive quality framework which is understood by staff
- quality assurance systems which have led to improvement
- rigorous self-assessment processes
- wide-ranging staff development programme

#### **Weaknesses**

- service standards not fully established
- weaknesses in target-setting
- lack of rigour in the college lesson observation process

65 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college demonstrates a strong commitment to quality assurance. This is reflected in the college's strategic aims and operational planning. Since the last inspection a new quality assurance system, 'Standards for Success', has been introduced. The system is supported by a detailed policy and comprehensive guidance documents. Pass rates

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for long courses have steadily improved and are now at or above the average for general further education colleges. Retention rates are close to the sector averages, despite deterioration in recent years. College data for 1999-2000 indicate that full-time retention has improved significantly when compared with data for the previous year.

66 As the self-assessment report states, the quality assurance system is comprehensive. It involves a three-tier approach to the setting of standards and assessing performance. In tier one, course teams review retention and achievement rates. They establish rigorous action plans to address poor performance and, taking sector averages and performance trends into account, set targets for the coming year. The teams' plans and targets are summarised at division and college levels. Examples of improvements resulting in this process are stricter adherence to entry standards for admissions to courses and new student support procedures. Some plans at course and divisional level are insufficiently rigorous. There is no systematic recording of the extent to which plans are implemented. Data problems have delayed target-setting this year. There is a need to aggregate some of the data and streamline the paperwork. The self-assessment report did not recognise these weaknesses.

67 Tier two of the quality assurance system is innovative and involves rigorous reviews of provision for groups of courses. The quality of five themes: course design; resources; teaching; assessment; and student support, is assessed systematically over four years. These investigations draw on a wide range of evidence including the views of staff and students, lesson observations, and external verifiers' reports. Strengths and weaknesses are determined and interim grades allocated. Plans to address weaknesses are implemented. Senior managers then consider the progress made and reassess the grades. This process makes an important contribution to the college's self-assessment report.

68 Tier three of the quality assurance system involves the annual assessment of the extent to which the operating objectives for cross-college provision such as finance and student services have been achieved. As the self-assessment report recognises, this process is not fully embedded for all functions. Only a few college services have service standards and monitor performance against them. The commitments in the recently revised student charter are linked to the college's strategic aims. There is a need to extend these commitments, for example, in relation to commitments to industry. There is no process for reporting the extent to which some of the commitments are realised. The college recognises this weakness in its self-assessment and is developing additional monitoring and reporting processes.

69 Self-assessment is well established and integrated with quality assurance procedures. It draws on a wide range of evidence and includes appropriate moderation processes. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and well presented. It includes a useful introduction to the college and informative position statements for each curriculum area. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified and supported by evidence. However, there is a lack of rigour in the lesson observation process. As the self-assessment report recognises, the profile of grades awarded to lesson observation contains a very high proportion of grades 1 and 2. The inspection profile for lessons observed during the inspection was significantly lower.

70 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff appraisal and development processes are good. Appraisal operates on a two-year cycle. The induction process for permanent staff is comprehensive and well documented. Part-time teachers are not appraised. Staff development is well planned and effective. Development needs are identified through appraisal, the quality review process and self-assessment, and are linked to college objectives. For example, college priorities have recently focused staff development on teaching

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and learning, key skills and retention issues. Staff speak positively about the development opportunities provided. The college's status as an Investor in People has recently been re-confirmed. A range of research projects has been commissioned recently by the college, for example, a review of the quality assurance system.

## Governance

### Grade 3

**71 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- exceptionally high levels of attendance at corporation and committee meetings
- regular review and monitoring of the college's financial position
- effective search committee

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of progress towards strategic objectives
- underdeveloped evaluation of the performance of the corporation
- inadequate consideration of non-financial issues

72 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

73 The corporation has 15 members, of whom three are women. Seven governors have been appointed since September 1999. One vacancy will be filled shortly. The governors have a

broad range of expertise including human resource management, finance, education, and local business, and in estates management, which has proved beneficial in helping the college to develop its accommodation strategy. The search committee is effective. It has advised the corporation on appointments for the new categories of membership and evaluated the contribution of existing governors prior to their re-appointment. It has also undertaken a skills audit, determined appropriate induction arrangements and produced a governor training programme. Recent in-house training sessions have covered quality assurance, finance and strategic planning. A number of governors have taken the opportunity to attend external training events. However, there is no formal annual assessment of individual training requirements.

74 The corporation meets at least five times a year. The independent clerk has a detailed and comprehensive job description. Agendas and papers are despatched to members on a timely basis, and corporation business is conducted efficiently. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings over the last 12 months is high, averaging 91%. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. The conduct of meetings is governed by standing orders. The corporation has yet to undertake a formal, annual review of its decision-making procedures. In addition to the search committee, the corporation is supported by five committees: strategy and finance; audit; remuneration; quality and standards; and curriculum and students. All committees have appropriate terms of reference and reporting arrangements to the corporation are good.

75 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the corporation closely oversees the college's financial performance. The strategy and finance committee reviews the most recent monthly management accounts at each of its meetings. It has met five times in the last 12 months and is chaired by a governor with extensive financial experience. In addition, the

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management accounts are circulated to all governors, and the chair of the committee frequently meets one of the vice-principals to discuss the college's financial position. However, the committee did not review the three-year financial forecast 1999-2002, prior to its presentation to the corporation for approval. The audit committee receives a progress report on outstanding audit recommendations at its meetings and prepares an annual report to the corporation. Its 1997-98 report was prepared in advance of this being a requirement of Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. Membership of the committee includes an external co-optee with appropriate expertise.

76 The corporation operates openly. It has adopted a code on access to college information, which also sets out criteria for confidentiality. A wide range of information is available for public inspection in the college's library, including agendas, papers and minutes of corporation meetings, the register of interests and the code of conduct. Minutes of recent corporation meetings are also available on the college intranet. The code of conduct requires updating to bring it into line with the Nolan recommendations. The corporation holds an annual public meeting, which is well attended and includes presentations by students and a local employer.

77 The corporation's involvement in the strategic planning process has been insufficient. The corporation does not effectively monitor progress made towards strategic objectives. The self-assessment report identified this weakness. The corporation did not approve the 1999-2000 operating statement. It has largely focused on resolving the college's accommodation difficulties. However, in 1999 it reviewed the college mission and identified 10 strategic aims that it was to monitor. The corporation has agreed that the strategy and finance committee would assess progress in meeting these aims.

78 The corporation receives and discusses students' achievements. The data include

comparisons with national benchmarking data published by the FEFC. Before corporation meetings, governors receive briefings from college managers on particular areas of work. To increase their understanding of the curriculum and the analysis of students' achievements, governors have recently set up two committees: curriculum and students, and quality and standards. These committees are considering the content, format and timing of reports they need to receive if they are to monitor the college's performance more effectively. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements. The corporation does not monitor the implementation of action plans arising from the self-assessment process. The annual health and safety report for 1998 was not approved by the corporation until late 1999. It does not receive annual reports on equal opportunities or charter performance. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

79 The corporation takes an effective part in self-assessment. However, it has not monitored the effectiveness of individual governors or the corporation. The search committee has recently agreed a limited number of performance indicators for the current academic year. Benchmarks for future governor performance will be drawn from these and presented to the corporation for approval.

# Cross-college Provision

## Management

### Grade 3

**80 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the college overestimated the significance of improvements to the monitoring and review of organisational performance.**

#### Key strengths

- productive community links and external liaison
- effective management at curriculum level
- good communications
- new strategic aims that are clearly understood

#### Weaknesses

- difficulties in accessing computerised management information data
- inadequate monitoring of operational plans
- insufficient monitoring of the implementation of key college policies
- poor strategic planning

81 The college has experienced a period of significant change, including a proposed merger with another college, major changes to corporation membership, and plans to sell one of its sites. Following the appointment of a new principal in 1998, the management structure was also reorganised. As a consequence of all these changes, there have been delays in addressing some of the weaknesses in management identified in the previous inspection.

82 The senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, four assistant principals, a human resources manager, a facilities manager and the academic registrar.

It meets fortnightly to oversee operational and strategic matters. The management structure locates academic staff in programme areas grouped into four divisions, and support staff in cross-college teams. Senior managers meet monthly with programme area managers and managers of college services. This group is an important forum for business and encourages participation in discussion. Although inspectors identified examples of effective management, particularly at course level, there remain weaknesses. For example, papers for some meetings lack supporting data. Monitoring and reporting responsibilities are not always systematically fulfilled.

83 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that communications are good. They have improved significantly since the previous inspection. The college's intranet and newsletter are used effectively to communicate with staff. For example, notes of senior management meetings are posted on the college intranet. The principal keeps staff in touch with issues facing the college. Most staff feel they are well informed. Staff value the moves towards a more open management style which encourages them to express their views.

84 The college's first staff conference in July 1999 provided staff with the opportunity to discuss how the college should respond to the issues facing it. The outcomes were used by managers and the corporation to help them determine new college strategic aims to reflect government and college priorities. These aims are now clearly understood by staff. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses in the strategic planning process identified in the self-assessment report. For example, strategic planning, financial planning and the accommodation strategy are not sufficiently integrated within the current strategic plan. The college has received funding from the FEFC's standards fund to address this weakness. The content, format and style of operational plans vary considerably. Links

# Cross-college Provision

between strategic aims and some operational plans are not clear. Many plans lack quantifiable targets, action points, milestones and timescales. There is insufficient monitoring of progress against the plans during the year. End-of-year monitoring lacks rigour and does not sufficiently inform the development of plans for the following year.

85 Most data on students' achievements provided for inspectors prior to inspection were produced manually and proved to be reliable. However, as the self-assessment report identifies, the computerised management information system does not provide regular, accurate or timely reports. Managers do not currently have on-line access to data. The student achievement targets sent to the FEFC do not include all the qualifications undertaken by students.

86 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Of the college's funding, 55% is from sources other than the FEFC. However, the average level of FEFC funding is declining and there is a duplication of costs arising from operating on two sites. The college needs to repay to the FEFC £447,000 for 1998-99, for non-achievement of additional growth. The college's financial position remains weak and management has prepared an action plan to address the situation. The current forecasts indicate a break-even position over the next three years. The college's new finance system produces monthly management accounts, which are reviewed by the senior management team. However, the accounts do not include cashflow information. The finance department monitors the cash position and prepares a 12-month rolling cashflow forecast. Budgets are tightly controlled and discussed at a monthly meeting between budget holders and the finance manager. Reports of internal and external auditors indicate that the college has sound systems of internal control.

87 The academic board has recently been reconstituted with increased membership from non-managerial staff and students. It is too early to measure the effectiveness of these changes. There has been insufficient monitoring of key college policies. The college has been slow to implement its health and safety policy. Monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy is poor. There is little data collected and reports are not produced for the academic board or the corporation.

88 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has developed extensive and effective partnerships with external providers and the local community. The college frequently assumes the lead role. These partnerships have resulted in positive action to make learning more widely available and relevant to the needs of students. There are good links with the County Durham TEC. The college has the largest number of County Durham TEC-funded trainees in the area. External market research was commissioned to provide data on aspects of college recruitment as well as on employers' and other organisations' perceptions of the college. However, internal market research from quality reports and student feedback is not always used to inform planning at college level.

## Conclusions

89 The college's self-assessment report is clear and comprehensive. It drew on reports produced by all curriculum and service sections and by the governors. It provided a sound basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses, although some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified. The self-assessment report is self-critical. Inspectors considered that one curriculum area had been under graded and one over graded. They agreed with all of the cross-college grades awarded by the college.



# Cross-college Provision

90 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 (March 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	24
19-24 years	15
25+ years	60
Not known	1
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (March 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	23
Level 2 (intermediate)	30
Level 3 (advanced)	38
Level 4/5 (higher)	7
Non-schedule 2	2
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	202	950	14
Construction	61	268	4
Engineering	65	342	5
Business	111	1,187	16
Hotel and catering	246	261	6
Health and community care	343	687	13
Art and design	234	479	9
Humanities	339	1,975	29
Basic education	19	335	4
Total	1,620	6,484	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 12% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (March 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	294	60	0	354
Supporting direct learning contact	30	0	33	63
Other support	208	4	30	242
Total	532	64	63	659

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£16,728,000	£16,772,000	£18,463,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£20.33	£19.37	£18.32
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	58%	60%
Achievement of funding target	106%	110%	100%
Diversity of income	48%	51%	55%
Operating surplus	-£2,707,000	£9,000	-£83,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll – college (1997), Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	644	1,153	1,224	1,272	1,374	1,004
	Retention (%)	89	84	85	89	90	81
	Achievement (%)	43	63	69	49	54	62
2	Number of starters	1,407	1,610	1,854	1,277	1,579	1,013
	Retention (%)	81	85	77	87	87	78
	Achievement (%)	53	60	71	51	55	67
3	Number of starters	1,139	1,468	1,500	1,372	1,438	1,167
	Retention (%)	84	77	76	90	86	80
	Achievement (%)	54	62	70	40	46	65
4 or 5	Number of starters	24	20	12	408	526	544
	Retention (%)	88	70	92	94	82	84
	Achievement (%)	85	29	100	50	58	72
Short courses	Number of starters	954	484	932	1,742	1,005	1,285
	Retention (%)	92	83	84	93	87	72
	Achievement (%)	42	35	51	46	57	67
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	490	1,154	963	2,408	3,012	3,001
	Retention (%)	95	98	91	97	97	91
	Achievement (%)	65	83	72	41	67	76

Source: ISR

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