

Newham Sixth Form College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

**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 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

Newham Sixth Form College

Greater London Region

Inspected March 2000

Newham Sixth Form College is located on a single site in the London Borough of Newham. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report and with all but one of the grades awarded by the college.

Since its last inspection, the college has built on its strengths. There is a continued commitment to meet the learning needs of a wide range of learners. A comprehensive range of courses is available. There is a strong emphasis in the college on maintaining a high standard of teaching and learning. Students' achievements and retention are good and improving. The art and design provision is excellent. The college offers an attractive, high-quality learning environment to its students. The support for students is outstanding. There are well-organised, effective induction programmes for students and new staff. Tutorial support is extensive and focused on improving students' achievements. The relationships between staff and students are very good. The college maintains strong links with local schools. Students' attendance, which was identified in the previous inspection as an area of concern, is now high. There is an extensive programme of enrichment activities for students.

A commitment to continuously improve the quality of the provision is evident at all levels of the college. The self-assessment process is rigorous and the performance of courses is reviewed thoroughly. Staff value the development opportunities available to them to improve their effectiveness. The college benefits from the wide range of skills and experience of the governors. The college is well led by managers who are open and self-critical.

The college should improve: students' achievements and retention on some courses; students' punctuality; the reliability of data on students' achievements for some courses; and aspects of the governance of the college.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics, computing and information technology	2	Support for students	1
Business	2	General resources	1
Art, design and media	1	Quality assurance	1
Humanities	2	Governance	3
		Management	1

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Newham Sixth Form College is located on a single site in the London borough of Newham and draws 98% of its students from disadvantaged areas, as defined in the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions. It was established in 1992 by the local authority, which saw the building of the new college as an opportunity to encourage more young people to stay on in full-time education after the age of 16. The initial plans were for a college that would cater for up to 1,000 students. Currently, there are over 1,880 full-time and 400 part-time students. Of these students, 85% are 16 to 18 years of age.

2 Social and economic indicators provide a picture of Newham as one of the poorest and most disadvantaged boroughs in England. The unemployment rate is 11.9%, which is the fifth highest rate amongst London boroughs and well above the national average of 4.3% for Great Britain as a whole. The general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) pass rate in the borough's schools has risen steadily, but at 34.6% it is still one of the lowest in England, compared with the national average of 47.9%. Newham is recognised as one of the most ethnically diverse local authorities in the country.

3 The college is committed to providing a fully comprehensive curriculum offer. This includes over 30 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and 20 different full-time vocational programmes. Around 65% of students are following advanced level qualifications. Schools in Newham have a high proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college provision meets the needs of all individuals in a challenging yet supportive atmosphere.

4 The college's management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, two college development managers, a college services

manager, a business development manager and a management information systems manager. The curriculum is organised into five areas: arts and leisure; business; humanities; mathematics and science; and technology. The college employs 145 permanent full-time equivalent staff, of whom 66 are full-time equivalent support staff.

5 The mission of the college is to 'develop, deliver and promote learning opportunities of the highest quality to post-16 students from the local and wider community'. The college's strategic objectives focus on:

- 'providing an inclusive, stimulating and highly successful learning environment
- achieving maximum levels of progression for students
- establishing a culture of teamwork and self-assessment
- ensuring the long-term viability of the college
- ensuring effective and efficient maintenance of the working environment
- supporting local businesses and contributing to the economic regeneration of the community
- developing and promoting the college as a centre of excellence to meet the needs of the local community
- assisting governors to provide direction, advice and support to the college'.

6 The college works closely with a number of local organisations. These include community groups, schools and the local education authority (LEA). The college is committed to working towards the regeneration of Newham. In collaboration with a local university, some higher education provision is now offered. The college has won two Beacon awards in recognition of the links made between education and business.

Context

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected in March 2000. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and considered information held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college's data on students' achievements for 1999 were checked by inspectors against primary sources, including class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Data for 1997 and 1998 were taken from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR). The college was notified of the sample of its provision that would be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. Four programme areas and cross-college areas were inspected. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 42 days. Inspectors observed 59 lessons, including tutorials, and examined students' work and

documents relating to the college and its courses. They held meetings with governors, managers, college staff and students.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 77% were good or outstanding and only 3% were less than satisfactory. These figures are better than the averages for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The profile is better than at the last inspection.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	9	15	2	1	0	27
GCSE	0	4	1	0	0	5
GNVQ	3	8	3	0	0	14
Other vocational	0	2	1	1	0	4
Other*	3	1	5	0	0	9
Total (No.)	15	30	12	2	0	59
Total (%)	26	51	20	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

Context

9 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 (%)
Newham Sixth Form College	17.0	82
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

Mathematics, Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

10 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in mathematics, computing and information technology (IT). Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good and improving achievement on the national diploma in computing
- above average retention for most courses
- much good teaching
- high-quality resources for students and staff
- effective tutorials and monitoring of students' progress

Weaknesses

- low achievement on GCSE mathematics course and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate IT
- poor punctuality of some students

11 The college offers full-time courses for mainly 16 to 19 year olds in mathematics, computing and IT. Courses include GCE A/AS level in mathematics, computer studies and IT, the national diploma in computing and GNVQ intermediate and advanced IT. GCSE mathematics is offered as an option to students who wish to resit the subject in addition to their main programme of study. Part-time computing and IT courses are offered, mainly to adults. The college continues to develop courses that are geared to meet the needs of the local community and the computer industry. In particular, a wide range of specialist short courses and courses leading to professional qualifications have been introduced recently.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Provision is well organised, with detailed schemes of work leading to well-planned lessons. Students enjoy their lessons. The relationship between staff and students is excellent. Students are enthusiastic and well motivated. A typical mathematics lesson comprises a teacher introducing a topic, followed by students carrying out problem-solving exercises, which enable them to apply their newly acquired knowledge. Teachers use question and answer sessions to check the progress of students. Students get regular feedback on their progress. In IT lessons, teachers give lots of information about relevant software available on the market. Overall, teachers manage lessons very effectively. In a few lessons, the teacher did not involve all students in the learning. Teachers sometimes require all members of the class to work at the same pace and do not ensure that all students have sufficiently demanding work. Students' attendance is generally good but, occasionally, students arriving late disrupt the learning taking place. A few students' assignments had inadequate written feedback from the teacher.

13 Students' retention is high and on the majority of courses, is above the national average. It is particularly good in GNVQ intermediate and advanced IT and GCE A level mathematics. Students' achievements are good on most courses and excellent on the national diploma computer studies course. However, there is low achievement on the GNVQ intermediate IT course. The achievement in GCSE mathematics is slightly above the national average, but the college acknowledges in its self-assessment that further improvement is needed.

14 All GNVQ advanced IT and national diploma computing students have a three-week work placement. Most students enjoy this experience and gain confidence from it. Course teams have developed good procedures for developing students' key skills.

Curriculum Areas

15 Classrooms used for mathematics contain interesting display materials. Textbooks and other materials are available in classrooms for the students to use. The quality of handouts used in some lessons was poor. Both students and staff are provided with good resources. Each IT teacher is given a laptop. The IT suite contains workstations which may be reserved by students. The IT course team is currently arranging for their learning materials to be available on the college intranet. Inspectors agreed with the college that teachers are well qualified and experienced.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics, computing and information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	515	394	325
		Retention (%)	73	69	74
		Achievement(%)	15*	24	30
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	71	71	83
		Retention (%)	90	85	92
		Achievement (%)	57	70	45
GCE A level mathematics and further mathematics	3	Number of starters	110	133	142
		Retention (%)	69	73	92
		Achievement (%)	75	63	76
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	+	+	75
		Retention (%)	+	+	77
		Achievement (%)	+	+	77
BTEC national diploma in computing	3	Number of starters	21	25	25
		Retention (%)	76	72	80
		Achievement (%)	88	89	100
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	50	67	51
		Retention (%)	94	76	96
		Achievement (%)	54	61	77

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

*data unreliable

+course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

16 Twelve lessons at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels were inspected. Ten of these were for full-time students and two for part-time students. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report was rigorous and agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified.

Key strengths

- good achievement rates on GNVQ foundation and intermediate and national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses
- good retention on most courses
- mainly effective teaching
- high level of students' attendance
- effectively managed provision

Weaknesses

- low achievement on GNVQ advanced business
- low achievement and retention on GCE A level course

17 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time business courses, from foundation to advanced level. These include GCE A level and GNVQ programmes and NVQs in accounting. Two years ago, the college introduced a national diploma public services course. Most of the full-time students studying business are 16 to 19 year olds who come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Adult students attend mainly on a part-time basis in the evening. There are good opportunities for students on the GNVQ programme to progress to higher level courses. Many students take advantage of these.

18 The business provision is managed effectively. There are four programme managers. Between them, they have responsibility for curriculum, resources, tutorial support and staff development. They attend all

course team meetings, which take place every four weeks. The progress of individual students and strategies for improving overall students' achievements are routinely discussed at these meetings. Course reviews take place annually as part of the college's self-assessment process. Achievement and retention are monitored against the college's own benchmarking data. Targets for the following year are set.

19 The self-assessment report places great importance on the quality of teaching in business. There is some very effective teaching. The great majority of lessons are well planned. In the best lessons, teachers instil a sense of purpose into the lesson and use a variety of teaching methods. Teachers pose searching questions to check that students understand what they are doing. Most students are actively engaged in learning. In a GCE A level business lesson, the teacher used a practical exercise, involving the making of paper files, as a focus for informed discussion on production techniques. In an accounting lesson, students took part in a quiz to test their knowledge of basic accounting concepts. Assignments on the GNVQ programme are based on topics of current relevance. Students on foundation and intermediate courses have visited the Millennium Dome. They completed a project that assessed different zones within the Dome against certain criteria, such as marketing, level of interaction for visitors and visual impact. All full-time students have the opportunity to undertake some form of work experience or work shadowing.

20 Students are placed on an appropriate level of course. They talk enthusiastically about the college and enjoy their studies. The work observed in the classroom was at an appropriate level, though some students lack effective presentation skills. Concerns were expressed in the self-assessment report about students' attendance and punctuality. Action, through the tutorial system, has already been taken to tackle this and it was not an issue

Curriculum Areas

identified during the inspection. Attendance in the lessons observed was high, at about 90%. Most students arrive for lessons on time. Most students' written work was well presented and of an acceptable quality. Most of the marking was critical and included constructive comments from the teacher explaining to the student how their work could be improved.

21 Despite movements up and down over the last three years, retention on most courses is at, or above, the national average. Retention for students studying GNVQ intermediate and NVQ level 2 was especially high in 1998-99. There is poor retention on the GCE A level accounts course, which was recognised in the self-assessment report. This year it has improved. Students' achievements are good, being at, or above, the national average for most courses. Achievements on GNVQ foundation and intermediate and NVQ courses

are particularly good. The number of students passing GCE A level accounts and GNVQ advanced business is low. In order to remedy this situation, syllabus changes and different methods of teaching have been introduced. Additional teaching hours have been allocated to the GNVQ units and more emphasis has been put on preparing students for the various GNVQ unit tests. Results in the tests taken by the current cohort of students are substantially better than in previous years.

22 Staff teaching on business courses have appropriate qualifications and up-to-date knowledge of their subject. The classrooms provide an appropriate environment for learning, although occasionally they are overcrowded.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	53	45	33
		Retention (%)	94	87	82
		Achievement (%)	48	38	86
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	127	86	92
		Retention (%)	97	79	95
		Achievement (%)	77	80	83
NVQs	2	Number of starters	120	64	74
		Retention (%)	95	100	100
		Achievement (%)	77	94	99
GCE A levels	3	Number of starters	78	95	95
		Retention (%)	65	80	71
		Achievement (%)	67	37	68
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	110	134	121
		Retention (%)	71	85	77
		Achievement (%)	57	58	58

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

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Media

Grade 1

23 Eleven lessons were observed, covering a range of art, design and media courses. Inspectors found the self-assessment report to be clear and comprehensive. They agreed with the judgements in the report. At the time of the inspection, elements of the action plan had already been implemented, addressing weaknesses identified by the college.

Key strengths

- good students' achievements
- very high retention rates on some courses
- outstanding teaching
- high quality of students' work
- well-planned and well-managed courses
- excellent multimedia resources

Weaknesses

- poor punctuality of some students

24 The college offers a range of vocational and general education courses in art, design and media. The course team works well together to teach a broad and demanding curriculum. Schemes of work are well developed and linked to lesson plans. A rigorous self-assessment process is used to improve the quality of provision. Students' progress is reviewed regularly at team meetings.

25 Ten of the 11 lessons observed were good or outstanding. Both the teaching and the project work set extend students' abilities. Students have the freedom to experiment and are encouraged to learn from their mistakes. Project briefs combine theory and practical applications and allow students to develop their skills in a clear, systematic way. A wide range of historical and contemporary influences informs students' work. The college is involved in annual group exchanges and hosts visits from French students. Media students take part in a

European-wide project, involving web design and video production, with partner colleges in Italy, Sweden, Norway and Luxembourg. Art and media students produce a well-designed magazine for the college. Some carry out externally commissioned work.

26 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers use a wide variety of methods to stimulate students and help them to learn. Whilst a media class was studying 'fly-on-the-wall' documentaries, it was filmed by fellow students. The class later commented on their behaviour on video and evaluated whether or not being filmed changed their behaviour or affected the objectivity with which they reacted to the documentary. In another lesson, a public showing of students' work to their peers produced a sense of occasion and celebration.

27 Most students produce work of a high standard. Written work and projects are thoroughly researched and well presented. Teachers give priority to developing basic skills in the visual arts. Students' sketch books are full of vitality and experimentation. Media students produce videos of a professional standard. Recently, two media students won first and second prizes, of £1,000 and £500, respectively, in a London-wide video competition, judged by a world-renowned film director. Assessment procedures are open, accurate and fair. They involve a variety of methods. Assessment criteria are explicit and helpful to students. In a few cases, the assessment criteria used to grade students' work were different from the criteria originally given to students.

28 As stated in the self-assessment report, students' achievements are very good. Pass rates of 100% have been regularly achieved on the vocational diplomas in design and in media and in 1999 all the students on the GCE A level art course passed. On the GNVQ intermediate courses in art and design, retention has been good for the last three years. Many students progress to higher level courses and gain entry

Curriculum Areas

to highly competitive degree programmes. Students' attendance is high. During the inspection it averaged 88%, compared with a national average of 78%. Poor students' punctuality led to the disruption of learning on a few occasions.

29 Academic and technical staff are well qualified. Many have significant educational or industrial experience. Studios and workshops are well managed. There are good facilities in three-dimensional design, printmaking and photography. Resources for fashion and textile courses are improving. The general studio areas are airy and spacious. Occasionally, classrooms are overcrowded. As the self-assessment report identifies, the media and multimedia resources are a strength. The resources comprise a professional standard facility with a fully equipped computer suite, eight digital video-editing stations and a screening room.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design and media, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE critical studies in art (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	+	83	54
		Retention (%)	+	78	72
		Achievement (%)	+	80	70
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	79	68	67
		Retention (%)	82	94	89
		Achievement (%)	60	55	85
Vocational diplomas	3	Number of starters	58	72	68
		Retention (%)	72	79	91
		Achievement (%)	100	96	98
GCE A levels	3	Number of starters	107	152	196
		Retention (%)	68	88	88
		Achievement (%)	73	82	92

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
+course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

30 Inspectors observed 23 lessons, covering GCE A levels in English literature, English language, geography, law, psychology and sociology. GCSE English language and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses were also inspected. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's own assessment of this curriculum area.

Key strengths

- high-quality teaching
- good students' achievements in GCE A level English language, English literature and sociology
- effective course team reviews
- staff development responsive to identified needs
- high-quality resources

Weaknesses

- poor students' achievements in GCSE English and GCE A level law
- poor punctuality of students

31 The college offers a comprehensive range of humanities subjects at GCE A level. The humanities provision also includes GCSE English language and ESOL at entry and foundation levels. The majority of students are on full-time courses. GCE A levels in English language and English literature, and ESOL at entry level, are offered part time.

32 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching and learning are significant strengths. Teachers make the aims of lessons clear and use a wide variety of teaching methods. They check regularly on students' progress. There is a supportive, friendly relationship between staff and students. In an English literature lesson, the teacher used audio tapes to explore critics' views of a James Joyce

story. The lively presentation and expert subject knowledge shown by the teacher motivated the students. During a psychology lesson, students reviewed examination questions, in order to see what type of response complied with the requirements of the syllabus. This gave the students a valuable, detailed insight into the assessment criteria used by examiners. In an ESOL lesson, skilful work by teachers gradually built up the confidence of students until they felt comfortable answering questions in class. The students later went on to write down their answers. Teachers give students the confidence to use complex technical language in psychology and law. Students' attendance is high across the humanities, but there were frequent instances of teaching and learning being disturbed by students arriving late for lessons. Some students fail to value the importance of learning key skills.

33 Students' achievements are high in many areas of humanities. There are consistently high pass rates in GCE A level English language, English literature and sociology. There has been a downward trend in the pass rate for GCE A level law over the past three years. The GCSE English language pass rate at grade C or above is low. Students' retention is generally satisfactory.

34 The written work of students is frequently of a high standard. The work is assessed thoroughly, with helpful and written supportive comments from the teacher on how the work could be improved. There are some examples of overgenerous marking. GCE A level English language projects produce some impressive work from students, including studies of the use of language in bilingual homes.

35 The curriculum is well managed and staff meet regularly to plan and review provision. Courses are planned effectively, with clear and detailed documentation. Most schemes of work are comprehensive and include lesson objectives, resources to be used and learning

Curriculum Areas

activities. Effective preparations are taking place for the introduction of curriculum 2000 in September 2000. Extensive staff development takes place in all subject areas. Targets for students' achievements and retention are agreed and monitored. Students' views are analysed by the use of questionnaires. When necessary, appropriate action is taken by course teams to improve provision. Changes in fieldwork, teaching methods and English texts have all been made as a result of such student feedback.

36 Resources are excellent with spacious, well-equipped teaching rooms. The resource centre has up-to-date textbooks, videos and other learning materials. The college intranet provides students with good information on English, but is underdeveloped for other subject areas in the humanities.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English language (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	333	297	246
		Retention (%)	72	75	87
		Achievement (%)	46	57	42
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	37	44	46
		Retention (%)	100	70	74
		Achievement (%)	92	94	88
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	42	55	72
		Retention (%)	98	93	81
		Achievement (%)	97	63	95
GCE A level law	3	Number of starters	41	31	46
		Retention (%)	76	77	59
		Achievement (%)	77	62	56
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	39	50	46
		Retention (%)	74	86	85
		Achievement (%)	79	70	80
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	45	43	45
		Retention (%)	80	81	64
		Achievement (%)	76	91	89

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

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

37 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report was rigorous and agreed with the college's judgements of its strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- high-quality information, guidance, careers advice and counselling support
- strong links with schools
- comprehensive induction programme
- effective tutorial support
- outstanding learning support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- extensive programme of enrichment activities

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

38 Inspectors agreed with the college's view that student support services are outstanding. Procedures are clearly documented and there is a range of challenging service standards. Staff across all aspects of student support services work exceptionally well together to help students achieve their full potential. Students speak highly of the support they receive. They feel the college provides a safe, stimulating environment. Since the last inspection, the college has established a skills centre where any student can receive additional help in communication, numeracy and study skills. The college has also developed an entry level course to meet the needs of students who enter the college with few qualifications. There is a strong commitment to meeting the individual needs of all students. Efforts are made to remove any barriers that might discourage any potential students from applying for a course at the college. For example, a college student was offered a place at dance school, but was unable

to obtain a grant. Staff successfully appealed to the LEA and the student passed his dance course. He now has his own dance company and teaches dance classes part time at the college.

39 The college's prospectus is well designed and informative. Course booklets provide information on entry requirements, course content and services offered by the college. There are strong links with the 11 partner schools in the borough. The college organises a calendar of events with schools and circulates a termly newsletter celebrating students' achievements. There are opportunities for school students to sample the college courses and experience college life. Open days are well attended; in 1998-99, there were over 1,000 visitors to such events. Applicants who are uncertain about their choice of course receive impartial advice and guidance from college staff.

40 There is a comprehensive and highly effective induction programme, which helps students to settle into their work quickly and understand the demands of their course. During induction, tutors demonstrate to students how to set personal goals and targets. An induction pack for tutors and students provides information on all aspects of the college's support services. Induction includes a diagnostic assessment of students' literacy and numeracy. Those who need additional help are referred to the skills centre. Staff in the skills centre have developed a wide range of learning and support materials. They provide excellent support for students through individual tuition, and work alongside course teachers to provide high-quality additional learning support in timetabled lessons.

41 The college is responsive to the needs of individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Experienced, highly committed, qualified staff assist students in the transition from school. There are excellent links with specialist schools. A 'taster' week helps these students to prepare for college life.

Cross-college Provision

The college provides specialist help for many students who have multiple disabilities and some with serious behavioural problems. There are examples of students with severe disabilities who have progressed to higher education. Inspectors agreed with the college that the support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a notable strength.

42 Full-time students have three hours of tutorials each week. Tutors have high expectations of their students. The tutorial programme includes weekly IT lessons. Tutors encourage students to set challenging targets for achievement and attendance. They are effective in helping students to monitor their progress, produce action plans and set deadlines for completing work. A mentoring scheme links college managers and some GCE A level students. The aim of the scheme is to ensure that the more able students are challenged to reach their full potential. A comprehensive tutor pack outlines the roles and responsibilities of tutors. It gives useful guidance to tutors on how to monitor students' attendance and punctuality. The college holds three parents/guardians evenings each year. These are well attended and informative. A college diploma is awarded to students when they meet targets related to their achievement of employment skills, academic performance, attendance and punctuality. This gives many students a sense of personal direction.

43 The well-organised careers service provides students with a good range of information on how to apply to higher education and get jobs. The college helps students to get jobs by offering practice interviews and giving advice on how to complete application forms. An annual training fair enables students to meet employers and representatives of training organisations. The college provides good employment support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

44 A well-qualified and experienced counsellor provides advice to students on a wide range of personal issues. Two youth workers are available for half a day each week. One is a qualified adviser on benefit and housing, the other provides help with student union activities. Students who require longer-term counselling are referred to local agencies. The college provides an outstanding programme of enrichment activities. Students take part for enjoyment or to develop specific skills. Some of the enrichment activities lead to a qualification. Programmes to increase the extent to which women students participate in sport have been introduced.

General Resources

Grade 1

45 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report about its general resources.

Key strengths

- high-quality learning environment
- high-quality resources to support learning
- good access to computing facilities
- attractive, well-maintained site
- extensive recreational facilities
- good support and full access for students with physical disabilities

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

46 The college was opened in 1992 and is located on a single site. Buildings which previously formed a school were adapted and other accommodation was newly built. Plans for the future development of the site include improved sports facilities and a closer grouping of some subject specialist facilities. As noted in the self-assessment report, the college provides a high-quality learning environment. There is a

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suitable mixture of general purpose classrooms and the extensive specialist workshop, laboratory and studio facilities. Teaching areas are well equipped with overhead projectors, video recorders and other equipment to support learning. All the accommodation is decorated to a high standard. Teaching rooms are allocated initially to curriculum teams for timetabling. If rooms are not being used they are allocated to other curriculum teams, so ensuring good room utilisation.

47 The self-assessment report recognises the various factors that contribute to the attractive, well-maintained site. An atrium provides a pleasant and welcoming main entrance to the college. Signposting in the college is clear and accurate. The college is cleaned regularly throughout the day. There are interesting displays of students' work in corridors and classrooms. The grounds are well laid out, with shrubbed areas and flowerbeds. There is a large car park. The exterior of the college is well maintained. There is a detailed condition survey for each room. A safe learning environment is provided through access controls and suitably located security cameras. Helpful reception and site staff play a large part in maintaining the friendly atmosphere of the college.

48 The extensive recreational facilities are recognised by the college. There is a large sports hall, a small multi-gym for weight training and external tennis courts. When required, students can use the sports facilities at a nearby sports centre. The canteen provides a hot food service and has a shop for sandwiches, confectionery and cold drinks. There is a wide selection of food. A common room is reserved for female students. There is a multi-faith prayer room. The large college hall is used as a student social area for most of the year and acts as an examinations centre from time to time. All staff have a good level of resources in their workrooms, including computers.

49 The high quality of resources for learning is noted in the self-assessment. There has been much investment recently. A skills centre has been created to help students study more effectively. A multimedia suite, which includes modern digital editing facilities, is available to students and to local companies, which may wish to use such facilities. The resource centre has been extended to include 'drop-in' computing facilities. This centre provides a good service to students throughout the week and on Saturday mornings. There are sufficient private study spaces for the number of students wishing to use them. The bookstock is good in most subjects and is upgraded frequently. There is an extensive collection of books, careers information, software, and periodicals for students considering employment or higher education. Students can obtain an induction into the use of the resource centre on the college's intranet.

50 The college has 510 computers for learning purposes, which provide students with good computing facilities. There are three new IT suites, which are used for timetabled lessons and by students on a 'drop-in' basis. The computers have a modern specification and are upgraded every three years. Most computers have Internet access. There is a good range of general purpose and specialist software. The college intranet provides general information for students and staff, including some specialist teaching material and links to useful websites. Approximately £900,000 has been spent on computing hardware and software over the last three years.

51 There is good support for students with physical disabilities. Students who use a wheelchair have good access to all parts of the college. There are an adequate number of toilets for students with physical disabilities, who also have designated car parking spaces. Six visually impaired students are provided with laptop computers, supported by specialist computer software.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 1

52 Inspectors broadly agreed with the self-assessment report, although they considered a few of the strengths identified by the college to be examples of normal practice.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to quality assurance
- rigorous self-assessment, leading to improvements in many aspects of the college's work
- effective and thorough review of course performance by senior managers
- sound target-setting processes
- thorough staff appraisal system
- effective staff development linked to strategic objectives

Weaknesses

- unreliable data on students' achievements for some courses

53 The college demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement and its quality assurance process. This is evident at all levels of the college. The strategic plan includes an objective to establish 'a culture of teamwork and self-assessment', which will ensure quality in all aspects of the college's work. Since the last inspection, the college has further developed its quality assurance framework. The vice-principal for curriculum has overall responsibility for quality assurance. There is an effective quality audit group, which carefully oversees the processes of self-assessment, teaching observation and staff appraisal. The quality audit group meets six times during the year. The group includes senior and programme managers, teachers, support staff, governors and non-college members.

54 Senior managers review rigorously the performance of all courses. The principal chairs

the annual performance review meetings. At these meetings, senior managers meet with programme managers to review the self-assessment reports for the previous academic year. Retention and achievement rates are scrutinised and reasons for any under performance are thoroughly analysed. Course retention and achievement targets for the following year are agreed. These targets take into account the previous year's performance, and the college-wide targets. As recognised in the self-assessment report, the targets are demanding, but realistic. Action plans arising from the self-assessment process are also reviewed during the performance review meeting. Governors receive a report which summarises the outcomes of the performance review process.

55 Course teams carry out an effective review and evaluation of courses at the end of each academic year. The process involves self-assessment against a set of standards, which includes standards for teaching and learning and students' achievements. The strengths and weaknesses of each course are documented and an action plan is developed. These action plans are thorough and course teams regularly monitor the progress made in implementing them. Programme managers summarise the course and subject reports and produce a self-assessment report for their curriculum area. Meetings between programme and senior managers monitor the progress made towards the achievement of self-assessment action plans.

56 There is a well-documented and thorough lesson observation scheme, which is part of the process of appraising staff. Lesson observations are used to inform self-assessment and to share good practice. An analysis of the outcomes and grades awarded are reported to the quality audit group. Overall, retention rates at all levels are good and have been improving for the last three years. Students' achievements show an improvement at all levels for 1998-99, following

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a decline in 1997-98. Strategies implemented since the last inspection have resulted in clear improvements to the quality of teaching.

57 There are comprehensive quality standards for most service areas. Where appropriate, effective methods are used to seek the views of users and students on the quality of the services. Each service team produces self-assessment reports, which have led to improvements being made. The quality standards for many of the cross-college services have been evaluated recently.

58 Teachers and managers address issues raised by students effectively. Twice each year students are invited to report on those aspects of their course that they consider to be good, and to suggest how things could be improved. The reviews are summarised by tutors. Programme managers monitor the actions taken as a result of the reviews. In one curriculum area, the review led to an improvement in the clarity of assignments. Students are issued with the college's charter, which has a number of commitments, and includes a complaints procedure. Staff, managers and the principal deal effectively and swiftly with complaints. However, there is no overall analysis of students' complaints or the effectiveness of the college's charter. This weakness was not noted in the self-assessment report.

59 Course teams and managers are provided with information on students' enrolments, achievements, retention and progression rates. This information is used in self-assessment and course performance reviews. However, inspectors found some achievement data to be unreliable and, in a few instances, this has reduced the rigour of course self-assessments. The performance of GCE A level students, based on their qualifications at the start of their course, is used effectively to monitor if any value-added progress is made.

60 Inspectors agreed with the college that there are effective and well-documented systems for staff appraisal and staff development. All

full-time staff are appraised by their line manager. During this annual appraisal, the achievement of the individual's targets for the previous year is discussed and targets for the forthcoming year are agreed. Staff value the staff development opportunities available to them. Recent staff development activities have included IT updating and training on recent curriculum initiatives. There are comprehensive evaluations of all development activities undertaken. There is an effective induction programme for staff, which is reviewed and evaluated systematically.

Governance

Grade 3

61 Inspectors and auditors did not agree with some of the college's self-assessment of governance. They considered that the college had overstated certain strengths and failed to identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- constructive oversight of the college's strategic direction
- governors' strong commitment to the mission and success of the college
- close monitoring of the college's financial performance
- strong focus on development of college resources to support students' achievements

Weaknesses

- inadequate process for the appointment of governors
- lack of performance indicators to measure the performance of governors
- low attendance at corporation meetings
- unsatisfactory operation of the audit committee
- some unsatisfactory aspects of clerking arrangements

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62 Inspectors judged that governors effectively oversee the college's strategic direction. They closely monitor the college's performance. They rigorously review students' recruitment, retention and achievements, and the performance review reports from programme areas. They are well informed about educational issues, such as changes in the post-16 curriculum being introduced in September 2000.

63 The corporation has an agreed membership of 20, comprising seven business, two co-opted, two local authority, three local community, one parent, two staff and two student governors, and the principal. Some governors have not been appointed in accordance with the provisions of the instrument and articles of government. The corporation operates in an open manner. Governing body activity is reported to staff and students through the college intranet. An annual general meeting is held each year, which is open to the public. The average level of attendance at corporation meetings in 1999 was low at 61%. Six governors attended no more than one corporation meeting during the year.

64 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not fulfil its responsibilities under its financial memorandum with the FEFC. The corporation has established committees for search, audit, finance and general purposes, and remuneration. The terms of reference of the audit committee do not fully accord with Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. The college's new internal auditors started work before their plans had been considered by the audit committee.

65 The corporation, on the advice of the finance and general purposes committee, approves the annual budget. This committee reviews the college's financial performance each

term, through a comprehensive set of management accounts. Governors receive a financial report each term. They have successfully overseen the college's development of a range of impressive resources. They receive regular reports on developing the college's accommodation and learning resources.

66 The corporation has an external clerk to the corporation. Inspectors disagreed with the college's assessment of clerking as a strength. The corporation has not agreed a job description for the clerk that adequately reflects FEFC guidance in *College Governance: A guide for clerks*. The register of governors' interests is not held by the clerk. The corporation has not recorded any procedures for appraising the clerk.

67 There is an induction programme for new governors. Training events for governors take place, but there is no formal evaluation of training of how individual events feed into an overall training plan. There is a good balance of skills amongst governors.

68 Governors are involved in the self-assessment process. The appraisal of the principal by the chair of governors involves measuring performance against the college's strategic plan. Governors do not use performance indicators to evaluate formally their own effectiveness.

69 Specific governors are linked with aspects of college activity. Although the college's self-assessment reported that there were weaknesses in how this system operates, inspectors felt the overall contribution of governors to be good. For a number of years, one of the governors, representing the business community, has been involved closely in the college's Young Enterprise Scheme. A newly appointed governor is helping GNVQ business students to prepare presentations. Another governor has strong links with the art and design curriculum area.

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70 The college benefits from the diverse range of skills and experience that governors bring to the corporation. Members have a good knowledge of the local community and the context in which the college operates. This strength is identified in the self-assessment report. One of the governors is closely involved in the development of the new Stratford Arts Centre and strong partnership arrangements have been established between the centre and the college. Governors are committed to achieving the college's mission.

Management

Grade 1

71 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Most of the weaknesses recorded in the self-assessment were being addressed at the time of inspection.

Key strengths

- effective management structure
- consultative, self-critical management
- good internal communications
- rigorous evaluation by managers of students' achievements and retention
- strong, productive community and business links
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

72 The college is effectively managed. Since the last inspection, the college has continued to refine its management structure in response to the changing needs of its students and the community. The college's senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, two college development managers, a college services manager,

business development manager and management information systems officer. The management structure and lines of responsibility are clear and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. There is clear delegation of authority to middle managers. The self-assessment report noted that managers are still developing in their roles and establishing teams. At the time of the inspection, much of this work had been carried out.

73 The college makes good use of performance indicators and targets. Target-setting is well established across the college. A detailed cycle of reports and presentations to senior managers and governors ensures that progress made towards meeting targets is analysed rigorously. Action is required from course teams when targets have not been met. The self-assessment report noted that not all planning and quality assurance internal deadlines are always met. Systems are now in place to address this.

74 Senior managers are open and consultative. They make themselves readily available to staff and students. Managers are self-critical, and this is appreciated by other staff and students. Communications in the college are effective. There is a detailed schedule of meetings for all staff. Staff are kept informed about college matters and other relevant issues through regular newsletters, briefings by the principal and senior managers, subject and team meetings, electronic mail and the college's intranet. Senior management team members participate in the lesson observation scheme which enables them to form a view of the quality of work in each subject area.

75 Good-quality management information underpins regular monitoring of all aspects of the college's work. The information is available to all staff and includes regular reports on student enrolments, retention, attendance, destinations and progress. However, for some courses, achievement data are unreliable.

76 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the financial

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management of the college is good. The latest financial forecast indicates that the college will remain financially healthy throughout the period 1999 to 2002. The budget planning process is well managed. A comprehensive set of management accounts is produced promptly each month by the finance team. These management accounts include a rolling cashflow forecast and an analysis of performance against key indicators, such as cash days in hand. This enables effective monitoring of the college's financial performance by senior management. Budget holders receive monthly financial reports. However, there is no systematic training programme in budget management for budget holders. The college's financial regulations have recently been updated, but they are not comprehensive.

77 There are numerous productive links with local community groups, the business sector, local schools, special education institutions and community education. As noted in the self-assessment report, these links promote the sharing of good practice. For example, the college has developed a dynamic and supportive relationship with a specialist college for visually impaired students. This partnership has led to the recruitment of visually impaired students to GNVQ and GCE A level programmes. In turn, the specialist college has provided training for 30 college staff and provided advice and support for the purchase of new technology.

78 As noted in the self-assessment report, there is a strong ethos of equality of opportunity. This is evident in the college's procedures for appointing staff and enrolling students. Equal opportunities is an integral part of the college's work in widening participation and inclusive learning. It is promoted and managed effectively throughout the college.

Conclusions

79 The college's self-assessment report provided an effective basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. It was developed through a comprehensive process, involving all staff. The self-assessment process is an integral part of the college's quality assurance system. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the college's self-assessment grades.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	85
19-24 years	6
25+ years	7
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	5
Level 2 (intermediate)	24
Level 3 (advanced)	65
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	591	213	35
Construction	0	17	1
Engineering	107	0	4
Business	300	69	16
Hotel and catering	175	12	8
Health and community care	61	0	3
Art and design	159	34	8
Humanities	411	56	20
Basic education	84	25	5
Total	1,888	426	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 98% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	79	14	7	100
Supporting direct learning contact	27	5	5	37
Other support	39	6	1	46
Total	145	25	13	183

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

College Statistics

Three Year Trends

Financial Data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£5,951,000	£5,921,000	£6,260,220
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.82	£17.56	£17.00
Payroll as a proportion of income	62%	66%	66%
Achievement of funding target	112%	101%	109%
Diversity of income	7%	11%	13%
Operating surplus	£428,000	£11,000	£275,799

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 – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 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	117	100	86	100	90	95
	Retention (%)	84	90	93	57	59	98
	Achievement (%)	47	39	87	96	57	67
2	Number of starters	1,519	1,893	2,317	22	38	127
	Retention (%)	80	81	87	45	70	58
	Achievement (%)	81	68	73	43	73	67
3	Number of starters	1,484	2,244	3,262	150	77	146
	Retention (%)	78	84	84	84	74	64
	Achievement (%)	75	69	71	67	62	69
4 or 5	Number of starters	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Retention (%)	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Achievement (%)	–	–	–	–	–	–
Short courses	Number of starters	97	176	276	218	148	594
	Retention (%)	95	90	86	83	82	74
	Achievement (%)	73	59	98	63	59	78
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	239	226	–	71	68	–
	Retention (%)	93	88	–	87	91	–
	Achievement (%)	68	34	–	28	61	–

Source: ISR

– ISR data not collected

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