

North East Surrey College of Technology

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
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

North East Surrey College of Technology

South East Region

Inspected January 2000

North East Surrey College of Technology is a large college of further education offering courses from foundation to postgraduate level in all the programme areas funded by the FEFC. A comprehensive and evaluative self-assessment report was produced as part of the college's strategic planning and quality assurance cycle. Governors and staff at all levels contributed to its production, drawing on data from lesson observation and a range of college activity and performance. Inspectors confirmed many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report and found some additional ones. They also concluded that sufficient regard had not been paid to rates of student retention and achievement which vary significantly across the college. Since the preparation of the report, quality assurance procedures have been modified to include a more detailed analysis of retention and achievement data. It was also evident that the college had rectified some weaknesses and was addressing others in the report. Most of the teaching is satisfactory; 67% of lessons were judged to be good or outstanding. Student punctuality and attendance are weaknesses in some areas.

The college has undergone significant change during the last two years. A new principal is providing effective leadership. The college is

well managed and communication is effective. The culture of the organisation has changed significantly since the last inspection; a shared sense of purpose has been established. Staff appreciate the more open and consultative approach of managers. The working relationship between members of the corporation and senior managers is constructive and the governance of the college is good. The governors played a key role in re-appraising the character and direction of the college and in improving its financial health. The unreliability of aspects of management information continues to be a weakness. Improvements to quality assurance procedures are not yet fully established. Staff development activities complement the strategic development of the college as well as the personal and professional development of the individual members of staff. The college has widened participation and students have good access to advice, information and welfare services. The careers service is of a very high quality. Provision of tutorial support is not consistent. Measures for dealing with students' absence are not operating properly. The college is generally well resourced and the college estate has been improved significantly since the last inspection. The college should improve: achievement and retention on some courses; the standard of teaching on some courses; the consistency of tutorial support; punctuality and attendance; resources in some areas; and aspects of data collection.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	4	Support for students	3
Horticulture	2	General resources	2
Construction	3	Quality assurance	3
Business studies	2	Governance	2
Art and design, media and performing arts	3	Management	2
Humanities	2		
Basic skills	2		

The College and its Mission

1 North East Surrey College of Technology is a general further education college in the borough of Epsom and Ewell, south west of London. The college's catchment area includes North Surrey, and the London boroughs of Kingston, Sutton, Merton and Wandsworth. The college has a large campus in Ewell which is well served by the motorway network and by direct rail connections with London and the south of England. There are 25 schools with sixth forms and six further education colleges within easy travelling distance of the college.

2 The college aims to provide an educational framework that allows students to progress from school through further education to higher education. It offers a wide range of occupational, educational, technical and professional qualifications. One-third of the college's provision is in higher education. At the time of the inspection the college had 2,300 full-time and 3,800 part-time students, of whom 1,433 were full-time and 1,903 part-time further education students. Half of all students are aged over 25 years of age. Provision ranges from school link courses to part-time postgraduate qualifications and professional courses for people in employment. Courses are drawn from all the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The post-16 staying on rate exceeds 80% and local unemployment is about 1%.

3 Many residents of Epsom and Ewell work in London. Many other people travel to the borough to work. Most local businesses are small; 90% employ between one and five people. The college has contracts with: the Home Office to provide education in five prisons; local health trusts for nurse practitioner training; and training and enterprise councils (TECs) in south-west London. The college has also developed good and productive links with a wide range of local companies for whom it provides training and educational courses.

4 The mission of the college is 'personal success through learning'. North East Surrey College of Technology aims to meet the lifelong learning needs of individuals. Extensive provision and flexible arrangements for study seek to provide students with opportunities to reach their potential and contribute fully to the local and national economies.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during January 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999. These data were checked by inspectors against primary evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies, and were found to be reliable. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 51 days. The inspection team observed 82 lessons, visited students on placement, examined students' work, and scrutinised college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students. In the same week as the FEFC inspection, five inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college inspection. The TSC inspected construction, business administration and foundation for work. TSC inspectors interviewed 53 trainees and six employers, and visited seven work placements. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC framework, evidence gathered by the TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

Context

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 82 lessons observed, 67% were judged to be good or outstanding and 7% were less than satisfactory. This compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	8	2	1	1	15
GCSE	0	1	1	0	0	2
GNVQ	0	2	2	1	0	5
NVQ	4	10	5	1	0	20
Other vocational	6	12	8	1	0	27
Other	5	4	3	1	0	13
Total (No.)	18	37	21	5	1	82
Total (%)	22	45	26	6	1	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*

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The highest attendance level of 87% was in business administration lessons and the lowest at 57% in construction.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
North East Surrey College of Technology	14.6	71
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 4

8 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering courses for the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in biology, chemistry and human biology, and the national certificate in science (pharmacy). They broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment report but considered insufficient emphasis had been given to the weaknesses in teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- good achievement at GCSE
- a high level of practical skill on advanced courses
- good laboratories and practical equipment

Weaknesses

- poor achievement on GCE A level science courses
- unsatisfactory retention rates in GCSE
- a lack of student attention in biology theory lessons
- an inadequate range of activities in some theory lessons
- insufficient use of target-setting

9 The college offers a wide range of science provision that ranges from GCSE subjects to postgraduate and professional studies. Further education science courses are located within two separate college departments. One is responsible for applied science courses and the other for GCSE and GCE A level subjects. Managers meet with their teams regularly. There are schemes of work for courses but they are generally produced by individual teachers for their own use and there is no sharing of good practice. The schemes lack sufficient detail

on teaching methods. In line with college policy to improve performances and set targets at course level, action plans have been produced to improve students' achievements and their progress is regularly reviewed. For all science GCE A level courses there is one aggregated target; managers have not yet set targets for improvement for each individual subject. Value-added data are not yet being used to set targets for all GCE A level students.

10 The quality of teaching ranges from good to unsatisfactory both on GCE A level courses and on the vocational programme. The more successful lessons took place in laboratories. Students demonstrate high levels of practical skill and work safely. They benefit from the use of well-structured handouts which give clear information and instructions.

11 Chemistry teaching is good. In biology the teaching of theory is generally poor. During the unsuccessful theory lessons, there is little opportunity for students to take part in an appropriate range of work. As a result some students lose concentration. In one lesson, two students on the front row were playing with their mobile phones. One student laid his head on the table for 10 minutes. The teacher did not challenge the students about their lack of attention. In some lessons students were set a task but not given time to complete it before the solution was discussed. Teachers do not always check that students have understood the work. At the time of the inspection, use was being made of standards funding to address weaknesses in teaching and learning.

12 The national certificate in science (pharmacy) course attracts a small number of highly motivated students. The course no longer includes an information technology (IT) module. There is no assessment of the IT needs of individual students on this course and students are not made aware of the facilities that are available to help them develop their skills. Overall attendance in science lessons observed was low at 66%.

Curriculum Areas

13 Achievement on the national certificate in science (pharmacy) is in line with national figures for the sector. GCSE achievements are good. The retention rate in GCSE biology has fallen to an unacceptable level. The action plan identifies appropriate measures to remedy this weakness, but it is too soon for any improvement to have been demonstrated. Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that results at GCE A level are significantly below national figures for general further education colleges. Students are set suitable assignments and the work is marked to the appropriate standard. Some teachers identify areas for improvement; others do not provide correct solutions or helpful comments. The more able students can communicate effectively by using text, graphs and drawings and make logical deductions from data. Some students demonstrate good skills in wordprocessing.

14 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teachers are well qualified. They have sound knowledge of their specialist subjects and of the syllabuses they teach. There have been recent changes of staff teaching chemistry. The self-assessment report identified good laboratories and the range of well-maintained equipment as a strength in college provision and inspectors agreed. Laboratory technicians are well qualified and provide an excellent service as the self-assessment report noted. Rooms used for theory lessons are spread around the college site and although clean do not provide a stimulating learning environment. In some rooms, external noise is at times a distraction. The learning resources centre contains up-to-date text books.

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 biology	2	Number of starters	34	*	23
		Retention (%)	79	*	57
		Achievement (%)	67	*	85
GCSE chemistry	2	Number of starters	21	*	13
		Retention (%)	81	*	69
		Achievement (%)	65	*	78
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	36	38	30
		Retention (%)	64	66	70
		Achievement (%)	56	50	38
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	27	52	29
		Retention (%)	74	60	62
		Achievement (%)	50	17	17
GCE A level human biology	3	Number of starters	34	19	11
		Retention (%)	65	74	73
		Achievement (%)	38	38	38
BTEC national certificate in science (pharmacy)	3	Number of starters	9	9	13
		Retention (%)	78	100	85
		Achievement (%)	86	100	64

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Horticulture

Grade 2

15 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering the national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses in amenity horticulture at levels 1, 2, and 3 together with the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) certificate in practical gardening and the Royal Horticultural Society general examination in horticulture.

Inspectors agreed with most aspects of the self-assessment report. However, it overstated some strengths and omitted one key weakness.

Key strengths

- a good standard of teaching
- effective support of students
- good and improving pass rates on most courses
- flexible, modular course structures to widen access
- good course management
- good use of the college estate for practical projects
- well-integrated key skills

Weaknesses

- low achievement on NVQ level 3
- declining retention rates on most courses
- no contribution from industry to course evaluation

16 The college offers a restricted range of courses in amenity horticulture. Since 1997, the courses have been controlled directly by the college, following an earlier period of association with an agricultural college. NVQ courses include options in green-keeping, decorative and landscape gardening. The certificate in gardening is offered as individual modules although students can choose to take the full award. All courses are structured to enable

students to follow discrete modules on a flexible basis including daytime provision linked to evenings and weekends. This approach has widened the opportunities for adults, unemployed people and special needs students to join the courses. NVQ level 1 is run for full-time and part-time students. Various part-time modules at level 2 can be combined to make up a full-time course but there is no discrete full-time provision above level 1. The college recognised this weakness in the range of provision in its self-assessment report.

17 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that courses are well managed. Course files are comprehensive and up to date and follow a common format. Schemes of work have recently been revised and include cross-references to the requirements of syllabuses. They do not include sufficient details of planned activities, equipment and other requirements. The course review process includes two annual student satisfaction surveys and action plans and outcomes are reviewed against targets. Review and evaluation processes do not involve the industry. The review process has led to many improvements but failed to identify clearly the low achievements on the NVQ level 3 course.

18 Most teaching was good or outstanding. In most lessons teachers share their objectives with the students and use directed questioning to check students' understanding of previous work. Lessons are well planned and students experience a range of appropriate learning activities. In many of the theory lessons teachers make good use of their experience and of the facilities of the horticultural unit to enhance the vocational relevance of their teaching. In a few lessons teachers do not involve all students in the classroom discussion. Student portfolio work for NVQ is well structured and the overall standard of completed portfolios is high. Good emphasis is placed on health and safety.

Curriculum Areas

19 All students receive regular individual and group tutorials which are effectively monitored by the programme leader. Key skills are developed through specific lessons and group tutorials and are further enhanced during other lessons. On the NVQ courses a substantial amount of time is allocated to supporting students in their profile building. These classes are effectively managed although the action-planning and recording lacks consistency. Assessment and internal verification of NVQ profiles is comprehensive although little use is made of work-based assessments.

20 As identified in the self-assessment report, achievement rates on most courses are good and have improved over recent years. Pass rates on the Royal Horticultural Society general examination and the NVQ amenity horticulture level 2 rose to 87% and 96%, respectively, in 1999. Retention rates declined during 1998-99 on most courses compared with the previously good levels. The pass rate for individual units of the certificate in gardening in 1998-99 was 76% but only 29% of students chose to complete the

full award. The self-assessment report failed to identify the poor achievement rates on NVQ level 3 amenity horticulture. Nevertheless, more time has been allocated to portfolio building in the current year and a much higher proportion of students are close to achieving NVQ level 3.

21 The college has limited horticultural facilities but these are well managed and are used, together with the college grounds, as an effective teaching resource. There has been considerable development in recent years. The use of some facilities such as polytunnels is restricted in winter due to lack of lighting. There are adequate stocks of tools and small equipment. Staff are well qualified and have relevant industrial experience. Considerable use is made of part-time staff. The bookstock in the library has been increased recently and is now appropriate for the needs of the students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 0061 certificate in gardening	1	Number of starters	109	116	102
		Retention (%)	96	97	98
		Achievement (%)	39	57	76
Royal Horticultural Society general examination in horticulture	2	Number of starters	18	27	45
		Retention (%)	94	85	51
		Achievement (%)	77	26	87
NVQ amenity horticulture turf, decorative and landscape	2	Number of starters	51	39	44
		Retention (%)	65	80	55
		Achievement (%)	79	71	96
NVQ amenity horticulture turf and decorative	3	Number of starters	9	8	9
		Retention (%)	78	75	67
		Achievement (%)	29	0	33

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

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 3

22 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering NVQ levels 2 and 3 in construction crafts and national diploma and certificate courses in construction and civil engineering. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but considered it understated the weakness in both student rates of retention and achievement. Inspectors from the TSC inspected NVQ levels 2 and 3 in carpentry, joinery, brickwork and plumbing. Their findings were broadly in agreement with those of FEFC inspectors.

Key strengths

- good range of construction craft and technician courses
- strong links with the construction industry
- good teaching of practical subjects
- mostly good and well-equipped specialist accommodation
- good achievements in construction craft courses

Weaknesses

- low student achievement on technician programmes
- below average student retention rate
- poor punctuality and attendance
- some materials and small hand tools in short supply

23 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the range of full-time and part-time courses available is good. These courses include NVQ levels 2 and 3 in most areas of construction craft and national diplomas and certificates in building and civil engineering. They offer good progression routes and meet the needs of students and employers.

Course teams meet formally at least twice each term and informal meetings take place as required. The self-assessment report identified the low standard of course quality files as a weakness; significant improvement had been achieved by the time of the inspection.

24 Most teaching is satisfactory; some teaching, particularly in practical workshops, is good. Teachers have a strong command of their subjects and use their personal experience well to illustrate particular aspects. Most information is provided at the appropriate level and teaching methods are generally appropriately varied and interesting. In a few lessons the teaching is dull and fails to make suitable demands on students. All courses have clear schemes of work and lessons are effectively planned. At the start of a new lesson, teachers do not always confirm that previous work has been understood or always ensure that students are concentrating during the lesson. In some classes materials are of a poor quality, in short supply or inappropriately used. The average level of attendance is low and punctuality is poor. In one construction technology lesson, only four out of 32 students were on time; 23 minutes later only 14 were present. Punctuality was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Students who are late are not challenged to explain why they are not arriving on time. Health and safety procedures are observed and risk assessments are fully documented. Prohibition notices are prominently displayed where a process or activity would provide an unacceptable risk to health.

25 On construction craft courses achievement has been significantly higher than the national averages for the sector at NVQ level 2 and has been improving at NVQ level 3. In 1998-99, achievement at NVQ level 3 was 16% higher than the latest national average. There are high achievements in carpentry and joinery at NVQ level 2 where out of a group of 30 starters, 26 achieved the qualification in one year, and in

Curriculum Areas

plumbing at NVQ level 3 where out of a group of 17 starters, 13 achieved the award in a year. The quality of practical work produced by students is of a high standard. Solid and fibrous plastering is particularly good. Students' achievements on national diploma and certificate courses have been below the national averages in each of the last three years with a sharp decline in 1997-98. Many students use IT to prepare their assignments. Teachers written comments are generally informative and helpful to students. At NVQ level 2 in construction crafts, and technician level the retention for 1998-99 is less than the national average. The self-assessment report fails to identify retention as a weakness.

26 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced for the courses offered. Many teachers have recent industrial experience. The quality of most specialist accommodation is good. Most areas of construction are in new

buildings which are well maintained. However, plastering is undertaken in a number of unsuitable buildings as the college's self-assessment indicates. The department has a materials laboratory equipped with the full range of testing machines and equipment. It also has an appropriate range of surveying equipment. Considerable investment had been made to provide a fume removal and filtration system in the plumbing area. The maintenance of hand tools is poor and many students use their own. A good range of books, videos and specialist periodicals is well used by students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G construction crafts	1	Number of starters	*	118	116
		Retention (%)	*	80	75
		Achievement (%)	*	63	69
NVQ construction crafts	2	Number of starters	211	239	151
		Retention (%)	56	49	66
		Achievement (%)	78	65	77
NVQ construction crafts	3	Number of starters	20	43	31
		Retention (%)	85	91	84
		Achievement (%)	24	65	88
BTEC national diploma and certificate in building and civil engineering	3	Number of starters	46	48	53
		Retention (%)	57	83	60
		Achievement (%)	59	39	50
Short courses in construction crafts and health and safety	3	Number of starters	11	237	*
		Retention (%)	100	100	*
		Achievement (%)	0	100	*

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

27 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in business studies. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but concluded that it overstated the importance of some strengths while not recognising others. Inspectors from the TSC inspected NVQ level 2 courses in IT which were not part of the FEFC inspection.

Key strengths

- excellent retention rates
- high levels of achievement
- effective tutorial support for students
- well-managed courses
- good equipment and accommodation

Weaknesses

- the absence of planning to meet individual learning needs
- inadequate re-enforcement of health and safety good practice

28 The college offers a restricted range of full-time and part-time administration courses. These include full-time NVQ programmes at levels 2 and 3 in administration and full-time courses for legal secretaries. A small number of short courses to develop IT skills are offered in the evening. Recruitment to business and administration courses has declined in recent years and the college has now increased the use of industry standard software to attract new students.

29 Courses are well managed. Pre-course and in-course information provided for students is clear and easy to follow. Students are fully aware of what is required of them. Schemes of work are appropriately detailed and are shared with students so that they can plan their work. Timetables are well organised. They meet the

needs of different groups of students and examining bodies. Course teams work effectively. Team members contribute fully to course planning and support the team leaders in monitoring and improving the quality of the programmes. Minutes of team meetings are kept as a matter of routine and actions monitored by senior departmental staff. The standard of course quality files is good. They are monitored by the departmental quality co-ordinator both for compliance with requirements and for improvements in performance. Files show comprehensive coverage of: verification; student qualifications on entry; student feedback; and retention and achievement data. Course committees of staff meet termly; matters are raised by student representatives and students' concerns are addressed.

30 The training office is a well-equipped resource used by most full-time students. It does not, however, represent an effective simulation of a working office under typical working conditions. All full-time students undertake work experience. Links with employers are well established and very well regarded. While work experience is well managed, the support from employers does not create sufficient opportunities for assessment in the workplace. Visits to students at work experience placements do not give time for an effective assessment of skills which are being displayed in a work context. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

31 In two-thirds of lessons observed the teaching was good or better. Lessons are well planned and teaching materials are of a high standard. While the planning and teaching of lessons to the whole class are good, planning does not adequately accommodate individual needs. Few lessons include teaching approaches which adjust appropriately to learners working at different levels or different speeds. Students reported that they valued personal tutorials. Tutorial records are well

Curriculum Areas

kept and used to assist in the effective setting of targets for individuals. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that tutorials are a strength in the college's provision. Although health and safety training is an integral part of the learning programme, routine checking of chair height and sitting posture does not take place and document holders are not used by students.

32 Student retention rates are high and most are well above national averages for the sector. Student achievement rates are also very high. All students taking the one-year legal secretaries certificate have passed their course over the last two years. Student achievement rates on the one-year NVQ administration course at level 2 are over 20% above the national average. Inspectors agreed that the self-assessment report recognises that achievement is good. Much of students' work seen on screens and on paper in classes was imaginative and of a very

good standard. Students' assessed work is of good quality with some excellent portfolio entries for NVQ students.

33 Courses are offered in good accommodation. Examples of students' work is on display. Computer rooms are well equipped with up-to-date hardware and the latest versions of office software. The atmosphere, however, is austere. Printing arrangements are adequate although opportunities for scanning images and documents are insufficient. Inspectors agreed that resourcing is a strength. The college has recently started to improve access to these resources with the recent appointment of a tutor/demonstrator. Teaching staff are well qualified although there have been insufficient opportunities for commercial updating in recent years. Inspectors agreed that this is a weakness which was recognised through self-assessment.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
OCR copy typing speed test	1	Number of starters	58	81	132
		Retention (%)	84	95	98
		Achievement (%)	85	71	84
Teeline Examinations Board shorthand speed certificate	1	Number of starters	61	42	10
		Retention (%)	95	93	100
		Achievement (%)	74	67	50
OCR certificate in administrative and secretarial procedures	2	Number of starters	*	18	13
		Retention (%)	*	94	100
		Achievement (%)	*	65	85
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	16	17	16
		Retention (%)	75	94	69
		Achievement (%)	92	93	100
Wordprocessing	3	Number of starters	*	28	20
		Retention (%)	*	100	100
		Achievement (%)	*	76	55
NVQ administration	3	Number of starters	16	18	14
		Retention (%)	94	78	100
		Achievement (%)	87	50	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design, Media and Performing Arts

Grade 3

34 Inspectors observed 16 lessons from a range of courses. They agreed with the majority of judgements in the self-assessment report although some strengths were understated and some weaknesses were not identified. Certain weaknesses were being addressed at the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-planned and well-developed courses
- good assignments and supporting materials
- accommodation of good quality for the visual and performing arts
- comprehensive and thoroughly monitored course records
- good students' achievements in creative studies and performing arts
- good technical support

Weaknesses

- significant variation in retention and achievement rates
- restriction on specialist options
- unsatisfactory lighting in the visual arts studios
- students' inappropriate dress for some vocational activities

35 The college provides a range of vocational courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 as well as GCSE and GCE A level courses and a foundation course. The foundation course has a high proportion of adults. The restricted range of specialist options that were able to be resourced for the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced art and design course made recruitment difficult in a competitive area. The

course has ceased to run. The C&G life drawing course meets the needs of part-time students and provides additional opportunities for students following other full-time vocational courses in the department.

36 There is good formal and informal communication between team members. Meetings are well recorded and the views of students are used for planning and development purposes. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the development of courses is a strength.

37 Teaching and learning is generally well planned and well prepared. Students receive clear briefs for project work and understand assessment criteria. Use is made of different learning strategies and activities. The resources available limit the options for project work. Students on the creative studies courses achieve high levels of craft skills. In art and design a strong emphasis is placed on achieving the best possible levels of observational drawing. Specialist work in media and the performing arts achieves a good balance between the theoretical and practical in music, dance and performance. Students are generally well motivated and apply themselves fully to their tasks. In some lessons, however, the pace of work is too slow and, as a result, students are not sufficiently responsive when questioned. Some students ignore professional standards and wear inappropriate clothing and footwear for specific activities. Specialist staff plan and integrate work on key skills effectively with project work. Students at all levels are encouraged to plan and manage their work effectively; action plans are prepared and progress is monitored through regular tutorials. Absences are monitored by tutors. Staff take reasonable account of the external responsibilities of students and agree appropriate attendance commitments with them. In addition, staff through their influence as teachers and tutors, have tried to develop the habit of regular attendance among their

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students. Despite their efforts and actions, attendance and punctuality at lessons is too often unsatisfactory. The average attendance for the lessons observed was 73%.

38 Some ISR data for 1997 and 1998 were found to be unreliable when compared with college records. Where verifiable, college data were used for comparative purposes. Achievement and retention rates vary significantly. The most consistent and highest levels are in creative studies and performing arts. In performing arts retention is declining. Three of the courses have improved the retention rate. In three other courses the retention rate has fallen over the past three years. Retention and achievement in GNVQ media were low. The self-assessment report did not pay sufficient attention to the weakness and variability of retention rates.

39 Staff are appropriately and well qualified for the current range of work but there are not enough staff who have achieved the appropriate assessor awards. The teams are mutually supportive and have a positive approach to curriculum development. Each part of this whole curriculum area benefits from effective technical support which is highly valued.

40 The visual and performing arts have good accommodation. However, the quality of lighting in the visual arts studios is very poor. The fluorescent lighting does not reach the required standard for the observation and drawing of three-dimensional forms. In the performing arts, resources such as a public address system, and staging and manuscript boards are lacking. Technical resources for media have improved but the availability of essential reference material is less well developed. In all areas access to resources and to specialist computing are improving. The new learning resources centre has a very good range of books, videos and periodicals for photography and performing arts but the materials for the visual arts and media are less well developed. The self-assessment report understates the weaknesses in resourcing.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Life drawing	1	Number of starters	*	33	20
		Retention (%)	*	94	80
		Achievement (%)	*	26	25
C&G 7900 creative studies patchwork and quilting	1	Number of starters	17	11	6
		Retention (%)	82	73**	67
		Achievement (%)	64	50**	100
C&G 7900 creative studies soft furnishings	1	Number of starters	27	21	19
		Retention (%)	74**	76**	90
		Achievement (%)	75**	63**	100
C&G 7900 creative studies	2	Number of starters	10	9	11
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	20	67	73
GNVQ art and design	3	Number of starters	17	17	7
		Retention (%)	53	53**	0
		Achievement (%)	33	89**	0
Foundation art and design	3	Number of starters	15	19	21
		Retention (%)	53**	89**	71
		Achievement (%)	38**	53**	80
GNVQ media studies	3	Number of starters	29	33	23
		Retention (%)	45	52	61
		Achievement (%)	31	59	21
National diploma performing arts	3	Number of starters	27	31	32
		Retention (%)	74	74	63
		Achievement (%)	95	48	80

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

*course not running

**college data; ISR data found to be unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

41 Inspectors observed 10 classes in English, English literature, history and general studies at GCE A level. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report, but found that some of the weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- sound assessment procedures
- encouragement to students to organise their studies effectively
- good tutorial support
- effective course organisation
- well-managed provision
- good range of activities for improvement of retention and achievement rates

Weaknesses

- below average achievement in some subjects
- insufficient use of value-added data
- variability in implementation of new systems

42 The college offers 13 GCE A levels, including English, where the courses are for one and two years, and also English literature, history and general studies. GCSEs are offered in English language, general studies and sociology. Numbers enrolling for GCE A level English are good. Recruitment for GCE A level history is low. GCE A level general studies is taken by the whole GCE A level cohort, partly as a means of securing the programme of tutorial support.

43 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the provision is well managed. There are regular team meetings and reviews of

targets with individual staff. Examination results are reviewed and subject strategies devised. Schemes of work, which are reviewed annually, contain assignments and are shared with students. Staff do not follow all procedures consistently. Some schemes of work fail to identify students' activities satisfactorily. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a culture of continuous improvement and that course organisation is responsive to the needs of students. Significant staff absence during the first term of the 1999-2000 academic year was covered by appropriate specialist staff; schemes of work were rewritten and extra teaching allocated. During the inspection the area was affected by staff illness, but this setback was handled successfully.

44 The standard of teaching is good. Most lessons were good or outstanding. Schemes of work are shared; in most cases they are displayed on the walls of base rooms. Courses are well planned, lessons are well prepared and learning objectives for each session are shared with students. The aims and objectives of each lesson are reviewed at the end of the lesson. Students are encouraged to be effective in organising their own studies. Each subject has a supplementary study pack which enables students who miss lessons to do relevant or additional work. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that issues regarding punctuality and attendance had been resolved. Students were punctual in all classes, and attendance overall was 84%.

45 In-course assessment is thorough. Work is set and marked regularly, although a minority of students miss deadlines. Assignment coversheets include the criteria for each assignment and space for the student as well as the teachers to make comments. In most cases, these opportunities are well used. A minority of the assignment sheets contain imprecise criteria. Students receive good support. Academic progress is reviewed termly through individual

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interviews at which individual action plans are updated. The self-assessment report mentions the use made of the general studies programme as part of the provision of student support, but does not sufficiently emphasise its significance. Student commitment to this programme is extremely high.

46 Retention in English, English literature and history for 1998-99 was above the national average for the sector. Examination achievement in GCE A level English, in 1999 was 20% above the national average; 92% of students achieved passes. In GCE A level literature, the pass rate was below the national average but the retention rate was above. The student achievement rate is below the national average for further education colleges in GCE A level general studies. This is partly due to the college policy of enrolling all students for general studies as part of the programme of tutorial support. The retention rate for first-year GCE A level history is low. A programme for improving retention and achievement includes: individual staff targets;

much closer monitoring of students' progress; positive feedback to students through a 'gold award' system; specific warnings about absence and progress. The college has begun to use a commercial value-added system for predicting individual student achievements, but is not yet exploiting its full potential.

47 Staff are well qualified and enthusiastic. Classroom accommodation is generally good. The college has established base rooms for most subjects which contain attractive displays of students' work and relevant resources. Specialist resources in the learning resources centre are good.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCE A level English	3	Number of starters	67	46	36
		Retention (%)	54	63	69
		Achievement (%)	69	55	92
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	41	30	29
		Retention (%)	76	87	72
		Achievement (%)	71	55	76
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	35	28	15
		Retention (%)	71	71	73
		Achievement (%)	36	56	64
GCE A level general studies	3	Number of starters	229	169	154
		Retention (%)	69	69	66
		Achievement (%)	60	59	63

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

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Basic Skills

Grade 2

48 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in basic skills. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but found some additional strengths and weaknesses and considered that some strengths were understated. Many of the issues identified had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- some outstanding teaching
- the clear vocational relevance of basic skills assessment and teaching
- good cross-college leadership of basic skills
- the effective assessment and marking of students' work
- effective evaluation of most aspects of the support for basic skills

Weaknesses

- insufficient connection between initial diagnosis and basic skills support for some students
- insufficient planning of some support for basic skills in the classroom
- some low attendance

49 The inspection covered the full range of basic skills provided by the college and all methods of support other than individual support for students. At the time of the inspection, students receiving basic skills support were also following full-time programmes at foundation or GCSE level. Accreditation is provided through C&G Wordpower and Numberpower and Associated Examining Board (AEB) certificates of achievement in numeracy and literacy. Support is provided through discrete teaching, in-class support and whole class teaching.

50 Basic skills support is well managed. Much has been achieved in the last two years. Students on all full-time and some part-time courses undertake an initial basic skills screening. An important development is the introduction of additional, vocationally relevant basic skills diagnostic assessment on all level 1 and some level 2 courses as part of induction. Flexible arrangements enable all students at foundation level to have access to accreditation or support. Individual action plans are reviewed each term and influence the planning of support sessions. Personal tutors are kept informed of student progress. In other types of basic skills support the progress of individual students is not monitored systematically against initial assessment. The achievement of the qualification aim is used as the sole indicator of success rather than the students' broader learning experience. This weakness was not identified through self-assessment.

51 Students who are identified as requiring support but who decline the offer are monitored to check their progress on their main course. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Different methods are used to evaluate the effectiveness of basic skills support including student and staff questionnaires; changes are made as a result of these reviews. In 1998-99, students receiving basic skills support had a 4% better retention rate and an 8% greater achievement rate for reaching primary learning goals than those who declined support. As yet there are insufficient data to conclude that these increases are significant.

52 Of the lessons observed, most were good or outstanding. Self-assessment understated this strength. Lessons are well planned and clearly linked to previous work. Materials and assignments are relevant to the appropriate vocational area or are based on students' experience. Most are devised or adapted by teaching staff. The team recognises the importance of well-produced materials in simple language. Students are involved in a variety of

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tasks and activities which are carefully planned to consolidate old and develop new skills. Activities are structured so that there are opportunities to provide individual support. Explanations are clear. Teachers draw on students' experience and abilities skilfully to help them to develop their understanding, and especially their grasp of basic concepts.

53 Weaker lessons are often the result of poor planning. Tasks are either too difficult for students, because of insufficient analysis of the skills required, or the approach does not gain a response from the students. In a lesson where five students were receiving support in a large class, opportunities were missed to develop or consolidate basic skills. The main teaching method was to work on a question and answer session with the whole class. There was insufficient group, individual or project work. These weaknesses in planning were not identified through self-assessment. The attendance rate in classes, which excludes 'drop-in' attendance, during the week of inspection was 60%. This is 14% below the national average in the sector for the curriculum area.

54 Students make good progress in basic skills and are involved in monitoring their own progress. Many of the assignments for external basic skills assessment are produced by tutors and comments are consistently comprehensive and helpful. Destinations data for students are not systematically recorded. ISR data are unreliable, but college examination records show that there has been substantial increase in achievement in discrete provision. For example, in Numberpower achievements have risen from 8% in 1997 to 56% in 1999. In Wordpower achievements have risen from 16% in 1997 to 65% in 1999.

55 Resources are good. Learning support is based in the learning resources centre. There is an appropriate range of rooms available, including a small tutorial room. There are excellent up-to-date paper-based resources and access to computers. Some rooms used for classes in other curriculum areas are not suitable for groups working on basic skills. All the basic skills staff, including the classroom assistant, have appropriate basic skills qualifications and experience.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Numberpower	1	Number of starters	94	131	122
		Retention (%)	87	90	81
		Achievement (%)	8	40	56
Wordpower	1	Number of starters	95	113	57
		Retention (%)	84	92	89
		Achievement (%)	16	32	65
AEB certificate of achievement in numeracy	1	Number of starters	*	10	40
		Retention (%)	*	100	90
		Achievement (%)	*	100	87

Source: college

Note: ISR data were unreliable for 1997 and 1998; data are based on information obtained from college registers and awarding bodies

*course not running

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Support for Students

Grade 3

56 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report. The significance of some strengths had been overestimated, and some important weaknesses had been overlooked.

Key strengths

- efficient admissions and enrolment procedures
- effective induction procedures
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- good access to advice, information and welfare services for all students
- a careers service of very high quality

Weaknesses

- inconsistency in the achievement of students' tutorial entitlement
- inadequate measures for dealing with students' absence
- lack of strategies to address declining or erratic retention rates on some courses
- slow progress in resolution of childcare arrangements for students

57 The college has made significant progress in developing support for students since the last inspection. Many of these developments, however, are not clearly located within college-wide policies or strategies which recognise the diversity and differing needs of students. The college operates in a highly competitive environment, and now attracts students from across a wider geographical area than has previously been the case. Efforts to reach a more diverse clientele have been successful. A weekend college has been established, and community venues are used for some promotional events. Publicity materials do not reflect the age profile of the population.

58 Admissions and enrolment procedures operate efficiently, and students find staff helpful. Specialist advice is available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and there are comprehensive arrangements for accrediting prior learning. Induction procedures vary considerably across departments, but are effective in acclimatising most students to college life. Some part-time students are less well supported. Induction materials vary in quality.

59 Arrangements for identifying students' learning support needs are developing. The requirements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are quickly identified on their entry to college, and appropriate support is provided. The college has attempted to identify the impact of learning support on students' overall achievement, but the data are inconclusive. However, students generally feel that they have benefited. Although some students receive on-course assistance in developing IT skills, there is no college-wide approach to this matter. Help with study skills is given in a variety of ways: through the GCE A level tutorial programme; through on-course input by learning resources staff; and through a small-scale 'drop-in' facility in the learning resources centre. Students receiving this support value it highly. However, approximately 50% of the college's full-time students are not provided for in these ways. The college, which recognises the need to address this issue, did not acknowledge it in the self-assessment report.

60 Inspectors agreed that students have good access to information and advice services. Special provision is made for students who attend college in the evening. Enquiries are dealt with promptly, and there is an appointments system for students who need more in-depth consultation. There are clear procedures for dealing with students' applications for financial support. Personal support for both students and staff is available from a professionally qualified counsellor. A

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nurse provides information and advice on health issues. Performance standards are used effectively; there is a steady improvement in the quality of service to students. The college's careers service is of a high quality and recently achieved the Surrey Careers Libraries award. The service runs throughout the year and is open to the general public as well as to students. The careers staff contribute where appropriate to college courses, and operate an appointments system and a 'drop-in' facility. Staff from Surrey Careers Service provide supplementary support. Students speak highly of the help that they are given. The main careers software packages are available on 20 computers in the library, and effectively meet the needs of students who are undertaking independent research. Careers staff maintain a database of local employers to help teachers in the organisation of work placements.

61 Tutorial arrangements are very diverse. They meet many different needs but vary considerably in their effectiveness across the college. Since the last inspection, staff have undergone training relevant to their tutorial roles and twice-yearly quality audits have been introduced. Action-planning is not of a uniform standard and the college is overgenerous in the self-assessment of the quality of tutors' work. Levels of student satisfaction vary across the college. Some staff and students construe the term 'entitlement' as meaning that involvement in tutorials is not essential. Such ambiguity is a weakness which was not identified in the self-assessment report.

62 The college has installed an electronic register system, but this is not functioning properly. The procedure designed for following up absent students would, in any case, not come into operation until the student had been away from college for at least two weeks. Retention rates are declining or erratic on some courses. Although there have been some initiatives to support students who are at risk of leaving and some valuable work in support of inclusive

learning, the college has not made a concerted effort to improve retention through its support arrangements. This was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

63 The lack of childcare support for students was previously identified as a weakness. The college has made several attempts to address this matter, but with little success. A childcare bursary has been introduced, but students have little awareness of this opportunity, and the uptake is low. The college, which has recently established a trust fund to assist 16 to 18-year-old students with their travel costs, operates a courtesy bus service between the college and local stations. The students' union is an additional source of advice for students. The president, who is on sabbatical, serves as a college governor.

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General Resources

Grade 2

64 Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but not with the weightings accorded to some strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- an excellent learning resources centre
- a wide range of sporting and recreational facilities
- well-managed access to computers and independent learning resources
- overall improvements in the standard of accommodation
- a responsive and effective estates team

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory accommodation
- some unsuitable equipment
- the inappropriate use of some accommodation
- the slow implementation of some estate plans

65 Since the last inspection the college has consolidated its provision and expanded its accommodation on the colleges site at Ewell. Developments are in accordance with the college accommodation strategy which is strongly influenced by curriculum development plans. The campus occupies an area of 32 hectares, a considerable part of which is designated as greenbelt. There are extensive playing fields used mainly for soccer, rugby and cricket. Buildings range from the original 1950s brick structure, to the 1990 steel sports hall, and the more recent system structures. Different building designs and the location of reception at the north end of the site accentuate the impression of a sprawling campus. More recent building developments, however, especially on

the east side, give the site a more compact and accessible feel. The estate includes a hostel and leased training facilities in Epsom.

66 Phase one of the overall plan for the campus involved consolidation on one site which required the replacement of facilities at short notice. This phase included the building of: the construction craft workshops and laboratory facilities; the visual and performing arts building; and an integrated learning resources centre. Other more recent developments are the creation of the business centre and the refurbishment of science laboratories. These additions or improvements are of a good standard and have added to the quality of the learning environment. Unsatisfactory lighting for drawing was installed in the new visual and performing arts building. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Most staff have appropriate workrooms and access to computers. A few academic staff are located in areas that are separate from their teaching areas.

67 As noted in the self-assessment report the site is kept in good condition. Grounds which are maintained with the help of the horticultural section provide a pleasant setting for the college. Most of the annual maintenance plan is achieved although precise deadlines are often disrupted by the introduction of new curriculum initiatives such as the weekend college. Detailed planning is frequently thrown out of sequence by urgent problems to which the estates team responds rapidly. Pockets of unsatisfactory accommodation remain. For example, huts provide poor accommodation and have persistent heating problems.

68 The learning resources centre was opened in 1998 and is of an innovative design providing spacious and comfortable accommodation. The facilities offered provide and support a variety of valuable learning opportunities. The learning resources centre has 44,500 books and audiovisual materials in stock and 348 current

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subscriptions to journals. This whole provision is kept under review to ensure its appropriateness to the further education curriculum. A network of 60 workstations provides open-access IT, including office applications, Internet access and student electronic mail. A separate CD-ROM network provides access to major indexing and abstracting tools and the full text of several national newspapers. There are also large collections of multimedia materials and careers guidance software. The media workshop advises students on the use of equipment for presentations or for creating audiovisual projects. It also houses the college bookshop. The learning support team helps students with their literacy or numeracy difficulties and other specific learning difficulties, including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students.

69 The learning resources centre actively seeks the views of its customers, both staff and students. One outcome has been the reduction of time taken for students to obtain access to a computer. The college ratio of computers to students is 1:6. Students report easy access. They also record their high level of satisfaction with the service provided by the staff of the learning resources centre. Links with academic departments are enhanced by subject librarians who ensure that stock is up to date and meets the requirements of the curriculum. The helpdesk is particularly responsive to students' needs.

70 The college offers more sporting activities than is normally seen in colleges of this type. Inspectors agreed that this provision is a strength. Basketball is popular and there are regular team fixtures for soccer, rugby, cricket and netball. A large sports hall provides for many activities including roller hockey and pole-vaulting. The gymnasium is well equipped and reasonably priced for both student and corporate use. The facilities are well used by the local community. Access to local leisure centres is also available for students at a discount price to cater for provision not offered at the college.

71 There are no nursery facilities on site. Most of the site is accessible to all students with restricted mobility. All upper floors are accessible by lifts and all major entry points have level access. There are plans to install more electrically operated doors to make access easier. A recent report by RADAR indicates that improvements are needed in the newer buildings for those with sensory and other impairments.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

72 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional weaknesses. The college has taken some action to address the weaknesses since the report was written.

Key strengths

- a comprehensive framework for quality assurance
- the effective monitoring of quality
- a lesson observation scheme
- effective involvement of governors in monitoring standards
- good staff development

Weaknesses

- procedures not showing a positive impact in some areas
- insufficient use of retention and achievement data for self-assessment
- underdeveloped service standards for support areas

73 Since the last inspection, the college has made significant progress in improving quality assurance procedures. It has used the standards fund to address weaknesses in teaching and learning. The commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in the revised college mission statement, the strategic objectives and operating statements. There has

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been an extensive revision of quality procedures over the last 18 months which includes: procedures for self-assessment; lesson observation; student and staff surveys; and internal and external verification. The college acknowledged in its self-assessment report that its new quality improvement systems are not yet fully established throughout the college. The changes to the procedures have not demonstrated uniform, sustained improvements in students' retention and achievements.

74 Monitoring of the quality of the curriculum is effective. Quality issues are a regular agenda item at departmental meetings. The academic board provides the forum for detailed debate of quality assurance and planning activity. The academic standards subcommittee of the academic board meets termly to review the academic performance of courses as well as monitoring the self-assessment action plans. The Quality Improvement Steering and Monitoring Board, which includes members who are external to the organisation, oversees the operational direction of the quality improvement framework and monitors the self-assessment process. The corporation's committee for curriculum, standards and students matters has started to scrutinise retention and achievement data and to request action plans.

75 The college produced its third self-assessment in preparation for inspection. Judgements in the self-assessment report were made using the established system of course review, course data, information based upon lesson observations, and student and staff satisfaction surveys. They are grouped under the headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Data used in the self-assessment report were based on aggregated data that did not expose low achievement and retention rates on some courses. Consequently, some curriculum sections failed to identify weaknesses related to poor student retention and achievement rates. Some curriculum sections placed insufficient emphasis on weaknesses in teaching and learning. A more rigorous process of

self-assessment has been introduced and is half way through its first annual cycle. A more detailed analysis of retention and achievement data and performance against targets for retention, achievement and enrolment is included. Clear action plans are produced for different areas and are effectively monitored by managers.

76 Self-assessment contributes to strategic planning which is implemented through departmental operating plans. Strategic aims have measurable performance indicators. Action plans that result from self-assessment, strategic planning and departmental operating plans are integrated to produce a departmental action plan. Action plans and deadlines are clear and contain outcomes that can be measured. Staff responsibilities for the specific actions are well defined.

77 There is a programme of lesson observations, which has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching. Lesson observations are a requirement for all full-time staff. The percentage of good and outstanding lessons has risen from 42% to 67% since the last inspection and is now above the national average. The college has made progress towards setting targets for rates of retention and achievement. Target-setting for enrolment, retention and achievement takes place at course level and is monitored by each department. There has been an improvement in achievement and retention rates at levels 1 and 2 in the last three years. Retention at level 3 declined to below the national benchmark but has started to improve in the last year. Overall achievement rates for level 3 courses were significantly below the national benchmark for the last three years but have shown an increase in the last year. Although achievement rates on some GCE A level subjects have been identified as areas for improvement, a national agency's value-added system has been introduced recently as a means of providing achievement targets for individual GCE A level students, based on their GCSE grades.

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78 Staff development is good and is evaluated for its effectiveness for both individuals and the college. Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that the staff development plan is coherent. Staff speak highly of the support which they receive. Training needs are identified through 'job review and staff development interviews' and self-assessment procedures. The needs are significantly influenced by the requirements of the strategic plan. The effectiveness of the arrangements for these particular staff interviews is well documented. The whole process is regarded positively by staff. Job targets are reviewed and action plans prepared. Feedback from lesson observations are included in interviews for teaching staff. In addition, observations of staff working in learner support and guidance have recently been introduced. The college was awarded the Investor in People award in 1998 and underwent a successful annual review in 1999.

79 Inspectors agreed that service standards for support areas are underdeveloped. Draft standards with measurable performance indicators for the personnel services unit and the learning resources centre have been produced. There are plans to introduce standards for other support areas for implementation in July 2000. Annual service reviews are used during the preparation of the cross-college sections of the self-assessment report.

Governance

Grade 2

80 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's overall assessment of governance.

Key strengths

- effective oversight by governors of the character and direction of the college
- sound development by governors of self-assessment
- thorough induction and training of governors
- the effective initial impact of the corporation's committee on quality of provision
- the constructive partnership between governors and senior managers
- the effective administration of corporation and committee business

Weaknesses

- inadequate procedures for monitoring implementation of the strategic plan
- the inadequate monitoring role of the audit committee

81 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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.

82 The corporation board has 15 members. At the time of the inspection vacancies existed for one local authority governor and one community governor. The board includes two staff members and a student member. Governors bring a wide range of business, public sector and academic experience to the college, and have strong links in the locality. A

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new member to provide additional financial expertise is being sought. The board has a code of conduct, which embraces the Nolan committee's recommendations on openness and accountability. The clerk maintains an up-to-date register of governors' interests.

83 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the administration of corporation business is good. Each year governors approve a schedule of board and committee meetings. However, this schedule does not identify the key items of business for consideration at each meeting. Attendance at board meetings is good and averaged 86% for the 12 months prior to the inspection. Agendas, supporting papers and minutes are of a high standard; decisions are clearly recorded. A full clerking service is provided to all committees by the college secretary. The standard of clerkship is good. The clerk has a separate job description approved by the corporation and is appraised annually by the chair and vice-chair.

84 The corporation has six standing committees. The committees have adopted a 'reviewing and recommending' role in relation to the main board. All matters for decision are referred to the corporation for approval. The audit committee operates substantially in accordance with its terms of reference. However, the committee has not yet developed a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of recommendations arising from the internal audit process. The college's annual budget is considered by the finance and general purposes committee prior to being recommended to the corporation for approval. However, the latest three-year financial forecast was not subject to consideration by the corporation. Management accounts are also reviewed by the finance and general purposes committee, on a quarterly basis, prior to being referred to the board of the corporation for consideration.

85 In the last two years, governors have re-appraised the college's character and direction. There is now a clear vision of the college as a provider of both further and higher education. Governors are appropriately involved in the construction of the strategic plan to ensure that the new vision is realised. However, governors recognise, in their self-assessment report, the need for more detailed information at their meetings to enable them to monitor progress towards key objectives.

86 The changing culture within the college owes much to the positive partnership between the board and the new principal, who was appointed in 1997, and senior managers. This strength is not identified in the self-assessment report. Governors both support and, when appropriate, challenge the principal. The distinction between governance and management is understood and observed. The chair and vice-chair appraise the principal annually and their conclusions are used during the annual review of salary.

87 Over the last three years, governors have developed detailed criteria and procedures to assess their performance, individually and as a board. Their knowledge of the college has improved through a programme of curriculum area visits. The self-assessment report concludes that there is a good induction programme for new governors. Inspectors agreed. A handbook provides essential information, for example, the code of conduct, standing orders and details of personnel and equal opportunities policies. There has been a regular programme of training for governors. This has included preparation for their roles on committees, and led, for example, to a briefing on the college's finance systems. There are two seminars each year so that all governors have the chance to update themselves on current developments in education and training both locally and nationally.

Cross-college Provision

88 Another outcome of the self-assessment process was the decision taken in January 1999 to establish a new committee to oversee the quality of the college's provision. In addition to the monitoring of rates of student retention and achievement, the terms of reference require the committee to oversee the range of provision and the quality of students' experience at the college. So far, the committee has met three times. It has already taken steps to intervene where it found that standards of achievement or rates of retention were poor. Members required managers to produce an action plan to remedy a sharp decline in retention and achievement in GCE A level in 1999. The committee reported its findings to the full board which approved the recommended action. While it is too early to assess the long-term effectiveness of this committee, its prompt intervention and monitoring of required action constitute good practice and an emerging strength that was underestimated in the self-assessment report.

Management

Grade 2

89 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's overall assessment of management.

Key strengths

- effective leadership
- a clear management structure
- an effective consultative style of management
- well-managed market research
- an inclusive strategic planning process
- effective communication at all levels
- improvement of the college's financial health

Weaknesses

- inconsistency of student information data

90 Effective leadership over the last two years has brought about change in the management and culture of the college. A significant restructuring of management has been successfully completed. Firm measures have been taken to improve the college's financial health. The importance of the provision of further education as a major element of the college's activity has been reinforced. These achievements demonstrate a considerable improvement in management since the last inspection. The college is now an organisation more at ease with itself, benefiting from a unifying sense of purpose and direction. Managers have adopted an open and consultative style, a development welcomed by staff. Internal communication is effective. There are weekly management information bulletins. Five development days for all the college's staff provide opportunities for the managers to share substantial issues with all their colleagues.

91 The principal and senior managers maintain effective oversight of college activity through three key committees. The executive management group for academic matters comprises the principal and vice-principal, the heads of marketing, of learning resources, of departments, the academic registrar and, when appropriate, the head of quality improvement. It is the main forum for monitoring the quality of provision and student experience. The executive management group for support matters includes the principal and vice-principal, the heads of support units and the academic registrar. Its main focus is the operational management of the college. These two committees meet on alternate weeks. Minutes are clear, succinct and presented in a style which focuses on action and monitoring. Every two months, the two groups come together to consider strategic matters and to monitor progress in implementing the strategic plan.

Cross-college Provision

92 The relatively new structure has reduced the layers of management. Line management and decision-making are now more efficient. Heads of the four departments lead teams of curriculum area managers supported by course leaders. There are regular team meetings within each department. A general management forum chaired by the principal is effective in bringing together all middle managers of curriculum areas and support units with senior managers, and provides opportunities for the sharing of good practice.

93 Strategic planning involves governors, senior managers and all staff. This inclusive process is a strength that is identified in the self-assessment report. The overall strategic plan is implemented through operational and action plans for each academic department and support unit. An executive summary of the strategic plan is displayed throughout the college. Strategic planning is informed by effective and well-managed market research which has earned some impressive national awards. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment that marketing is good. The college uses varied and, at times, imaginative strategies to test the market. Subsequent promotional activity to widen participation has led to an increasing diversification of the student body. The launching of the weekend college has begun to address the needs of a largely commuting local community. The college has established significant partnerships with: international companies; TECs; other post-16 providers; higher education institutions; and Her Majesty's Prison service.

94 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the financial management of the college is good. Since the last inspection, the college has managed effectively the downward convergence of its average level of funding, from £22.70 for 1995-96 to £18.00 for 2000-01. The latest three-year financial forecast indicates that the

college will achieve the convergence target of £17.20 for 2001-02. The college has taken effective action to improve its financial performance and overall health in recent years, moving from an accumulated deficit of £1.1 million at 31 July 1996 to an accumulated surplus of £500,000 at 31 July 1999. This improvement has been achieved mainly through restructuring and estate rationalisation. Benchmarking exercises have been used to identify specific areas for efficiency savings, particularly in central services.

95 The college's income is obtained from a wide range of sources. Approximately one half of that income comes from activities that do not involve the FEFC. The college allocates resources to academic departments partly on the basis of their estimated income from the FEFC and other activities. However, the budget setting process for 1999-2000 was not well documented, particularly the methodology for the allocation of resources. The annual budget did not include the projected balance sheet and cashflow forecast for the year. Training has been provided for budget holders including training in the use of the college's financial accounting system. Financial reports are provided promptly each month to budget holders, senior management and governors. Budget holders also have online access to the financial accounting system. The financial reports for governors and senior managers are comprehensive, including a rolling cashflow forecast for 12 months ahead, and an analysis of performance against key financial indicators. Senior managers use these reports effectively to monitor the college's financial performance, including the achievement funding units of the FEFC and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The college has a wide-ranging set of financial regulations and procedures, which are updated at least annually. However, the financial regulations do not reflect fully the requirements contained in Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*.

Cross-college Provision

96 During 1998-99, the internal auditors reported significant weaknesses in the college's student record systems, which college managers have been addressing. Recent improvements in the college's information systems include online access to student information for all managers and to staff rooms. However, the college recognises in its self-assessment report that there is still a need for stricter measures to ensure consistency between data held in course registers and centrally.

97 The college has strengthened the monitoring of its equal opportunities policy. There is training to raise staff awareness and reports are provided for senior managers and the corporation. All self-assessment reports are expected to address issues of equal opportunities. Personnel and health and safety procedures are regularly updated.

Conclusions

98 The self-assessment report prepared by the college was comprehensive and formed a useful basis for planning and conducting the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified but also identified additional ones. At the time of inspection action to rectify some of the identified weaknesses had already been taken and other weaknesses were being addressed. Inspectors agreed with three of the curriculum grades awarded by the college but found that one curriculum area had been under-graded and three areas had been over-graded. Two of the cross-college areas were also found to be over-graded.

99 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)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	39
19-24 years	17
25+ years	44
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	26
Level 2 (intermediate)	31
Level 3 (advanced)	36
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Non-schedule 2	2
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	281	367	19
Agriculture	114	172	9
Construction	202	382	17
Engineering	53	70	4
Business	196	275	14
Hotel and catering	62	21	2
Health and community care	119	201	10
Art and design	228	156	12
Humanities	173	221	12
Basic education	5	38	1
Total	1,433	1,903	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 9% 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)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	148	53	0	201
Supporting direct learning contact	41	0	0	41
Other support	153	0	8	161
Total	342	53	8	403

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£15,633,000	£14,965,000	£14,270,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£21.74	£21.74	£19.61*
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	64%	65%
Achievement of funding target	95%	102%	100%
Diversity of income	50%	44%	50%
Operating surplus	£682,000	£681,000	£323,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

*provisional data

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	113	374	564	261	699	820
	Retention (%)	76	79	84	80	84	90
	Achievement (%)	43	34	60	73	45	70
2	Number of starters	799	898	846	375	384	496
	Retention (%)	66	67	75	61	74	83
	Achievement (%)	43	60	69	66	58	77
3	Number of starters	1,625	1,451	1,480	882	594	693
	Retention (%)	85	66	69	83	75	80
	Achievement (%)	52	59	57	54	51	57
4 or 5	Number of starters	14	9	3	424	379	337
	Retention (%)	71	67	100	81	76	82
	Achievement (%)	100	83	0	63	57	76
Short courses	Number of starters	714	474	252	2,490	1,825	1,092
	Retention (%)	77	65	85	89	84	91
	Achievement (%)	55	50	45	65	53	79
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	236	480	715	1,087	1,587	1,814
	Retention (%)	91	93	92	92	92	95
	Achievement (%)	45	53	80	52	51	86

Source: ISR

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