

Northern College for Residential Adult Education

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 6

Curriculum areas

Humanities: the diploma programme 9

Humanities: the pathways programme 18

Cross-college provision

Support for students 26

General resources 33

Quality assurance 39

Governance 47

Management 54

Conclusions 61

College statistics

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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Northern College for Residential Adult Education *Yorkshire and Humberside Region*

Inspected February 1998

Northern College for Residential Adult Education is a long-term residential college for adults. The college is situated near Barnsley and dedicated to the education and training of men and women who lack formal qualifications and are seeking to return to learning. The curriculum is delivered through two one-year programmes, the diploma programme and the higher education programme, and through four programmes of short-term residential and part-time courses. The inspection included the diploma and elements of the three largest part-time programmes. Since the last inspection, the college has made significant progress in, for example, establishing accreditation for the part-time programme, extending the range of subjects taught and improving its learning support and guidance services. The self-assessment report was found to be a reliable document for planning the inspection. The report was the result of an effective and rigorous self-assessment which forms part of the college's normal quality assurance system. Inspectors agreed with almost all the findings in the report.

Support for students, quality assurance, governance and management at the college are

outstanding. The teaching is good, students' achievements are high and there are impressive progression rates. Tutorials are outstanding. A key feature of college life is the high-quality residential learning environment and the particularly positive working relationship between staff and students. The curriculum is well managed. There are excellent learning resources, and individual study is enhanced by the high quality of the library and resources centre. Support for students is comprehensive and highly effective. The college takes care to create the right conditions in which each student can learn effectively. Quality assurance procedures are of a high standard and lead to continuous improvement; they include performance indicators and benchmarks effectively applied to all aspects of the college's work. The college is well governed and governors are productively involved in many aspects of the college's work. The college is successful in achieving its clear and well-understood mission to widen participation, and there are outstandingly effective partnerships with a wide range of organisations.

Management is effective, encouraging high levels of staff commitment. The college should: take action to deal with some less effective teaching; improve the assessment and review of individual students' progress on some part-time courses; and continue to address acknowledged deficiencies in general accommodation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Humanities: the diploma programme	1	Support for students	1
Humanities: the pathways programme	2	General resources	2
		Quality assurance	1
		Governance	1
		Management	1

The College and its Mission

1 Northern College for Residential Adult Education, located near Barnsley, was founded as a long-term residential college for adults in 1978. It is one of six residential colleges in England designated, under section 28 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, as eligible to receive funding from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college recruits most of its students from South and West Yorkshire, which has large areas of social and economic deprivation in which levels of educational attainment and qualification fall below both national and regional averages. The college was established to provide educational opportunities for adults who left compulsory education with few, if any, formal qualifications and who have had limited opportunities to pursue systematic study since leaving school. This is reflected in the college's mission statement, which also includes the aim of providing adults with, 'facilities to study in a residential learning environment, in order to assist the realisation of their personal and intellectual potential as individuals, in groups and in communities; and thereby to further the development of their skills, competencies and educational achievements'.

2 The college had over 4,000 enrolments in 1996-97. All but 98 of the students were part time and the majority, some 90 per cent, were 25 years of age or over. In line with the college's mission to widen participation, 31 per cent of the full-time students and 52 per cent of the part-time students had no previous educational qualifications. Some 65 per cent of full-time students and 70 per cent of part-time students were unemployed or unwaged when they enrolled on their courses, and 62 per cent of full-time students and 56 per cent of part-time students, when employed, had been involved in unskilled manual occupations.

3 Much of the college's work is undertaken in partnership with local authorities, community

groups, voluntary organisations, higher education institutions, the Workers' Educational Association, other colleges, training and enterprise councils (TECs), trade unions and employers. Most courses are residential or have some residential education element. The curriculum is delivered through two one-year programmes, the diploma programme and the higher education programme, and four other programmes which are made up from both short-term residential and part-time courses. The diploma programme is taught over 30 weeks on a modular basis and leads to a range of qualifications, extending from Open College Network levels 2 and 3, the equivalent of general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), to higher education level 1, the standard reached at the end of the first year of a degree course. The range of subjects includes key skills, sociology, social policy, history, European studies, information technology (IT), literature, politics and economics, women's studies and psychology. GCSE equivalent qualifications are available in English and mathematics. The diploma is validated by Sheffield Hallam University and the Open College Network.

4 Some part-time courses, belonging to the college's pathways programme, lead to the award of credits which are validated and moderated by the Open College Network. Part-time courses take place throughout the year both on site and at centres away from the college. In 1996-97, there were 337 courses, 211 of which were pathways courses with 2,509 enrolments. Courses are designed for residents of the local authorities which are members of the Northern College Company (the 'company' programme), for individuals who wish to return to education but who are not able to study full time (the 'regional gateway' programme), for those in former mine-working communities (the 'coalfields learning programme'), and for trade unions (the 'trade union' programme). Activities

Context

have included learning to learn, creative writing, returning to study, how to organise community groups, IT and cultural and political issues.

5 At the time of the inspection, the college employed 28 full-time equivalent teaching staff, 19 full-time equivalent learning support staff, 26 full-time equivalent residential staff and 23 full-time equivalent administrative staff.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 9 February 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by inspectors against class registers and pass lists.

7 The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The sample, drawn from two curriculum areas, the diploma programme and the pathways programme, included most of the college's schedule 2 provision. It did not include the higher education programme which had 23 full-time

students, the trade union programme with 262 part-time students which was not running during the week of the inspection, and the non-accredited part-time courses. The inspection was carried out by seven inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 27 days.

Inspectors observed 32 lessons, including tutorials and community education work. They examined students' work and college documents and held meetings with governors, managers, college staff, students and representatives of higher education, trade unions and the local authority.

8 Of the 32 lessons inspected, 78 per cent were good or outstanding. Only 6 per cent were less than satisfactory. This profile is significantly better than the average for all lessons observed during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 89 per cent which is well above the average for the sector of 77 per cent, according to the same report. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Diploma programme	6	8	2	1	0	17
Pathways programme	4	7	3	1	0	15
Total	10	15	5	2	0	32

Curriculum Areas

Humanities: The Diploma Programme

Grade 1

9 Inspectors observed 17 lessons, including tutorials, covering a range of subjects in the diploma programme. The programme team had conducted their own rigorous self-assessment, providing evidence to support their judgements. With the exception of some minor aspects of teaching and learning, inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment of the provision.

Key strengths

- highly effective teaching
- high academic expectations of students, combined with outstanding levels of support
- high course completion and pass rates
- the high standards of students' work
- detailed feedback on students' work
- the successful inclusion of students with disabilities
- outstanding quality of tutorials
- good curriculum management
- high-quality learning resources

Weaknesses

- teachers' failure to consolidate students' learning in some lessons
- teachers' failure to take account of students' differing learning needs in a few lessons

10 The modular diploma programme is validated by Sheffield Hallam University and the Open College Network. The programme operates over two semesters and students have the opportunity to sample modules before studying them. The flexible structure of the modular programme allows students to develop

a broad range of knowledge and skills. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers provide students with a great deal of help and encouragement, enabling them to realise their academic and personal potential. Lessons are well planned and the teaching methods which are used help to prepare students for higher education. Distinctive features of the teaching include the development of topics in ways which promote students' interest and the effective use of source materials to provide an evidence base for learning and to develop students' awareness of research and the investigative aspects of their studies. In most lessons there were good opportunities for students to work together in groups or in pairs and they responded well to the tasks set. In a successful introductory lesson on social policy in the European Union, for example, the teacher used a quiz to assess levels of knowledge and students answered questions enthusiastically. Students show good concentration, prepare effectively for their lessons and offer well-considered contributions to classroom debate.

11 Steps have been taken to improve teaching and methods of learning since the last inspection. These have included staff development focused on mixed ability teaching and the development of good teaching guides. The quality of teaching has risen significantly though there are still improvements to make, particularly in meeting the new challenges arising from larger group sizes. In a few lessons, teachers used methods which were sometimes unsuitable for the wide range of abilities in the class. Occasionally, they missed opportunities to consolidate students' progress by checking what they had learned. For example, the notes which students had taken did not always record the salient points of the discussion effectively and teachers did not take steps to remedy this. These weaknesses were not identified in the programme area's self-assessment.

Curriculum Areas

12 Students' achievements are outstanding. Teachers are committed to the highest standards of scholarship and have high expectations of their students. The opportunities for learning which the college provides for its residents are effective in developing their individual potential in purposeful ways. There are impressive gains in students' knowledge, skills and confidence. Course completion and pass rates on the diploma programme are excellent; 92 per cent of students achieved their primary learning goal in 1996-97. Retention rates are high and there are good rates of progress to a wide range of higher education courses, including initial teacher training. Over 70 per cent of students completing their course gain a place in higher education. Some students go on to employment and take significant roles in local government, the community, in management in voluntary organisations, and in teaching. Several staff members are successful former students. The college recognised in its self-assessment report that its monitoring of the destinations of those students who did not progress to higher education is not detailed enough. Strategies are being adopted to remedy this.

13 A major reason for the high standard of students' work is that the college expects teachers to provide students with detailed advice and guidance on how they might improve their work. Teachers consistently give dedicated individual support to students, including students with specific learning difficulties and other disabilities, to help them overcome the disadvantages they have experienced.

14 Tutorial support complements teaching and is a major strength of the college. Tutorials are conducted on a one to one basis. Good account is taken of the differing backgrounds and abilities of students. Tutorials are used effectively to review individual students' progress, build confidence and produce action plans for learning. In several tutorials, teachers gave clear and constructive feedback to students on their essays. Teachers identified what new

learning and new skills students had developed and how they could apply these to new contexts. The students were attentive and by the end of their tutorial were in a position to recognise what next steps they needed to take.

15 The popularity of some modules has resulted in some large classes. There is some lack of forward planning in relation to anticipated group sizes and the scheduling of modules. A significant strength of the programme is the introductory foundation element which provides an extended period for diagnosing students' learning needs. After this, students confirm their subject choices and subsequent learning programme.

16 The diploma programme is constantly developing to meet changing needs. New modules have been introduced to diversify the range of opportunities available to students. New curriculum areas include access to mathematics, psychology, languages and science, additional modules in IT and the piloting of modules, for example in introductory law, which students can study on their own using the computer network. Vocational pathways have also been explored. As yet, a work experience component does not feature in the diploma programme. The programme is well managed and staff from the team show strong commitment to their students. Attempts have been made to ensure that consistent procedures are followed across the different modules. This has involved, for example, the development of helpful detailed handbooks for teachers and personal tutors, and a student guide.

17 The diploma programme is well resourced. In particular, the recently upgraded library and learning resource centre provides an excellent environment for research and investigative activity and library staff provide a high level of individual guidance and study support. Students with visual or hearing impairment have access to appropriate specialist resources which enable

Curriculum Areas

them to study effectively. Accommodation specific to the diploma programme is largely concentrated in three rooms which are dispersed across the college. They are appropriately furnished and well equipped with teaching aids. Students generally have good access to computing resources. On a few modules with high numbers of students, there were not always enough computers for the students in specialist rooms.

Examples of students' achievements on the diploma programme, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Diploma programme	Retention (%)	91	88	89
	Pass rate (%)	88	95	92

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Humanities: The Pathways Programme

Grade 2

18 Inspectors observed 15 lessons, covering a range of subjects and courses offered both in the college and in community settings. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this area of provision.

Key strengths

- the good quality of teaching
- the particularly positive relationships between teachers and students
- carefully designed courses to meet the needs of particular groups
- good levels of achievement
- well-managed provision
- well-established and highly successful approaches for widening participation
- effective use of high-quality learning resources

Weaknesses

- arrangements for reviewing students' progress with them
- some teaching of key skills
- monitoring of students' progression and destinations
- the proportion of teachers without teaching qualifications

19 The pathways programme consists of over 200 part-time courses, most of them organised as short residential courses lasting two to five days. Many courses are designed in collaboration with community groups to meet their particular requirements and negotiations with these groups are expertly managed. The quality of teaching is generally good. Courses are well planned and have clear aims. Most are effectively designed to encourage students to

develop the confidence and skills needed to prepare them for further study. For example, a course for parents, designed to take account of students' interests, included IT, photography, and how children learn. The students evaluated their own ways of learning and considered how they would apply new learning with their children at home. Educational guidance and the planning of future goals are integral parts of such courses.

20 Teachers quickly establish positive and supportive relationships with students. They use a good range of methods of working including discussions, practical activities such as making videos and art work, and exercises involving pairs and small groups. Many teachers help to develop students' skills in communication and computing as part of courses. However, key skills development is not systematically planned or assessed across the provision and the college recognises this in its self-assessment report. Arrangements for assessing individual students' learning, and reviewing progress with them, are underdeveloped; in most courses, these processes are not built into the course timetable. Many students leave the college without being given a record of their learning; their 'learning diary', or other evidence of achievement, is left behind at the college for assessment by teachers and moderation by the Open College Network. Some students do not understand how their work will be assessed or whether they will gain credits. Some of the weaker lessons lack clear learning objectives and, in a few cases, teachers fail to ensure that all students in the class are involved in relevant learning activities.

21 Students, many of whom have had negative experiences of education and continue to have a low estimation of their own abilities, gain confidence as learners and develop a good range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Students value studying residentially. It allows them to concentrate on study without the interruptions and responsibilities of everyday

Curriculum Areas

life. They benefit from being able to use the college's resources during the day and evening and to talk with other students and staff about what they are learning, outside lessons. Inspectors concluded that the impact of residence at the college in accelerating their achievement is understated in the self-assessment report.

22 The college has reviewed and developed the part-time programme since the last inspection. A major development has been the successful introduction of an innovative curriculum framework, 'pathways', accredited by the Open College Network. The pathways programme was introduced in September 1996 and now provides credit for students' achievements at Open College Network levels 1 to 3. The retention rates on these predominantly short courses are consistently high. A high proportion of students (75 per cent in 1996-97) gain at least one unit of credit within the Open College Network scheme. Some students gain several credits from different short courses. In 1996-97 the pass rate on some of the courses within the programme was lower, at 61 per cent. The pass rate was also lower for students on the small number of non-residential short courses. Some students progress to more advanced short courses within the programme and the college's diploma programme. In 1996-97, 44 per cent of the diploma course students were recruited from part-time programmes.

23 Curriculum management has been strengthened by the appointment of programme and curriculum co-ordinators and the provision is now well managed. Inspectors confirmed the strengths identified in the college self-assessment report in respect of the curriculum and course management. The co-ordinators agree performance criteria for the programmes, which are linked to the strategic objectives of the college, and they conduct regular and thorough reviews of the programme. Most targets are met. A few, such as those relating to the recruitment of adult unemployed men and

people from ethnic communities, were not achieved in 1996-97. Arrangements for assuring quality at course and programme level are good. There is comprehensive analysis of the views of students and course tutors evaluate their own courses well. Course evaluations are subsequently considered by the programme co-ordinators and action is taken to make improvements, where necessary.

24 A feature of the strategic approach to community education is the well-established, long-term development of partnerships with a wide range of agencies, including voluntary organisations and local authorities. Liaison with communities across the region is effective and productive. The pathways programme has had outstanding success in providing for students who often do not participate in education; for example, provision, including a short residential course, for women working as prostitutes. Another course, at Rotherham, is located in a community centre on a housing estate with high levels of deprivation. Local students are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in community work skills. Off-site provision, which forms a small but significant part of the pathways programme, is well managed. In 1996-97, 25 per cent of destinations were unknown. Inspectors agreed that the monitoring of students' progression and students' destinations is not fully effective. Information about other leavers was based on their stated intentions though the college now monitors the actual destinations by sampling 10 per cent of students.

25 Teachers have good experience of teaching short residential courses where many students lack confidence as learners, and demonstrate a high level of commitment to educating adult students. About half of them, however, do not have a teaching qualification and few have additional specialist qualifications; for example, in teaching basic skills. Resources, including IT resources, are good and teachers make effective

Curriculum Areas

use of them. The teaching accommodation is of high quality. It provides a pleasant and attractive learning environment. The college uses a large number of venues across the region for its off-site provision, most of which are rented from host organisations. All of these venues have the advantage of being well known locally and accessible to adults who are unable to travel to the college. A few classes meet in rooms that are damp but the majority of the venues used are suitable for purpose.

Examples of students' achievements on the pathways programme, 1996-97

Programme within pathways programme	Number of courses	Number of students	Number of students achieving primary learning goals	Percentage of student achieving primary learning goals
Company programme	58	635	490	77
Regional gateway programme	134	1,633	1,230	75
Coalfields learning programme	15	171	105	61
Trade union programme	4	70	64	91
Total	211	2,509	1,889	75

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

26 The college's self-assessment report on student support is comprehensive and inspectors agreed with its judgements. Considerable progress has been made in addressing the few weaker aspects of support identified in the self-assessment.

Key strengths

- successful arrangements for providing an inclusive learning environment
- well co-ordinated and comprehensive support services
- high-quality guidance and personal support
- highly effective learning and study support
- carefully planned support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the outstanding quality of tutorials for individual students on longer courses
- well-managed and supportive residential arrangements for students and their families
- professional careers advice and thorough preparation for students progressing to higher education

Weaknesses

- failure to make some students on short courses fully aware of the range of support services available

27 The college has given a high priority to developing an inclusive approach to learning and governors and staff have received appropriate training. Care is taken to provide suitable conditions in which each student can learn effectively and achieve her/his learning goals. Inspectors considered this strength understated in the self-assessment report. The

content of most short courses and the teaching methods to be used are carefully negotiated and agreed in advance with the students to ensure they match students' requirements. The college provides clear information about its other courses and offers all students impartial guidance. Students are then in a good position to make an informed choice of the courses to study. The college has plans to extend the ways it presents information about its provision, which include the use of different formats such as audio tape. Students joining the college praise the welcome they receive and the helpfulness and friendliness of staff.

28 Inspectors agreed with the finding expressed in the self-assessment report that induction arrangements are thorough and effective. Students on the diploma programme benefit from a five-week foundation period which helps them to assess their existing skills, to identify those which need further development and to agree arrangements for learning support, where appropriate. Induction is well planned; it is effectively integrated with all short residential courses. The role of personal tutor is well developed and tutors provide effective support for each student on the diploma course and the longer part-time courses. Inspectors found the quality of tutorials with individual students outstanding.

29 There are comprehensive systems for identifying and responding to students' requirements though, as noted in the self-assessment report, some short-course students are not fully aware of the support services available. There are excellent arrangements for students who require additional learning support or specialist equipment to succeed in their studies. Students' requirements are assessed before they enrol on longer courses and college staff make suitable arrangements, often by contacting students and carefully planning these with them. For example, one student with a disability was taken to visit a specialist centre to select appropriate equipment

Cross-college Provision

to help him study. Teachers are well briefed about the effect of a student's difficulty or disability on her/his learning. Staff provide specialist support for students with dyslexia and students are referred for further professional assessments, if required. Students benefit from high-quality numeracy, literacy and computing workshops and individual arrangements for learning support. The college has improved the arrangements for initial assessments of students in line with the action plan in its self-assessment report.

30 Personal support for students is comprehensive and relevant. Services include professional counselling, welfare and financial advice, high-quality childcare, including activities for older school children, and transport. Living at the college enables students to engage fully in their studies. Their families can visit them at the college and, for example, stay with them at weekends. The college effectively encourages students to support each other. There are well-organised arrangements for students with children, which have included visits to local schools, the establishment of a children's library, and the setting up of a parents' support group. The wide range of thoughtful and often practical support provided by college staff, such as caretakers opening up teaching rooms early in the morning so that students anxious about making a presentation can practise before the class assembles, and the careful allocation of study bedrooms to take account of each student's requirements or preferences, contribute to the outstanding quality of the residential support.

31 Since the previous inspection, the college has further developed the social and recreational activities offered to students to include a range of sports, indoor games, quizzes and social evenings. It has also created the post of enrichment officer. In addition to the activities organised by the college, the students' union organises its own social events for students. Students are represented at every

level of the college decision-making and consultative processes. Frequent and productive meetings between union officers and college managers help to identify desirable developments. The college has an effective system for recording and responding to complaints from students. In 1996-97, all complaints were responded to promptly.

32 Inspectors confirmed the high quality of the careers advice available to students. The college employs a qualified careers adviser, and local careers service staff visit the college weekly. The quality of the preparation for students wanting to go on to study in higher education is good. Students on short courses are given valuable help to prepare for 'next steps'. This includes self-assessment exercises to identify further study or employment options, preparation of an action plan, information about guidance services and other courses in the college, and information about advice and careers services in the areas where students live.

General Resources

Grade 2

33 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgements about general and residential accommodation and other facilities.

Key strengths

- an outstanding library and excellent learning resources
- new high specification computer facilities
- high-quality residential learning environment
- incremental improvements to the fabric of the buildings

Weaknesses

- a significant proportion of poor-quality study bedrooms

Cross-college Provision

- some acknowledged deficiencies in general accommodation

34 The college campus occupies a site of 2.6 hectares, and provides students with access to the extensive adjoining landscaped gardens and parkland which form a setting of outstanding beauty. The main building is a grade I listed Georgian mansion and there are grade II listed outbuildings. The 14 teaching rooms are located in the main house and two adjacent buildings, constructed in the 1960s when the site was used for a teacher training college. Residential accommodation is provided for 130 students in 87 bedrooms which are located in the main house, two residential blocks and two other small buildings. Ownership of the campus buildings has been transferred to the college. The transfer of the house has yet to be completed. The college campus provides an attractive and welcoming residential learning environment which students find inspiring.

35 Each residential student is provided with a study bedroom which they occupy individually or share. The standard of a third of these rooms is poor, a significant weakness which is identified in the college's self-assessment report. A programme of gradual refurbishment is improving the overall standard of the older residential accommodation and there is a commitment to replacing these substandard bedrooms as part of this. The geography of the site and the design of the college buildings present difficulties for students with restricted mobility. Careful planning has improved access during the last three years. However, some areas remain inaccessible to students using wheelchairs, a situation which the college acknowledges in its self-assessment report. Some accommodation deficiencies have not been rectified within the planned timescale because of unanticipated shortfalls in funding. For example, the plan to install a lift in the main house has not yet been implemented. There have, however, been incremental improvements

to the fabric of the buildings. Since the last inspection, a new heating system has been installed which is proving to be more energy efficient. Rooms in the main house have been redecorated and new furniture purchased, the roof has been repaired and directional signposting has been improved. The college's regular room utilisation surveys indicate that there has been more intensive use of accommodation as the number of students has increased over the last three years. The use of teaching rooms throughout the year, however, is still low. No targets are set for the efficient use of accommodation.

36 General facilities for students include a dining room, a common room, and a bar and games room. The dining room is overcrowded at peak times. Teaching rooms and the main public areas are designated as 'no smoking' areas. The college has a football pitch and tennis courts and there are some links with local sports clubs. Nevertheless, the range of recreational facilities for residential students is restricted and the college has identified this in its self-assessment report. The residential blocks have television lounges, small kitchen areas and washing facilities. There are good facilities for the children of students; 30 childcare places are available.

37 A major development has been the relocation and integration of the library and learning resource centre, involving significant structural changes. The library and learning resource centre is now situated in a spacious and attractive room and provides an outstanding resource for students. The centre is open seven days a week for a total of 65 hours and is highly valued by students. It provides 54 study places in the main room and 12 multimedia computers with ISDN internet access, and there are an additional 17 study places in an adjacent seminar room. Librarians and learning support workers provide effective advice and help for students and there are good arrangements for induction to the library. Close

Cross-college Provision

liaison between library staff and teachers is particularly effective. The library holds approximately 27,000 books, 140 periodicals, 240 videos and 30 audio books. The annual budget for books is high, at £18,000; about £44 per full-time equivalent student. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified by the college in respect of library provision.

38 IT resources for students have improved significantly since the last inspection. The two dedicated computer rooms have been relocated next to the library and resource centre. They hold 24 new computers of a high specification which are networked with those in the learning resource centre. There is appropriate software and access to the internet. Staff are creating an increasing amount of courseware for students to use. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:11, but this does not include recently purchased laptop computers or the computers available to students at outreach centres. More than 100 additional computers are used by teaching and administrative staff. Technical support is available to teachers and students for much of the time. There are no IT facilities in the residential blocks.

Quality Assurance

Grade 1

39 Inspectors agreed with the key strengths and weaknesses for quality assurance identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the rigorous self-assessment process which leads to improvements in students' learning experience
- strong commitment to continuous improvement of the quality of provision
- an effective framework for assuring the quality of all aspects of the college's work

- performance indicators and benchmarks effectively applied to all aspects of the college's work
- effective quality assurance procedures for part-time courses
- the well-developed staff appraisal system, linked to training and development

Weaknesses

- some students' awareness of the college charter

40 The college is committed to continuous improvement of its provision. This is evident in its mission statement, the strategic plan and minutes of the corporation. The college has been successful in developing a comprehensive quality assurance system, of which the self-assessment report is a part. The 'quality committee' of the board of governors determines and reviews the quality assurance policy. It produces an evaluative annual report on 'the learning environment', which informs the board of governors on all matters relating to quality of provision, and provides an action plan in response to issues raised. The educational standards committee is responsible for implementing and reviewing the quality assurance policy. The committee, which reports to the quality committee is chaired by the vice-principal and includes a team of managers from different parts of the college. It receives regular reports on all aspects of provision which have an effect upon students' learning, including course programmes, catering, accommodation and college services.

41 Managers have introduced a rigorous self-assessment process which leads to improvements in students' learning experience. Self-assessment is viewed positively by staff. This attitude has been helped by the college's 'integrated performance review framework', within which a range of performance reviews are undertaken in respect of five areas of work:

Cross-college Provision

governance; management; academic services; residential services; and administrative services. These contribute to the college self-assessment report. The preparation of the latest report by a co-ordinating group involved all staff and governors, and many students past and present. It also drew on the views of a wide range of partners and users of the college and its facilities.

42 The self-assessment report includes financial aspects of the college's performance in response to Council Circular 97/22. These aspects are fully covered in the report and inspectors agreed with the college's judgements.

43 Managers have established standard procedures for quality assurance and regular reviews against targets. Comprehensive quality assurance documentation and staff training have ensured that staff fully understand and support the college's quality assurance procedures. Performance standards are set and monitored for all aspects of the college's work. Benchmarks are used effectively for comparing the college's performance with other colleges in the further education sector. All staff are involved on an annual basis in reviewing standards and performance indicators. These standards are clearly expressed, and are realistic. The college has established seven 'slice-groups' to focus on common issues. These groups are designed to bring together staff from different areas of work, such as catering, reception, the children's centre, academic teams and governors.

44 There is a comprehensive policy for assuring the quality of courses. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection report in improving the quality assurance procedures for part-time courses. All full-time and part-time programme areas produce interim and annual reports to a common format. These are received by the educational standards committee which produces a summary report for the quality committee. There is a strong emphasis on

monitoring the progress made in relation to the previous action plan and performance standards. The annual course reports take account of students' views. Students' comments on the quality of courses and services are collected in a variety of ways; for example, by means of questionnaires and through student representation on college committees. The annual course reviews make effective use of the outcomes of 'focus group' discussions. These discussions are facilitated by an external consultant; groups of full-time and part-time students discuss issues related to the quality of teaching, the curriculum offer, and issues relating to residential education. The changes introduced as a result of students' views include the introduction of IT into the diploma programme, and the improved cleanliness of rooms. The college's quality assurance procedures meet the requirements of external examining, validating and awarding bodies, and the college places a high priority on the use of external verifiers' reports in the annual course reviews. All these strengths are identified in the self-assessment report.

45 The college charter has been reviewed three times since its introduction in 1994. All students receive a copy and it is also displayed in classrooms and on notice boards. The charter is clearly presented, addresses the major issues which affect students, and contains service standards for many, but not all, of the commitments which it lists. There are, for example, no standards for the time taken to provide students with feedback on their work. Complaints are monitored, and the annual quality assurance report monitors charter commitments against standards, where they exist. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the college has only recently questioned students' awareness of the charter and its content as part of its quality assurance.

46 Staff development is a strength recognised by inspectors. New staff receive a formal induction. Staff development requirements are

Cross-college Provision

identified through a well-established staff appraisal process that applies to all permanent and some part-time staff. A thorough training needs analysis has been undertaken using external consultants who interviewed every member of staff. After this, a training plan was produced. Staff development priorities are related to the strategic plan, developments in the curriculum, the action plans in the self-assessment report, and the strategic priorities of the FEFC. The staff development programme embraces a comprehensive range of activities. Lesson observation has been an element of the appraisal process since 1995, and the grading of lessons was introduced during 1997. The profile of grades allocated by inspectors to lessons is similar to that established by the college. The college was recognised as an Investor in People in 1996.

Governance

Grade 1

47 Inspection evidence supported the college's judgements on governance.

Key strengths

- effective contribution by governors to the strategic planning process
- governors' broad range of expertise which is of value to the college and well used
- close monitoring by governors of the strategic plan and review of performance
- sound and effective procedures for conducting governors' business
- involvement of staff and students in the work of the governing body and its committees

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

48 Governance of the college is outstanding. Inspectors confirmed the college's self-assessment. The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. Business is conducted substantially in accordance with the memorandum and articles of association, and the responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC are substantially fulfilled. There is a code of conduct for governors and staff and a register recording interests. The college is controlled by a company limited by guarantee. Some governors are company board members. There is also a college advisory council with a large membership, which has an advisory function. In the last year, the council has reviewed its own performance, reduced its size and has chosen to focus on more strategic issues.

49 The board of governors has established an appropriate range of committees. These operate in accordance with clear terms of reference. Proceedings at committee meetings are reported to the next meeting of the board of governors. The policy and finance committee closely monitors the financial position of the college. The audit committee is effective.

50 Clerking arrangements are carefully fulfilled; agendas and minutes of meetings are prepared to a high standard. Procedures for the conduct of the business of the board of governors and its committees are clearly set out in standing orders.

51 There is a strong and productive relationship between governors and members of the senior management group, and a clear understanding of their respective roles. Governors use their expertise to support senior managers in the work of the college.

52 Governors are centrally involved in the shaping of the college's mission and in the formulation of the strategic plan. The working party charged with overseeing the preparation of the strategic plan is led by a governor. The

Cross-college Provision

FEFC is currently reviewing the role and future funding of the designated residential colleges and this has led to some agreed delay in the formulation of the new three-year strategic plan. Governors bring a wide range of expertise and experience in their advice and guidance to the college. Their experience is generally well matched to the needs of the board and its committees. The composition of the board is unusual. It comprises 27 governors, including representatives of business and industry, co-opted representatives of other organisations, nominees, together with staff, student governors, two academic advisers to the college and the chair of the advisory council. A recent self-evaluation and skills audit of governors was undertaken to identify gaps in skills. A search committee actively promotes appropriate representation in relation to new governor appointments.

53 Governors are knowledgeable and well informed about the work of the college. This has been reinforced through briefings, development seminars and interaction with relevant college staff through task groups and working parties. Staff and student governors are represented, where appropriate, on committees. The work of the governors is well focused. It is characterised by a strong advocacy of the college and its mission, combined with an evaluative oversight of its performance and direction. The setting of targets, monitoring and review are now well-embedded procedures across the range of governor business.

Management

Grade 1

54 The self-assessment report provides a detailed and rigorous analysis of the quality of management which was supported by inspection findings. Inspectors considered that most weaknesses identified in the report were not significant.

Key strengths

- a clear and well-understood mission
- successful achievement of the college's strategic objectives
- strong leadership and effective management
- high levels of staff commitment and dedication
- outstanding partnership work with a wide range of organisations
- extensive needs analysis
- effective consideration of financial reports
- extensive monitoring of performance against targets
- effective strategies for implementing equal opportunities and widening participation

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-ordination of operational plans

55 The college has a clearly defined mission statement, which is well understood and supported by governors, managers, staff and students. The college is successful in achieving its mission of offering high-quality education to mature students who have previously gained few qualifications. Strategic planning is well matched to the mission statement. Annual updates of the strategic plan include reviews of the progress made against objectives and the setting of new targets, with dates for

Cross-college Provision

achievement, quantitative measures and the naming of persons responsible for action. The college recognises that there is insufficient co-ordination of the detailed operational plans. There is extensive monitoring of progress achieved against targets; the self-assessment report gives a detailed picture of how governors and managers carry out the monitoring process. The college has achieved the majority of objectives outlined in the strategic plan and its updates. Since the last inspection, the college has diversified and expanded its portfolio of courses and developed its support services for students. Enrolment targets have been met or exceeded and the college has produced a year-on-year reduction in unit costs. The self-assessment report identifies the need to develop further value for money exercises.

56 There is outstanding leadership and effective management of the academic, residential and administrative functions of the college. Staff work well together within and across teams. This is particularly important in view of the residential nature of the college. The college has successfully reviewed the workings of its committees and meetings structure since the last inspection to ensure the most effective use of time. Teachers and other staff are well deployed to meet college objectives and the needs of students. Staff interviewed during the inspection were positive about communications and the efforts made to ensure that they are consulted and kept up to date with proposed developments. There is commitment, energy and a sense of purpose throughout the organisation and staff morale is high. Students are well represented in the decision-making processes. There are students on the board of governors, all the standing committees and the academic board.

57 The college has made good progress in developing its computerised management information since the last inspection. It has an integrated system which covers finance, student records, personnel and, when fully developed, it

will also cover estates management. Reports are produced centrally and are well used to monitor and plan ahead. Direct access to the system is increasingly available and some managers are beginning to make use of this facility. Training has taken place to develop staff skills and confidence in the use of the system; the self-assessment report recognises that this is a continuous process. Steps have been taken to simplify the management structure since the last inspection. A 'next steps in management' staff development programme, which started in 1996, focuses on quality assurance, team-building and financial management.

58 The FEFC audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Monthly financial reports are prepared. These comprise a commentary together with a statement of progress of income and expenditure against profiled budgets, a balance sheet, and a cashflow forecast for the following 12 months. The reports are considered at meetings of the financial management team, the senior management group and the wider college management team. The financial regulations have recently been updated. Neither the internal nor the external auditors have identified any significant weaknesses in the college's systems of financial control.

59 The college has outstanding links with a wide range of organisations regionally, nationally and internationally. There are formal and productive links with regional TECs and with the government office. Seven local authorities and UNISON are company or associate company members with representatives on the board of governors. The college is in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and runs some courses in conjunction with further education colleges. It works jointly with voluntary and community groups. The partnerships are successful in helping the college to deliver its mission. Extensive needs analysis is carried out by the college and its

Cross-college Provision

partners to determine socio-economic trends and to target work in specific communities. An example of this is the recent household survey in Leeds. Since the last inspection, the college has appointed a senior manager with responsibility for marketing, public relations and fund-raising. A marketing database has been developed which gives the college a tool to co-ordinate its marketing processes. Examples of successful diversification of funding by working in partnership with other agencies include the coalfields learning programme which has generated £260,000 per annum. A formal process exists whereby former students of the college are involved in marketing courses. The college has increased its income from sources other than the FEFC, since 1995.

60 The college is strongly committed to equal opportunities and to widening participation; this is evident in all aspects of its work. Evidence of this commitment is provided in the setting of targets to increase enrolment of students from groups which have not usually entered further education, and in curriculum development. Targets are carefully monitored and action is taken when targets are not met.

Conclusions

61 The inspection team found that the self-assessment report provided a reliable basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. In almost all cases, inspectors agreed with the findings in the college's self-assessment report. A few weaknesses identified by the college, such as those in teaching and learning, were given less significance than that placed on them by inspectors. Inspectors considered that the college underestimated its management strengths. Lessons observed and graded by the college resulted in a profile of grades which was similar to that awarded by inspectors. In most cross-college areas, the college has underestimated the significance of its strengths and overstated its weaknesses. Inspectors

agreed with the curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected and all but one of the grades for cross-college provision.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	1
19-24 years	7
25-40 years	40
41-55 years	31
56-65 years	12
66+ years	7
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	27
Intermediate	38
Advanced	5
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	29
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1997)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	0	382	9
Business	0	225	6
Health and community care	0	41	1
Art and design	0	117	3
Humanities	63	2,570	65
Basic education	0	663	16
Total	63	3,998	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (February 1998)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	20	7	1	28
Supporting direct learning contact	11	8	0	19
Other support	20	3	0	23
Residential	23	1	2	26
Total	74	19	3	96

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£2,748,000	£2,964,000	£3,204,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	*	*	*
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	64%	63%
Achievement of funding target	101%	114%	(est) 105%
Diversity of income	43%	45%	47%
Operating surplus	£46,000	£68,000	£75,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – College (1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

**not within the Council's funding methodology*

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Northern College diploma	Pass (%)	88	98	89
	Retention (%)	91	78	83
Access to higher education certificate	Pass (%)	*	100	100
	Retention (%)	*	100	100
Northern College certificate	Pass (%)	100	33	100
	Retention (%)	100	100	100
Award of Open College Network credits	Pass (%)	*	100	100
	Retention (%)	*	100	75
National Certificate of Tenant Participation	Pass (%)	*	*	100
	Retention (%)	*	*	82
Pathways programme	Pass (%)	*	90	75
	Retention (%)	*	95	96
Part-time non-schedule 2	Pass (%)	*	91	91
	Retention (%)	*	95	98

Source: college data

FEFC Inspection Report 56/98

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