

Northbrook College, Sussex

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

Northbrook College, Sussex

South East Region

Inspected November 1999

Northbrook College, Sussex is a large general further education college located in and around Worthing in West Sussex. Inspectors used an updated version of the college's second self-assessment report in the planning of their inspection. The self-assessment process involved teachers at all levels and to a lesser extent non-teaching staff. Some judgements in the report were not substantiated by clear evidence. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. They considered that some strengths had been overstated, however, and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded lower grades to two curriculum areas and one cross-college area, than those given by the college.

The college provides courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. It also offers a significant number of higher education courses, and is a major provider of adult education in Sussex. Provision in six programme areas as well as all cross-college areas were inspected. Since the last inspection, there have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements. These have been supported by an effective cycle of course review and lesson

observation. The college has also made good progress in the support provided for students and in improving the quality of its libraries and computing facilities. The standard of accommodation varies considerably. Governors have been effective in helping to ensure the financial stability of the college, but they failed to follow correct procedures when reappointing six governors. They have not given sufficient attention to filling governor vacancies and to the monitoring of student retention rates and achievement. College management has improved since the last inspection. A new management structure is working well and the deployment of teachers is good. Communication is good at all levels in the college. The college should improve: student retention rates; the quality and availability of management information data for curriculum managers; target-setting and the identification of performance indicators; procedures for the appointment and reappointment of governors; monitoring of students' performance by governors; tutorial provision on some courses and for part-time students; accommodation at the central Worthing campus; and access to computers for all teachers.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	2	Support for students	2
Business studies	2	General resources	3
Hospitality and catering	1	Quality assurance	2
Childcare	3	Governance	4
English and modern foreign languages	3	Management	2
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Northbrook College, Sussex is a large general further education college in and around Worthing, West Sussex. The college was formed in 1986 following the merger of Worthing College of Technology, West Sussex College of Design, and Chelsea College of Aeronautical Engineering. The college also offers courses in Horsham, Shoreham, Southwick, and Brighton. It is responsible for prison education at Her Majesty's Prison Ford, and offers the largest programme of adult education in Sussex. The college recruits the majority of its students from a wide area of east and west Sussex with many coming from beyond Brighton and Hove in the east and Portsmouth in the west. The college recruits nationally for some of its courses especially those in aeronautical engineering, textiles and menswear design. The college has also recruited motor vehicle students from Portugal for many years.

2 The greater Worthing area has a population of about 100,000. A number of major national and international companies have administrative and manufacturing centres in the area. The college has good and productive links with all these companies. The majority of local businesses are small, and three-quarters of them employ five people or fewer. Whilst Worthing has been identified as the most commercially profitable town in the country, it contains areas of deprivation with one council ward being among the top 10% of deprived localities in the country. The post-16 staying on rate exceeds 80% and unemployment in the area is low, at about 2.7%.

3 The college offers courses in all 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas ranging from foundation to advanced level in most areas. It also offers a broad range of higher education programmes including those leading to honours degrees. Courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided through a variety of

full-time and part-time programmes in partnership with public and voluntary organisations, such as the Department for Social Services and Mind. The majority of further education courses offered by the college lead to vocational qualifications. The number of students progressing to higher education has increased steadily in recent years. Many students achieve entrance to higher education by obtaining vocational qualifications or through successful completion of an access course.

4 In 1998-99, almost 2,100 full-time and 8,600 part-time further education students attended the college. In addition, the college had 570 higher education, and 11,500 adult education students. There are four 11 to 18 schools in Worthing and within 30 miles there are 11 further education and sixth form colleges. The college operates in a highly competitive environment. Since 1996, however, it has increased its recruitment of both full-time and part-time students and has developed and maintained close collaborative links with local schools and the colleges in East and West Sussex, and Brighton and Hove. Examples of collaboration include an agreement with Worthing Sixth Form College to develop a range of courses without unnecessary duplication, partnership agreements with the five local 11 to 16 schools, and regular contact with the four 11 to 18 schools. The college has a collaboration agreement with all the further education colleges in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove to share information, good practice and to discuss issues of common concern. Developments include provision of training through a computerised system and an advanced on-line computer integrated manufacturing system. The college has a progression agreement for students with the three local higher education institutions.

Context

5 The college's mission is 'to serve the community by assisting individuals to develop their capabilities throughout their lives by providing high-quality opportunities for learning which are relevant and appropriate to their individual needs and to the needs of employers'.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 29 November 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the self-assessment report and considered information from other directorates of the FEFC. The college provided data on students' achievements for 1999 for the curriculum areas inspected. Inspectors checked these data against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. They found some data to be unreliable. These data have not been included in the tables that accompany the curriculum sections of this report. The college's data for 1999 and the

individualised student record (ISR) data for 1997 and 1998 were used to compile the tables in the curriculum area reports, except for data on engineering courses, which were unreliable. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 47 days. They observed lessons, evaluated students' work and scrutinised college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, other college staff, and students.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 71 lessons observed, 78% were judged to be good or outstanding and only one lesson was less than satisfactory. These proportions are significantly higher than the averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	2	1	0	0	3
GCSE	0	1	0	0	0	1
GNVQ	2	6	2	0	0	10
NVQ	5	6	1	0	0	12
Other vocational	8	16	10	0	0	34
Other	4	5	1	1	0	11
Total (No.)	19	36	15	1	0	71
Total (%)	27	51	21	1	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*

Context

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Northbrook College, Sussex	11.8	77
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

Engineering

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 11 aeronautical and motor vehicle engineering lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- well-managed courses
- good specialist engineering equipment
- high pass rates on most courses
- well-established employer links
- updating of teachers' industrial experience

Weaknesses

- poor use of practical equipment in some theory lessons
- poor assessment criteria on some motor vehicle courses
- insufficient assessment opportunities for some aeronautical students

10 Aeronautical and motor vehicle engineering courses are offered at the college's campus at Shoreham airport. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the college offers a wide range of courses, from national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 to higher national diploma, in both areas of work. The main aeronautical engineering course leads to the Civil Aviation Authority licence-without-type qualification. The college has recently introduced a course leading to an NVQ in aircraft maintenance. A wide range of courses is also available for motor vehicle students. The curriculum is well managed. Detailed programme handbooks that include schemes of work and lesson plans, are produced for each course. Course teams meet regularly. Meetings

are carefully minuted and progress in following up action points is monitored at subsequent meetings.

11 Teaching was good or outstanding in almost three-quarters of the lessons observed. Lessons are well planned. In many lessons, teachers used motor vehicle or aeronautical components to illustrate the theory being taught. In one outstanding lesson, the work carried out during the term on the theory of flight and flight controls was reviewed. Students were divided into two teams for a quiz and each student asked a member of the opposing team a question. Points were awarded for correct answers. The students found the quiz stimulating and the teacher offered them constant encouragement. Difficult concepts were taught by asking the students carefully structured questions. Each student was required to summarise the main points in each answer. By contrast, in a minority of lessons, teachers failed to maintain the interest of students and they did not check that students understood what they were being taught. For example, in a lesson on the laws of friction, the teacher attempted to demonstrate the difference between static and dynamic friction. A poor handout was given out, no use was made of resources to illustrate the concepts, and the teacher did not check students' understanding.

12 Students demonstrate good levels of skill and understanding in their practical work. Their progress in achieving competencies is carefully recorded. Practical work is made more difficult progressively in order that students can build up their confidence to undertake more demanding tasks. Insufficient assessment opportunities for students on aeronautical engineering and poor assessment criteria for automotive engineering assignments were not identified as weaknesses by the college in its self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

13 Only a few students are registered as having achieved qualifications. Before students may take the licence-without-type examination, they must be 20 and have completed a period of relevant work. From the college's records, it is not clear how many students on these courses obtained their qualifications. In order to ascertain the extent of students' achievements, inspectors drew on data from end-of-year course reviews. They agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that student retention and achievement rates are above the average for the sector. Over the past three years, student achievement rates on most courses have improved. The retention rate on the national diploma in motor vehicle engineering has fallen over the last three years, but at 70% in 1999, is still above the national average. Students' achievements have risen slightly over the same period to reach 69%. The student achievement rate on the licence-without-type course has been above 90% in each of the last two years. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that the low retention rate of 50% on this course in 1999 was a weakness. The student achievement rate on the vehicle body course in 1999 was good at 80%. In 1999, the students' overall achievement on the NVQ motor vehicle course at level 2 was low at 54% in 1999, but the achievement rate on the level 3 course was good at 75%.

14 The practical workshops are of industrial standard. They are well equipped with up-to-date specialist equipment including a good range of modern cars and aircraft. Two aircraft are maintained in an airworthy condition. The large workshops are clean and maintained to a high standard. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the quality of specialist equipment is a strength. There is a specialist library with up-to-date books, journals, CD-ROMs, and Internet access. Teachers are

well qualified and have a good range of specialist skills. Most teachers have recently taken up opportunities to update their industrial experience. Where appropriate, teachers have achieved relevant assessor and verifier qualifications.

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

15 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at advanced level, the Cambridge business skills course and a range of professional and management programmes. Inspectors mainly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, but they found some weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and learning
- well-managed courses
- students' good achievement rates
- good use of information technology (IT)
- strong emphasis on key skills
- effective tutorials for full-time students
- some excellent learning materials

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses
- some low recruitment to general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GNVQ courses

16 The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time business courses. These include courses in GCE A level business studies and GNVQ business at advanced level, secretarial and business administration, IT courses with a strong emphasis on the world of employment, professional and management programmes, the higher national diploma/certificate in business studies, and a course leading to a degree in marketing and design validated by the Open University. Increasingly, students progress to higher education courses. This year, there has been poor recruitment to the business studies GCE A level and the course leading to GNVQ business at advanced level. The range of

courses attracts students aged 16 to 19, and many mature students from different backgrounds. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the curriculum is well managed and that course assessment and administration are effective.

17 Two-thirds of teaching observed was good or better. All lessons are well planned and enthusiastically taught. Teachers have lesson plans and they share the aims and objectives of each lesson with students. They use a wide variety of appropriate teaching methods, including the use of video programmes, group work, self-assessment tests and personal tutorial support and these sustain the students' interest. In one outstanding lesson, a video film was used effectively and this portrayed three different types of management style. The students then discussed the different styles and identified the extent to which they involved effective communication skills and furthered good industrial relations. The students' interest was held through good questioning. The students provided good answers, often drawing on their own work experience. They were also made to justify their views on the most effective management style. In most lessons, students were encouraged to participate in discussion. In a few instances, however, the teacher failed to draw all students into the discussion or challenge them to explore their ideas in depth. Inspectors agreed that the students' development of key skills is a strength. Students are assessed at intervals during their course, and are regularly informed about the progress they have made. They benefit from the individual attention given them by teachers and from good tutorial support. In some instances, lesson time was not used well. Students undertook tasks which were more appropriate for private study and opportunities to extend students' learning were missed. Students' attendance in a few lessons was poor.

Curriculum Areas

18 Students' work is of an appropriate standard and some is of particularly good quality. Only a limited amount of marked and assessed work on professional courses, however, was made available to inspectors. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students' achievements have improved in the last three years and that those on accountancy and management programmes are often well above the national average for the sector. Student achievement rates on the Association of Accounting Technicians foundation course improved from 29% in 1997, to 71% in 1999. At intermediate level achievement rates have risen to 69%, well above the national average. Retention and achievement rates on other professional and management programmes, such as the Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants foundation and certificate programmes are excellent and in 1999, they have improved to 91% and 88%, respectively. Student retention and achievement rates on GNVQ, GCE A level and Cambridge certificate courses have also improved. Achievement rates on the one-year GNVQ advanced course are just above the national average. The poor recruitment to some of these courses this year is recognised by the college as having implications for the college's chances of success in fulfilling its objectives to offer a broad range of provision with progression to higher education programmes at the college.

19 The learning resources for business courses are good and some are excellent. A major investment programme has led to a significant improvement in IT resources. The recent networking of these resources and the acquisition of Internet facilities have further enhanced the level of resources available to business students. Teachers produce a variety of good-quality learning materials for each course. The range of learning resources in the library is good, though some books are out of date.

Curriculum Areas

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
Association of Accounting Technicians foundation	2	Number of starters	42	71	52
		Retention (%)	67	82	86
		Achievement (%)	29	90	71
GCE A level accounting	3	Number of starters	*	31	36
		Retention (%)	*	32	75
		Achievement (%)	*	10	74
GNVQ advanced business studies (including Fastrack)	3	Number of starters	63	34	35
		Retention (%)	44	47	57
		Achievement (%)	64	63	60
Association of Accounting Technicians intermediate	3	Number of starters	62	70	56
		Retention (%)	81	49	73
		Achievement (%)	40	79	54
Supervisory management	3	Number of starters	*	30	22
		Retention (%)	*	77	82
		Achievement (%)	*	87	72
Diploma in management	4	Number of starters	*	14	17
		Retention (%)	*	100	70
		Achievement (%)	*	100	91
Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants foundation	4	Number of starters	38	31	36
		Retention (%)	61	90	69
		Achievement (%)	*	100	91
Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants certificate	4	Number of starters	30	25	17
		Retention (%)	87	88	100
		Achievement (%)	50	67	88

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

*courses did not recruit

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 1

20 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in hospitality and catering. The self-assessment report was comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses it identified.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- high levels of students' achievements
- well-developed and ably managed courses
- opportunities for students to work towards a wide range of additional qualifications
- good progression routes for students

Weaknesses

- the poor quality of some catering equipment

21 The college offers a good range of hospitality and catering courses which provides good progression opportunities and meets individual students' needs. Courses range from foundation to advanced level and include NVQ at levels 1 and 2 for both part-time and full-time students and GNVQ intermediate and advanced. Full-time students are also able to obtain additional qualifications including basic and advanced pastry, wine and spirit and food hygiene qualifications as part of their course. Part-time students may also work for these qualifications. The college has recently been approved as a centre for NVQ level 3 in food preparation.

22 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that courses are well managed. Learning programmes are well planned to have clear outcomes and meet high standards. Course teams meet regularly to discuss course organisation, student attendance,

retention and achievement rates. Meetings are carefully minuted and action points are followed up. Internal verification procedures and the recording of students' achievements are good.

23 The quality of teaching and learning was good or outstanding in all the lessons observed. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that lessons were well planned with clearly defined objectives. Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to develop and maintain students' interest. Teachers frequently refer to current practice in the catering industry and also include examples from their own industrial experience. All full-time students undertake industrial experience during their course which heightens their awareness of current issues and the need to work accurately and at speed. During their work experience, students gather evidence of working practices to use when they return to college. In lessons, teachers encourage the students to draw upon their placement experiences. The college invites speakers from local and national companies to stimulate further the interests of students. In an outstanding practical lesson, students were required to prepare, cook and present dishes that would appear on the restaurant menu later that week. After an introduction, the students worked in pairs preparing the dishes. While these were cooking the students watched a video on preparing a turkey. The teacher then demonstrated the principles seen on the video until the cooking was complete. The lesson was well planned. The teacher held the students' interest during the three-hour session by using a variety of appropriate teaching styles and frequently checked that the students understood what they were being taught. The lesson was successful in enabling students to build on, and extend, the skills learnt in previous lessons, and in preparing them for demanding tasks they would carry out later in the week.

Curriculum Areas

24 The standard of students' assignment work on GNVQ programmes is good and students' portfolios are well presented. A programme of assessments is agreed to ensure that students are not overburdened at peak times during the year. Assessments and assignments are well marked and teachers give students clear information about how to improve their work. Many students achieve the main qualification for which they are aiming. Most students are enrolled on NVQ level 2 courses. Retention rates on these courses have been very good in each of the last three years and have not fallen below 70%. Students' achievements on these courses are outstanding with 100% pass rates in the last two years. The achievement rate on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced programme has also been 100% in the last two years. At the beginning of the year, students from the college were involved in preparing luncheon for the Queen who was on a visit to Sussex.

25 Teachers are appropriately qualified and have a good range of industrial experience. The college has good realistic working environments in which to train students. Facilities include a well-equipped coffee shop, public restaurant and bar, and two production kitchens. Some large kitchen equipment is now old and is in need of replacement. The teaching accommodation is good and is well maintained. There is a learning area where catering and hospitality students can work on their own. This learning area contains good learning materials and it is well equipped with computers. Students use these resources effectively to carry out theory work for each course element, and to gather evidence of their attainment of competences for the purposes of NVQ assessment. The library, identified as a weakness at the last inspection, now has a good range of learning materials for staff and students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ food preparation and cooking	1	Number of starters	33	37	40
		Retention (%)	91	73	75
		Achievement (%)	87	100	100
NVQ food and drink service	1	Number of starters	32	49	39
		Retention (%)	88	100	79
		Achievement (%)	93	100	100
NVQ food and preparation and cooking	2	Number of starters	22	33	21
		Retention (%)	86	94	71
		Achievement (%)	68	100	100
NVQ food and drink service	2	Number of starters	19	23	11
		Retention (%)	95	100	91
		Achievement (%)	94	100	100
GNVQ intermediate hospitality and catering	2	Number of starters	*	5	4
		Retention (%)	*	60	100
		Achievement (%)	*	100	100
GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering	3	Number of starters	12	9	4
		Retention (%)	83	78	50
		Achievement (%)	90	100	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 3

26 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in childcare. They agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They found some additional strengths, and considered that some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- well-planned and ably taught courses
- valuable links with employers
- good opportunities for progression
- students' high achievement rates on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate course

Weaknesses

- failure to make key skills an integral part of content on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education courses
- poor retention on one BTEC course
- students' poor achievements on the BTEC national diploma

27 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time childcare courses from NVQ level 2 to 4. They include the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education courses, and BTEC national award courses. Enrolments have increased on all courses. The experienced teaching teams have strong links with the local childcare and education providers, and social services through which they are able to organise students' work experience. The college is a member of the local childcare network. The courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly and carry out quality assurance activities. Course leaders have developed their role to include some managerial responsibilities and one teacher represents the team on the academic board quality team. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge as

a strength, the encouragement teachers give students to express their views on the quality of their courses and the college's provision. The representation of students on course review teams and the forum for childcare students is welcomed.

28 Teaching is well planned to comply with awarding body requirements and to meet the needs of students. Initial diagnostic testing identifies students' potential learning difficulties and preferred learning styles. Teachers attempt to take these into account when planning lessons and activities. Students are familiar with this method of planning and some use a similar technique in their work with children. In the better lessons, teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods and give students a suitable diversity of learning tasks to meet their needs. In one lesson, students experimented with 10 different painting techniques. Working in pairs, they prepared the materials with one technique and tried out the others. There followed a lively discussion about the appropriateness of each technique for different ages and abilities of children. Students learnt quickly and demonstrated good theoretical understanding. Students benefit from the vocational experience of teachers. In all the lessons observed, teachers drew on examples from the workplace and these helped the students to relate theory to practice. In the poorer lessons, students were not challenged to think and use their skills to the full. They lost interest and were easily distracted. Although courses include practical work, practical activities in college are severely restricted by inappropriate classroom design and overcrowding, but this weakness is understated in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education courses do not develop their key skills sufficiently.

Curriculum Areas

29 For the last two years, students' achievements on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate courses have been about 20% above the national average for the sector. In contrast, students' achievements on the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing course fell below the national average in 1999. Students' low retention rates are a weakness recognised by the college. Last year, almost half the students on the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing course left before completing their studies. Measures have been introduced in an attempt to improve retention rates, including probationary periods for students and more guidance and advice for them during initial interviews and induction. For the last three years, targets have been set for student retention and achievement rates. Students' portfolio work are of an appropriate standard and assessment and verification are comprehensively carried out. There are clear guidelines for assessment and students' progress is closely monitored. Students' work displayed in the teaching areas is colourful and well presented. Students demonstrate a high level of competence in their work experience placements and are well regarded by the employers. Students undertake a range of childcare experiences, including, until this year, work experience abroad. Many students progress to higher courses and employment. In 1999, 71% of students on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate course progressed to the diploma programmes, and all students on the diploma course progressed to higher education or employment. This strength was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students work for a range of additional qualifications such as those in paediatric first aid, health and safety and basic food hygiene.

30 The library provides an appropriate range of books and journals, but many students choose to use the well-resourced learning area. There is a good range of educational equipment for practical sessions and sufficient toys and craft

materials for use on the course. Teachers are well qualified and suitably experienced in a range of child-related professions. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement in the self-assessment report that students benefit from the services of part-time teachers and visiting speakers who are practitioners in the profession and have up-to-date knowledge of developments in the world of work.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate	2	Number of starters	*	16	30
		Retention (%)	*	100	93
		Achievement (%)	*	100	93
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education Diploma in Nursery Nursing (National Nursery Examinations Board)	3	Number of starters	36	33	26
		Retention (%)	75	61	73
		Achievement (%)	63	95	84
BTEC national diploma in childhood studies	3	Number of starters	63	35	38
		Retention (%)	78	80	59
		Achievement (%)	91	88	83
BTEC national certificate in childhood studies	3	Number of starters	*	15	21
		Retention (%)	*	93	75
		Achievement (%)	*	86	87

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 3

31 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in English, English as a foreign language (EFL) and modern foreign languages. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- good results on general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses in English, German and Russian
- good retention rates on most courses
- the opportunity for all full-time students to study a foreign language

Weaknesses

- lack of rigour in the review of quality of some modern foreign language courses
- poor retention rates on GCE A level English and some National Open College Network (NOCN) courses
- poor pass rates on GCE A level French and English and some EFL courses

32 The college offers GCE A level courses in English, French, Italian and Spanish. There is a range of GCSE and NOCN modern foreign languages and EFL courses at levels 1 to 3. Almost all students on these courses are adults, attending part time, although some full-time students study these subjects. The self-assessment report does not acknowledge as a strength, the opportunity offered to students to include a foreign language as part of their programme of study. A large number of students attend EFL courses.

33 The English and languages sections are located within the division of business management and computing. The management of courses is effective. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that schemes of work prepared for the courses need further development. This is particularly true in modern foreign languages, where many schemes contain very little detail. They do not include detailed information on the resources to be used or indicate the expected learning outcomes.

34 Teaching in most lessons was good. In EFL and modern foreign language lessons, the language being taught was the principal means of communication. Most students participated effectively in discussions and other activities. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that lessons are well planned and teaching materials are of a good quality. In the better lessons, teachers' expectations of the students are high. Teachers use a range of appropriate teaching methods to stimulate and sustain students' interest and students often work in groups and pairs. In one EFL lesson, for example, the teacher explained how to give advice in English and then handed out a sheet listing related practical tasks. The students were then divided into four groups and each group practised giving advice, with the teacher circulating to give help, encouragement and support. If a group completed the tasks quickly, it was given more problems to deal with. Students then listened to a tape recording of more problems and of advice on how to solve them and they discussed this. Finally, students worked in pairs on a few more problems. The lesson was conducted with great humour and it captivated the students' interest. In some lessons, teachers do not always check that students have understood what is being taught. Some teachers do not make sure students have mastered new vocabulary and they do not correct poor pronunciation. In some lessons, teachers do not ensure that all students are

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drawn into class discussion and are encouraged to contribute to it. Students' written work is of an appropriate standard. It is marked carefully and returned to students with helpful comments.

35 Most retention rates are good. Retention rates on GCE A level French and on most GCSE courses are considerably higher than national averages for the sector. On some EFL courses they are also well above national averages. For example, on the preliminary and key English test courses, retention has been above 90% in the last two years, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. The proportions of students who gain grade C or above in GCSE English, German and Russian are high. The pass rates in GCE A level English and French have, however, been below the national average for the last three years. The proportions of students who achieve qualifications on the NOCN courses in modern languages and EFL courses are sometimes low, but many of the students completing these courses choose not to take the examination.

36 Teachers are well qualified. There is no language laboratory in the college and no satellite facility to record off-air programmes from other countries. However, students have access to well-resourced learning areas, where they can use a range of CD-ROMs, videos and cassettes. Students also have access to the Internet. There is a good range of books in the college libraries, but an insufficient number of current magazines in foreign languages. The quality of classrooms is satisfactory, but wall displays in some are uninspiring.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and modern foreign languages, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE modern foreign languages	2	Number of starters	36	72	66
		Retention (%)	81	74	77
		Achievement (%)	64	55	80
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	66	46	52
		Retention (%)	80	74	68
		Achievement (%)	74	58	59
GCE A level modern foreign languages	3	Number of starters	30	12	20
		Retention (%)	96	67	60
		Achievement (%)	24	38	75
GCE A level English	3	Number of starters	112	58	36
		Retention (%)	63	66	64
		Achievement (%)	53	65	57

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

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Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

37 Inspectors observed 11 lessons for both full-time and part-time students. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- some outstanding teaching
- individual programmes matched to students' needs
- a wide range of appropriate and accredited modular programmes
- well-managed and well-integrated work experience
- clear progression routes for students

Weaknesses

- retention for 16 to 19 programme below the national average
- some undeveloped schemes of work
- narrow range of specialist IT software

38 The range of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The work is well managed. Teachers have good links with the careers service and other external agencies and these help them to be responsive to students' needs. The college offers a programme of 'extended education' and link courses to enable students to progress smoothly from a residential environment to college.

39 Teachers identify students' learning needs through effective initial and subsequent assessment. They devise individual learning programmes for students that have clear, achievable goals. Students are able to take modular programmes to meet their individual

needs. Vocational options have been developed to improve students' access and progression to mainstream courses.

40 Most teaching was good or outstanding, especially in practical lessons which were often taken by vocational teachers. In some lessons, however, the teacher had not shared the lesson plan with the class assistant. Lessons are well planned. They have clear aims and objectives appropriate to students' needs. Some schemes of work were more detailed and better developed than others. Most showed differentiation of tasks and activities, however, to suit the range of students' abilities and aptitude. Teachers use a range of appropriate teaching and learning methods that take account of students' interests and individual needs. Learning materials are adapted to meet each students' requirements. Students' work is assessed through a variety of methods including observations and photographic evidence.

41 In one lesson in which students were learning about general care for babies, a student from another course brought along her baby to demonstrate the practical aspects of feeding and changing. Students had the opportunity to practise aspects of childcare on the baby. The teacher made a range of equipment available to the students which they enjoyed using. The students were absorbed in the lesson. It extended their knowledge and provided them with opportunities to acquire and develop new skills. In another lesson, in which students were learning to budget and develop numeracy skills, the teacher made decorating a bedroom the context for learning. Good use was made of materials such as colour charts and catalogues. Students were engaged in activities that built upon their experiences and previous work to strengthen and develop their numeracy skills.

42 There is a low teacher to student ratio. Tutors provide individual students with good support. Careers advice has helped students to make career choices. Tutorials are well

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structured and are used effectively. During tutorials, students receive help and support and their progress is reviewed. Former students are invited to talk to students about their employment experiences. Most students increase their self-confidence and develop skills of self-reliance.

43 Students have the opportunity to attend residential periods during their courses when they strengthen their knowledge gained in class and further their personal development. Students told inspectors that they valued their residential and work experience. Students are found work placements that suit their individual ability and help to extend their learning. Students work in realistic work environments, including the college coffee shop, and are introduced to work experience and health and safety through the use of videos.

44 The college provided inspectors with student retention, achievement and destination data in various forms during the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that student retention and achievement rates are high on adult courses, but not with the college's judgement that they are good on programmes for students aged 16 to 19. Retention rates on these programmes for the last two years were 79% and 77%, respectively, below the national average for the sector. Many students progress to mainstream courses and a small proportion take up employment.

45 Teachers are suitably experienced. Several have assessor and verifier awards and some specialist qualifications. Vocational teachers although appropriately qualified did not have a specialist qualification in this area of work. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that some of the teaching accommodation at the Broadwater site is of poor quality. The substantial growth in the use of computers has not been matched by an increase in the range of appropriate IT software. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

46 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some were understated and others were overstated.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry guidance and admissions process
- flexibly arranged and effective provision of learning support services
- good professional counselling and welfare unit
- contribution of the nursery to widening participation
- strong links with specialist agencies

Weaknesses

- poor tutorial support in some areas
- underdeveloped system for support and guidance of part-time students
- insufficient use of hard data to evaluate effectiveness of provision

47 Since the last inspection, the college has made progress in increasing the level of support offered to students. In its strategic plan and operating statement, the college stresses the importance of guidance and support in improving students' attendance, retention and achievements. Potential students are able to obtain information about the college's courses through a wide range of sources. Open days are well attended and help potential students to make decisions about which course to choose. Many of them and, where appropriate, their parents make appointments to come and obtain further information. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that enquiries are handled promptly and efficiently. Helpful and well-informed receptionists greet

visitors to the college. The admissions process is thorough and guidance is impartial. Advice and guidance officers work closely with divisions and maintain contact with applicants up to the time of enrolment. Most applicants are clear about the demands of courses prior to enrolment.

48 Staff have good relationships with local schools and attend their parents' and careers events where they are able to speak to pupils. Through the efforts and activities of the curriculum links co-ordinator, teachers in local schools have a better knowledge and understanding of the college's programmes for disaffected pupils. The number of pupils attending 'taster' courses has increased dramatically. All courses start with an induction period. This helps students to understand the requirements of their course and familiarise them with college life. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, induction varies considerably in scope and effectiveness and is often inadequate for students who enrol late and those who enrol on part-time courses.

49 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that learning support is available on all college sites. The number of students receiving support has increased considerably since the last inspection. The college has carried out an analysis of the impact of learning support for students. Findings from this indicate that where learning support is effective, retention rates have improved. The college has not, however, extended this analysis across the whole college or taken these findings sufficiently into account in planning action for the further improvement of services to students. Learning support is adapted to meet the needs of students in relation to their course, and is provided in the most convenient location for them. The learning support team responds quickly to new referrals. It has excellent links with a wide range of specialist services. The team is well qualified to help students with dyslexia. Support for students with physical and sensory impairments is well organised.

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50 It is college policy that every student should have a personal tutor to monitor progress and be the first point of call for support and guidance. Handbooks provide broad guidelines to help tutors implement this policy. There is much good tutorial practice in all divisions. For example, in the division of health, hospitality and leisure, a tutorial programme has been devised with accompanying schemes of work covering both individual and group tutorials. Programme managers monitor issues arising from tutorials carefully. A record of individual tutorials is agreed and a copy given to the student. Progress on action arising from the tutorials is reviewed at the next tutorial session. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that tutorial support is not provided with consistent thoroughness and effectiveness on all courses and that arrangements for the support and guidance of part-time students are underdeveloped. Plans to establish a post for a central co-ordinator to monitor performance and promote good practice are being considered. The careers education programme has developed over the past four years, but is not effective in all parts of the college. Careers materials are improving and more students are using the job search programme. The college's involvement in the process of applying for the Investor in Careers award has helped staff to raise their awareness of the importance of careers education and to identify strengths in the current careers education programme.

51 A counselling and welfare team provides a high standard of service to students and staff. Careful records are kept which indicate increasing demand for the service. Increasingly, some students need help with complex and difficult problems. The college is able to call upon good specialist medical services for those students who need them. The team is not able to use management information to monitor whether recipients of the service successfully complete their course. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that

the counselling and welfare team is well regarded throughout the college. The nursery caters for two to five year olds. Although open to the general public, it provides mainly for the children of staff and students. The college does its best to help students in financial need by providing them with assistance from the hardship and access funds.

General Resources

Grade 3

52 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report about general resources. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- sound estates planning
- good quality of the newer buildings
- well-planned buildings maintenance
- good computing facilities for students
- well-managed libraries
- innovative learning areas

Weaknesses

- some poor-quality accommodation
- poor utilisation of teaching accommodation
- inadequate social areas for students
- inaccessibility of some accommodation to students with physical disabilities
- insufficient access to computers for teachers

53 The college operates from four main sites in Worthing and Shoreham and two smaller sites in nearby Horsham. The main campus, West Durrington, is on an attractive 24-acre site to the west of Worthing. The buildings were constructed between 1981 and 1990. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that this

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accommodation is good. In contrast, the buildings on the Broadwater site, close to Worthing town centre, are mostly old-fashioned and date from the early 1900s, although there is one modern two-storey block. At Union Place, a 1930s art school, library block and temporary buildings, are used largely for art and design. A Victorian house is used for adult education. The Shoreham Airport site comprises engineering workshops, a classroom block and prefabricated offices. Art and design courses are based at the Horsham sites.

54 The self-assessment report recognises that the quality of accommodation varies markedly. Successive accommodation strategies have identified poor accommodation on every site, other than West Durrington. Despite its best efforts, the college has been unable to improve its buildings significantly since the last inspection. It failed in its attempt to sell the Broadwater site and build a new college on another site. The college, and Worthing Sixth Form College, have jointly sought financial support from the FEFC for new buildings.

55 The college has a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of its estate. It has worked effectively on accommodation strategies to ensure building improvements are prioritised, a strength not recognised in the college's self-assessment. Over the last three years, about £350,000 has been spent on building improvements, including the new music technology facility at Broadwater. The annual maintenance budget of about £250,000 is well managed. This covers the 10-year planned maintenance and continuous maintenance programme. However, the planned maintenance programme needs updating.

56 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that utilisation of its accommodation is low at 25%, although some sites are heavily used. Computerised timetabling was introduced in an attempt to improve the use of accommodation, but it was not a success and

was abandoned. Implementation of further improvements awaits the resolution of building issues. There has been little improvement since the last inspection in making more accommodation accessible to students and staff with physical disabilities. Most parts of the two main sites are accessible to them. The sites that the college wishes to dispose of are the least accessible.

57 The quality and number of computers have improved since the last inspection. There are 600, largely modern computers for students, giving a good ratio of computer to full-time equivalent further education student of 1:5. Students have good access to computers in the numerous learning areas, libraries and in classrooms when machines are free. Most computers are networked and about 60% have Internet access. Software is appropriate and modern. These strengths are not sufficiently recognised in the self-assessment report. More and better computers are being made available to staff in some, but not all, offices and staff rooms. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that some staff rooms are inadequate.

58 The libraries are well managed. They offer a good range of services and works. Library staff are well qualified and work closely with teachers. The libraries at West Durrington and Broadwater are the largest. Smaller libraries at Shoreham and Horsham provide specialist book and periodical collections. All libraries have a common computerised catalogue and students can borrow books from other sites. Subject librarians liaise with teachers to ensure library resources are kept up to date. The college's self-assessment report identified some of the strengths of the libraries. Overall, the libraries are open for a sufficient number of hours during the week. They have over 46,000 books and subscribe to over 300 journals. The video collection has been expanded since the last inspection and now consists of 1,000 items. The library budget of

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about £100,000 a year or £26.00 for each full-time equivalent student is good. The various learning centres with their specialist equipment and computing facilities provide an excellent resource for students and staff.

59 There are large refectories at each of the main sites. At Broadwater, the accommodation is poor and this makes it difficult for the college to provide a pleasant refectory there. At West Durrington there is also a coffee shop and the theatre bar. There are no student common rooms. The college recognises this weakness in its self-assessment. At West Durrington there are many pleasant external seating areas, well used by students in warm weather. Although there are playing fields they are little used owing to rabbit infestation. There are well-equipped fitness centres at both main sites.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- commitment to quality assurance leading to improvement
- comprehensive system of course review
- effective framework for monitoring quality
- established programme of lesson observation
- appraisal linked to staff development

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped quality assurance procedures in support areas
- lack of detail and timescales in action plans

61 The college's commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in its mission statement, strategic objectives and operating statement. Since the last inspection, the college has made steady progress in improving quality assurance procedures. Its quality assurance policy and manual have been simplified. The manual contains clear quality assurance procedures for all aspects of the curriculum and teachers understand these well. There is a well-planned quality assurance cycle and calendar of activities. Monitoring of the quality of the curriculum is effective. Quality is a standing agenda item at divisional meetings. The academic board provides the forum for detailed consideration of quality assurance. The board has a broad, representative membership and meets once each term. The quality assurance subcommittee of the academic board, meets each term to review the performance of courses and progress in implementing the self-assessment report action plan. The college carries out external benchmarking of its academic performance through Sussex Colleges' Consortium and the Southern Region Council for Education and Training Colleges' 'quality network'.

62 There is an annual cycle of course reviews. Reviews include information on how retention and achievement rates compare with national averages, students' views, external verifiers' reports and findings from the observations of teaching. The quality of most reviews is good, but some are not sufficiently analytical. The quality of courses offered jointly with training providers is monitored in a similar way. Action plans from course reviews are monitored through divisional boards and are improved, where necessary.

63 Students' achievements are carefully monitored through the quality assurance procedures and have improved. There was also a slight improvement in student retention rates last year. As part of the quality assurance process, there is a programme of lesson

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observation to assess the quality of teaching. Workshop sessions to develop teaching skills are well attended. The percentage of good and outstanding lessons has risen from 58% to 78% since the last inspection. The college sets targets for students' recruitment, retention and achievements in relation to each course, and progress towards reaching these is monitored at divisional meetings and by the academic board.

64 The college has not established performance indicators. There is no formal monitoring of the quality of services provided by administrative and support staff. The self-assessment report failed to identify as a weakness, the failure of some support areas to carry out an annual review of the services they provide. Although managers of all support areas participate in self-assessment, the extent to which their staff do varies considerably and some staff have little involvement in it. A senior manager ensures that the views of support staff are taken into account in the self-assessment report. Support staff do not, however, identify their strengths and weaknesses.

65 There are separate charters for students and staff. The college charters identify standards of service, but they do not include quantitative targets. Students' views are sought through questionnaires and course boards and their concerns are acted upon. Complaint procedures are good and are clearly understood by students.

66 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college is committed to staff development. The college spends a significant proportion of its budget on staff development. Training needs are identified through appraisal, course review and evaluation, self-assessment and the strategic plan and are met through a training plan. All staff are encouraged to undertake staff development activities including short periods in industry, attendance on higher level courses and study for teaching qualifications. Staff appraisal

arrangements are well documented and are regarded positively by staff. All staff are appraised annually. A formal appraisal of the principal's performance against the college's strategic objectives was undertaken last year by the chair of governors. The college gained the Investor in People award in 1997.

67 The college produced an update of the college's second self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. Judgements in the self-assessment report follow the headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Curriculum sections were written using evidence from course reviews and evaluations, lesson observations, students' responses to questionnaires, and data on students' retention and achievements. Overall, the self-assessment report is thorough, although some of the statements of strengths and weaknesses are insufficiently detailed. Some of the evidence to substantiate the strengths and weaknesses in the updated version of the self-assessment report is not clearly stated. Action plans in the updated version lack detail, such as the names of managers responsible for carrying out action, and the timescales within which the action must be completed.

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Governance

Grade 4

68 Inspectors and auditors awarded a lower grade for governance than that given by the college. Some strengths were overstated and they found some key weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- commitment of governors to making the college successful
- effective monitoring of the college's finances
- governors' focus on addressing the college's accommodation needs
- clear monitoring of personnel systems and procedures

Weaknesses

- failure to appoint governors correctly
- insufficiently prompt action to fill governor vacancies
- lack of openness in the conduct of business
- some unsatisfactory aspects of meetings' procedure
- inadequate monitoring of student retention and achievement rates
- failure to identify performance indicators for the corporation

69 Since the last inspection, governors have given considerable attention to, and have been successful in, improving the financial health and performance of the college. Over the same period, the corporation has, in its involvement in strategic planning, largely focused on resolving the college's accommodation difficulties. It has given careful consideration to options for resolving these and has been forthright in ensuring that the right option was

chosen. However, inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that governors should be more involved in defining the strategic goals of the college. Governors have approved the current strategic plan, but they do not routinely review progress in implementing it, in the light of the college's operating statement.

70 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation has not conducted its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. This relates in particular to the failure of the corporation to follow proper procedures when reappointing five governors in 1997 and one governor in 1999. The corporation substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

71 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report, that governors have experience and expertise in various fields and are committed to the success of the college. Attendance at meetings is good and is usually over 80%. Governors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and of the distinction between governance and management. The corporation has established its membership at 15. In accordance with the modifications to the instrument of government, its membership comprises five business, two co-opted, two local authority, two local community, one student, two staff governors and the principal. At the time of inspection there were five vacancies. Governors have given consideration to filling these, but have not developed arrangements for appointing new governors promptly. The corporation has identified potential governors through advertising but has made slow progress in assessing applicants' suitability. The effectiveness of the search committee has been adversely affected by the granting of extended leave of absence from the corporation, to its

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chair. An analysis of governors' skills has been carried out but has not yet taken account of the changes arising from the new membership structure.

72 The corporation has an appropriate committee structure. Committees have clear terms of reference and cover: finance and general purposes; search; audit; remuneration; and personnel. A standards committee has been established. The personnel committee is successful in monitoring staffing systems and procedures. Inspectors did not agree with the college's assessment that all committees were similarly effective. The audit committee has not fulfilled some of its terms of reference effectively. It has not, for example, reported to the corporation on the weaknesses identified in the latest annual internal audit report. Committee reports are submitted to the corporation and supplemented by oral comments from the committee chairs. Decisions are not always clearly stated in minutes. These occasionally refer to the approval of a recommendation made in a separate document.

73 The clerk to the corporation is a senior college manager with a clear job description separating the roles. A minute secretary supports the clerk. There is an annual calendar of meetings, but this does not list the key items of business that need to be considered at each meeting. Governors normally receive papers in good time. The corporation has not comprehensively collated its standing orders to guide the conduct of its business. It has a code of conduct, but this has not been updated to take account of the Nolan committee's recommendations. A 'whistleblowing' procedure has been introduced. The corporation has established a register of interests, which includes declarations by all governors. This has been extended to cover the college's management team.

74 The corporation does not conduct its business with sufficient openness. This weakness is recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The corporation has not set clear criteria for determining which items are confidential and much routine business is classified as confidential. Corporation minutes are not generally available on all college sites.

75 Governors are informed about the work of the college mainly through presentations by senior staff. They give insufficient attention to the consideration of students' achievements, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Governors are beginning to identify essential information they need to receive in regularly scheduled key reports to enable them to monitor the college's performance more effectively. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that communication between governors, and staff and students needs to be improved.

76 The corporation carried out a review of its performance as part of the college's self-assessment. The review was insufficiently rigorous. Governors did not establish performance indicators against which to monitor their performance. Although new governors receive an induction pack and some informal guidance, they do not receive a specific programme of induction. There is no clear plan for training governors and developing their knowledge and understanding of the college.

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Management

Grade 2

77 Inspectors agreed with college's grade for management. They judged that some strengths were overstated, however, and they found strengths and weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- prudent financial management
- good teamwork by senior managers
- well-managed provision to meet local needs
- efficient deployment of staff
- good communications
- productive links with other colleges and external agencies

Weaknesses

- poor access for managers to management information
- insufficient systematic monitoring of the annual operating statement
- underdeveloped use of targets and performance indicators
- late student data returns

78 Since the last inspection, the college has taken steps to remedy weaknesses in management. Effective measures were taken to establish and maintain financial stability. In the two years 1994-95 to 1995-96, the college had fallen significantly short of its growth targets but it has met or exceeded these each year since. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that a major reorganisation has created a more streamlined and efficient management structure. The college management team consists of the principal, four teaching divisional managers and five cross-college managers. The principal has no designated deputy and nine senior managers

report directly to him. Although the principal carries a considerable burden of responsibility, the management structure works well and the commitment of managers underpins the good teamwork. The management team meets regularly. Minutes of its meetings provide a good record of debate and of decisions taken. Agreed actions are followed through. The academic divisions are well managed. Divisional and programme managers maintain effective control over the deployment of staff and the arrangements for assessing the quality of teaching and learning.

79 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The latest financial forecast predicts that the college will remain financially healthy throughout the period 1999 to 2002. The college's budget-setting involves the allocation of resources to academic divisions based on estimated student numbers. These allocations are subject to adjustment in the light of student enrolments. In 1998-99, financial reports were not produced each month and managers were unable to monitor the college's finances effectively. Since the beginning of the current academic year, budget holders have received monthly financial reports. They have had training in budget planning and control to help them to monitor their financial performance. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of management accounts for governors and senior managers this year. These include profiled budget figures and a rolling cashflow forecast. However, the management accounts do not yet include out-turn forecast income and expenditure figures. The college's financial regulations have recently been rewritten to make them still more effective and the financial procedures are being updated to ensure they comply with them. Procedures for dealing with suspected fraud and irregularities are not yet fully in line with Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*.

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80 The college installed a new management information system in 1997. Improvements in procedures have been made gradually to make the recording of student data more effective and to ensure the data are up to date and accurate. With a few exceptions, data on students' retention and achievements were reliable. However, statistical returns to the FEFC have been routinely late. At the time of the inspection, few managers had on-line access to essential data.

81 Since 1996, the college has devoted much time and energy to finding a solution to its accommodation problems. This has had an impact on long-term strategic planning. Problems over accommodation continue to be a major factor affecting the college's financial management, future direction and role. Despite the constraints of some of its poor accommodation, the college has been enterprising in making the best use of its resources. The college plays a leading role in a consortium of colleges in Brighton and Hove, and East and West Sussex. It has strengthened its links with a neighbouring sixth form college in order to rationalise provision in the area. There is a good working relationship with Sussex Enterprise and local councils. The college represents the further education sector in the Lifelong Partnership initiative in the area.

82 Through increasingly systematic market research, the college is better able to assess the relevance of existing provision and identify new courses to respond to the needs of the community, in particular, school-leavers, and locally-based commerce and industry. The findings of this market research also provide the basis for strategic development of provision. All teachers have the opportunity to contribute to this development through their divisional business plan, and they are able to recognise elements of the overall strategic plan that reflect their ideas. Inspectors agreed with the findings in the self-assessment report that the annual operating plan requires more rigorous and

systematic monitoring and that the use of targets and performance indicators is underdeveloped.

83 Communication in the college is good. Staff expressed confidence in the briefings provided by senior managers. This strength is not identified in the college's self-assessment report. The college has well-established personnel procedures. The good partnership between college managers and governors assists the successful implementations of the equal opportunities policy and procedures. The health and safety committee oversees compliance with relevant policy and procedures. Reports on all these activities are provided annually to the corporation.

Conclusions

84 The self-assessment report provided an effective basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, although they judged that some strengths had been overstated and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors considered that the college had over graded two programme areas and one cross-college area.

85 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	0
16-18 years	32
19-24 years	13
25+ years	53
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	7
Level 2 (intermediate)	20
Level 3 (advanced)	34
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	38
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	96	979	10
Agriculture	13	36	0
Construction	101	217	3
Engineering	468	2,555	27
Business	93	579	6
Hotel and catering	81	94	2
Health and community care	388	743	10
Art and design	928	536	13
Humanities	15	1,619	15
Basic education	231	1,347	14
Total	2,414	8,705	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 10% 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	124	15	105	244
Supporting direct learning contact	39	8	0	47
Other support	138	16	0	154
Total	301	39	105	445

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£12,864,000	£13,040,000	£13,573,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.57	£16.32	£16.28
Payroll as a proportion of income	59%	62%	66%
Achievement of funding target	101%	104%	100%
Diversity of income	33%	33%	34%
Operating surplus	£203,000	£328,000	£349,000

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)

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	242	542	544	-	730	895
	Retention (%)	85	79	72	-	81	81
	Achievement (%)	73	77	78	69	72	77
2	Number of starters	-	-	839	-	-	1,939
	Retention (%)	-	-	75	-	-	76
	Achievement (%)	71	78	84	56	70	62
3	Number of starters	-	-	796	-	-	1,814
	Retention (%)	-	-	73	-	-	79
	Achievement (%)	71	7	84	56	70	62
4 or 5	Number of starters	7	4	2	-	80	158
	Retention (%)	100	50	100	-	76	86
	Achievement (%)	0	100	50	10	46	44
Short courses	Number of starters	1,049	1,694	1,386	4,609	7,100	9,639
	Retention (%)	95	99	97	97	98	98
	Achievement (%)	83	84	89	76	86	89
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	-	987	253	-	-	1,095
	Retention (%)	-	81	89	-	-	74
	Achievement (%)	46	62	58	58	65	67

Source: ISR

-ISR data not collected

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