

The Richard Huish College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

The Richard Huish College

South West Region

Inspected November 1998

The Richard Huish College is the only sixth form college in Somerset and one of the two sixth form colleges in the South West region. The majority of the college's provision is for full-time students aged 16 to 19. The production of the college's self-assessment report involved staff at all levels in the college and governors. The outcomes of lesson observation informed the report. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. Since the self-assessment report was written, the college has made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses included in the report.

The college offers courses in seven of the FEFC's programme areas. Provision in three of the areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Students receive very good support. The college has strong links with partner schools. Standards of teaching and learning are high. Pass rates are mostly above the national rates for sixth form colleges. Students' achievements in some subjects are outstanding. Progression to higher education is good. Students benefit from a range of enrichment activities which contribute significantly to their personal development. Students have good access to IT. Management has improved significantly since the last inspection, and the college benefits from effective leadership. Governors are committed

to furthering the success of the college and they bring a wide range of skills. There has been considerable progress in developing sound procedures for quality assurance which have led to improvements in curriculum areas. The college has created a pleasant learning environment in which students and staff can work. The college should: increase opportunities for dissemination of good practice between subject teams and improve some teaching where it is less effective; address declining retention rates and weaker pass rates in some subjects; continue to develop its arrangements for monitoring learning support; ensure that its quality assurance system covers all aspects of the college's work; improve some unsuitable teaching accommodation; and address some aspects of the operation of the governing body and its committees.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and computing	2	Support for students	1
Business	2	General resources	2
English and modern foreign languages	2	Quality assurance	2
Archaeology, history, geography, law and philosophy	2	Governance	3
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 The Richard Huish College was established as a Church of England voluntary controlled sixth form college in 1979 on the site of the former Huish Grammar School, which was founded in 1874. The college occupies an attractive single site, a mile from the centre of Taunton, the county town of Somerset. It provides full-time courses for students aged 16 to 19 and some part-time courses for adults. Most students are studying subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). The college offers 38 subjects at GCE A level and 24 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects, as well as courses leading to advanced general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in business, health and social care and leisure and tourism, and a small range of courses leading to general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Full-time students are able to choose from a wide range of additional enrichment activities, for example in the performing arts, sport and outdoor pursuits.

2 Students are drawn from 11 to 16 schools, 11 to 18 schools and independent schools in Somerset, east and mid-Devon and west Dorset. Over 70% of students are from 11 to 16 schools in the borough of Taunton Deane which has a population of approximately 100,000. The town of Taunton is well served by public transport. There are major rail links and the M5 passes the eastern part of the town. The unemployment rate is 5%, below the national rate of 7.5%. The economy of Somerset is dominated by employment in agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Taunton, as the administrative centre of the county, has seen the rapid growth of public and private service employment in the past decade. Over 40% of those in employment work in public administration, education and health. Companies range in size from large public and private employers to small owner-manager enterprises. There are a number of other

providers of post-16 education and training in the area. A large college of further education is nearby and there are four other further education colleges within 25 miles of Taunton.

3 Enrolments have increased from approximately 600 students in 1993 to 1,212 at the time of the inspection. Of these 1,139 were aged 16 to 18. The college's admissions policy has a minimum requirement of five GCSEs at grade C for entry to full-time programmes at advanced level. In Somerset, 51% of pupils aged 16 achieved five or more GCSE grades at grade C or above in 1998. This is above the national average of 46%. The college has steadily improved its examination performance in recent years, while significantly increasing the size of its examination entry.

4 The college's senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, who are currently also faculty directors, and an assistant principal. Subject teachers are grouped into three faculties: humanities and languages; mathematics and science; arts and business. At the time of the inspection the college employed the full-time equivalent of 54 teachers, 21 staff who directly supported learning, and 26 other support staff.

5 The college's mission is to be 'a centre of excellence for the South West region offering full-time 16 to 19 students advanced level education to prepare them for higher education and professional careers'.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 2 November 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1996 and 1997. The college submitted its own data on students'

Context

achievements for 1998 which were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. These data proved to be generally reliable when checked against these sources. Nine inspectors and an auditor spent a total of 36 days in the college. Inspectors observed 52 lessons, assessed students' work and examined college documentation. They met governors, managers, college staff and students, parents and representatives of external bodies.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 52 lessons inspected, 69% were judged to be good or outstanding. This is below the national rate of 73% for sixth form colleges inspected in 1997-98, but above that for colleges in the sector inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	11	19	12	0	0	42
GCSE	0	1	2	0	0	3
GNVQ and NVQ	2	1	1	1	0	5
Other vocational	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total (No.)	14	22	15	1	0	52
Total (%)	27	42	29	2	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was about average for sixth form colleges.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
The Richard Huish College	13.1	85
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Computing

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in mathematics and computing. Inspection evidence broadly supported the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in this area. However, some weaknesses in teaching and learning were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- well-planned courses and lessons
- good achievement rates on GCE A level courses, particularly GCE A level computing

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates in GCSE mathematics
- too narrow a range of teaching methods in some lessons

10 The college offers mathematics and further mathematics at GCE A and AS levels. GCSE mathematics is also available. GCE A level computing was reintroduced in 1995. All full-time GCE A level students have the opportunity to improve their information technology (IT) skills by taking a course in computer literacy and information technology. The college acknowledges in its self-assessment report that a course of study at foundation level would be more suitable for some students currently enrolled on GCSE mathematics. It is also aware that there are too few female students on GCE A level computing. The college is taking steps to address both of these weaknesses.

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that most teaching is good. All courses have schemes of work that are shared with students, but some are merely lists of topics and do not include methods of teaching or

assessment. Most lessons are well planned, and begin with a clear statement of objectives. Assignment briefs are clearly written and easily understood. In the best lessons, teaching is well organised and a variety of teaching techniques are used. There is an effective mix of theory and practical work, demonstrations and direct questioning of students, and teachers succeed in stimulating students' interest in the subject. Some weaker lessons are dull and unimaginative. The slow pace and the lack of variety in teaching methods mean that teachers fail to maintain the interest of all students. The progress made by individual students is not always checked. The college's self-assessment report pays insufficient attention to weaknesses in teaching and learning.

12 Most practical work is well organised. In practical computing lessons, students work competently on their own and receive good support from teachers and other staff. In a mathematics lesson, students used the internet to gather data on football results for a statistics investigation. In a computing lesson, students gathered information on computer equipment for presentations that would help them to develop their oral communication skills. Additional sessions in the mathematics workshop provide individual students with opportunities to address any specific difficulties. Students value the high level of extra support available to them through these extra workshops and through revision sessions.

13 The inspection team agreed with the college's judgement that mathematics and computing courses are well planned and well managed. A new course manager for computing has been in place for one year. Responsibility for course management in mathematics is shared by four teachers. At the time of the inspection, sharing of expertise and good practice had just begun.

14 Most students' coursework files are well organised and contain work of an appropriate standard. The marking of assignments is

Curriculum Areas

careful. Teachers maintain comprehensive records of students' marks and progress. They provide students with constructive comments on their coursework to help them improve the standard of their work. Results for GCE A level computing are significantly above the national average for sixth form colleges. Pass rates for GCE A level mathematics have steadily improved over the past three years. GCSE results in mathematics remain below the national average. The self-assessment report acknowledges the consistently poor pass rate for GCSE mathematics and includes a number of remedial measures. Retention rates are improving for

GCE A level computing, further mathematics and GCE AS mathematics courses, but declining for GCE A level mathematics.

15 Resources for computing are excellent. Students are able to use up-to-date computers and industry-standard software as well as well-written support material held on the internal college computer network (intranet). Classrooms used for mathematics are spacious. The mathematics workshop has a good range of supplementary topic booklets for GCSE and additional worksheets designed for GCE A level students.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in mathematics and computing, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE mathematics (grades A to C)	2	Expected completions	99	131	98
		Retention (%)	88	71	100
		Achievement (%)	44	26	36
GCE A level computing	3	Expected completions	*	17	39
		Retention (%)	*	47	72
		Achievement (%)	*	88	86
GCE A level mathematics	3	Expected completions	145	141	130
		Retention (%)	82	75	70
		Achievement (%)	79	95	97
GCE A level further mathematics	3	Expected completions	15	15	11
		Retention (%)	53	73	91
		Achievement (%)	57	90	80
GCE AS mathematics and further mathematics	3	Expected completions	10	14	17
		Retention (%)	70	79	100
		Achievement (%)	33	80	86

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering full-time and part-time courses in business and accounting. The findings of the inspection generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- consistently high pass rate in GCE A level business studies
- well-organised and effective induction
- good teaching
- students trained to work confidently on their own or in groups
- opportunities for students to achieve professional accounting qualifications
- effective development of key skills on the GNVQ advanced business course

Weaknesses

- poor students' achievements on GCE A level accounting
- declining retention rates on advanced level courses
- some accommodation too small for the groups using it

17 The college attracts large numbers of students to study GCE A level business studies. One hundred students achieved the qualification in 1998. Much smaller numbers of students undertake the GNVQ advanced business programme. Fourteen students achieved the full award in 1997-98. In addition, the college offers GCE A level accounting and part-time professional accounting courses leading to qualifications accredited by the Association of Accounting Technicians and the Chartered Institute of Management. Full-time students value the opportunity they have to gain professional qualifications in addition to their

GCE A levels. Well-organised induction activities help full-time students to settle in to the college quickly, and to make final decisions about appropriate courses.

18 The quality of much of the teaching and learning is good. Teachers provide students with help outside the timetabled lessons. Schemes of work and relevant lesson plans are used for all classes. Teachers make good use of students' experience of work to help them develop their understanding of the subject. In the best lessons, teachers provide a variety of activities, vary the pace appropriately and make frequent checks on students' learning. In the less effective lessons, students are not sufficiently involved in the work, insufficient emphasis is given to applying knowledge and understanding to different business contexts and teachers give students little opportunity to participate in discussion. Most teachers use appropriate methods that allow them to meet the different abilities of individual students. Students are encouraged to acquire sound study habits, and most are able to work confidently by themselves or in small groups. Teachers provide opportunities for students to develop skills of self-assessment. Many students are able to make realistic judgements about the quality of their work. The early development of key skills on the GNVQ advanced business course is effective.

19 Business courses are generally well managed. Curriculum management has recently been reorganised. Two teachers have been appointed to lead groups of courses. Improvements to the quality of the teaching and management of some courses, such as GCE A level accounting, are already evident. Teachers are well informed about their students' progression to higher education or employment. They take into account students' views when developing action plans as part of the course review process. Students speak positively of their satisfaction with the college and their courses.

Curriculum Areas

20 The quality of most students' written work is good. It is well organised and makes good use of IT. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the achievements of the business studies students are a strength. The pass rates for GCE A level business studies were high and above national average. Pass and retention rates for GCE A level accounting were good in 1997. However, in 1998 the pass rate at 56% was well below the national average for sixth form colleges. The college has taken action to remedy this weakness with the appointment of a specialist accounts tutor in September 1998. At the time of the inspection, student numbers indicated a marked improvement in retention. Pass rates for GNVQ advanced business are above the national average. Pass rates on the Association of Accounting Technician's course are low for students achieving the full qualification. However, pass rates for those taking separate elements of the qualification exceed the national rates. Retention rates on all the advanced level courses have declined significantly over the past

three years. This weakness was acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

21 Teachers are suitably qualified and have appropriate teaching experience. Accommodation and resources for business and accounting generally meet students' needs. The facilities and accommodation for part-time accounting courses have been greatly improved. However, some classrooms are poorly furnished and too small for the size of the groups using them. Some lessons were disrupted by noise from adjacent areas. The college identified these weaknesses in its self-assessment report. Students and staff have good access to modern computer hardware and software. The internet is well used by business students undertaking project work. The college recognises that it needs to improve the range of printed materials and other resources available to business studies students in the library. The relocation of the GNVQ advanced course to a room on the ground floor has made the course accessible to wheelchair users.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in business, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level business studies	3	Expected completions	72	111	100
		Retention (%)	97	84	70
		Achievement (%)	84	99	100
GCE A level accounting	3	Expected completions	9	16	25
		Retention (%)	100	81	43
		Achievement (%)	66	100	56
GNVQ advanced business	3	Expected completions	22	11	17
		Retention (%)	100	70	65
		Achievement (%)	62	50	82

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in English and modern foreign languages. They broadly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, although they found some additional strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report for English made insufficient reference to teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- sound, well-planned teaching
- good examination pass rates
- the high standard achieved by students in class work and homework
- teachers' careful marking of students' work
- good range of books and other learning resources

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on GCE A level courses
- falling recruitment to GCE A level modern language courses
- poor accommodation for modern languages

23 The college provides courses at GCE A level in English, French, German and Spanish, and GCSE courses in English and Spanish. Recruitment to English courses has remained buoyant over the past three years, but the numbers of students recruited for French and German have significantly declined. Very few students on other courses choose to take up the offer of additional non-advanced language study. There is no overall manager for English or modern languages. Subject areas are managed by individual teachers who are responsible to

different faculty managers. There is insufficient sharing of good practice between English and modern languages teachers.

24 Most teaching is good and lessons are well planned. Teachers encourage students to play an active part in lessons. Students listen carefully to each other's views and give sensitive and well-considered responses to questions. They work effectively in groups. In the best lessons, students give lively responses to a range of tasks. In the lessons observed, the tasks included group work in English on the language of marketing and whole-class discussion of a topical issue in modern languages. English teachers are skilful at eliciting thoughtful and articulate responses from students. Modern languages teachers conduct lessons in the language being studied, providing good opportunities for students to develop their listening and speaking skills. In a few lessons, teachers allowed an activity to continue too long, so that the pace flagged and there was not enough time for other planned activities. Most of the lessons observed made use of written texts. While other resources were occasionally used, they were not always used imaginatively. There is no provision to allow students of modern languages to study independently at times of their own choosing.

25 Students' work is appropriate and well presented. In the best examples, students' writing demonstrated outstanding fluency, accuracy and command of subject matter. In the subject area self-assessments, some reports identified limited use of IT as a weakness. Teachers have tried to address this, and inspectors observed good examples of the use of the internet for research and of IT to produce coursework. Teachers mark work carefully and write constructive comments to help students improve their performance. Students understand the basis for their assessments, which they regard as helpful and fair. The college encourages students to take part in a range of other activities, including work experience abroad and foreign exchanges.

Curriculum Areas

26 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the examination results are a strength. In GCE A level English language and GCE A level English language and literature, pass rates are consistently above national averages for sixth form colleges. The numbers of students obtaining high grades have been above the national average in two of the last three years. Pass rates in GCE A level English literature have fluctuated. While they improved in 1998, the pass rates at grades A to C have declined. GCSE English language pass rates have been at or well above the national average. In modern languages, pass rates have generally exceeded national averages. The college's self-assessment report failed to identify the falling retention rate on GCE A level courses. The college compares students' grades at GCE A level with those projected from their GCSE

scores. Grades are slightly better than projected in English, substantially better in Spanish, but lower than predicted in French and German.

27 Teachers have a teaching qualification and several have higher degrees. Generous provision of foreign language assistants complements the staffing in modern languages. There are plentiful up-to-date books, texts and audiovisual aids. English lessons take place in modern, well-furnished rooms. As the college states in its self-assessment report, the accommodation for modern languages is poor. There are problems of security, acoustics and temperature and the language laboratory is ageing. The modern languages area has lost its valuable satellite television link. Despite this, teachers have created a good environment for language learning, with attractive displays of posters and students' work.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in English and modern foreign languages 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English language	2	Expected completions	55	*	47
		Retention (%)	95	*	89
		Achievement (%)	65	*	79
GCSE Spanish	2	Expected completions	19	32	34
		Retention (%)	84	47	82
		Achievement (%)	93	*	89
GCE A level French	3	Expected completions	63	71	73
		Retention (%)	76	63	63
		Achievement (%)	69	93	93
GCE A level German and Spanish	3	Expected completions	47	42	46
		Retention (%)	77	71	65
		Achievement (%)	89	90	100
GCE A level English language/English language and literature	3	Expected completions	60	84	126
		Retention (%)	85	79	66
		Achievement (%)	92	100	90
GCE A level English literature	3	Expected completions	90	98	81
		Retention (%)	94	78	75
		Achievement (%)	91	94	95

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data inaccurate

Curriculum Areas

Archaeology, History, Geography, Law and Philosophy

Grade 2

28 Inspectors observed 14 lessons in archaeology, history, geography, law and philosophy. They concluded that the self-assessment report provided a generally accurate evaluation of the quality of provision, although it did not give sufficient weight to some declining retention rates.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- good examination results
- thorough marking of students' work, and constructive feedback
- good use of IT
- valuable enrichment activities

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates in several subjects
- inadequate library bookstock at peak times

29 As part of its humanities provision, the college offers courses at GCE A level and GCE AS in archaeology, history, geography, law and philosophy. A flexible timetable permits students to choose from a wide range of subject combinations. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that teaching and learning are enhanced by extra activities directly linked to the subjects being studied. For example, history students tour the battlefields of Flanders, and a visit to a Roman villa gives archaeology students practice in excavation techniques.

30 Overall the teaching is sound. Teachers use well-prepared materials, such as useful information leaflets and handouts, to help students to learn. For example, one teacher

produced a well-conceived handout which helped law students understand the concept of criminal liability by requiring them to place eight cases in ascending order of culpability. In most lessons, teachers provide students with a variety of appropriate learning activities which stimulate their interest and develop their self-confidence. Students are encouraged to express their opinions and respond well to questioning. Group work is well organised. There are clear objectives and effective procedures for reporting back on outcomes. In a philosophy lesson, an exercise involved students assessing one another's essays using the mark scheme of an examination board. Students listened carefully to each other's views. They spoke enthusiastically of the confidence and insights gained from discussing the work of other students. In a few lessons teachers spend too much time relaying information to students. Students have insufficient opportunities to undertake research and formulate their own arguments.

31 Assignments are set at an appropriate level, marked helpfully and corrected conscientiously. Students understand the written tasks that are required of them, and the criteria by which their work will be assessed. They receive regular evaluative feedback from their teachers about their work and progress. They are encouraged to assess their own performance in order to develop a self-critical approach. Assignments are well planned, linked effectively to previous learning and designed to prepare students for examinations. The written work seen during the inspection was of a good standard across an interesting range of assignments.

32 Curriculum areas are managed well. Teachers listen and respond to students' opinions. Subject staff meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning, students' achievements and students' progress. Action plans are mostly well constructed and effectively monitored. There is evidence that they are leading to

Curriculum Areas

improvement in each subject area, for example, in examination results or additional books for the library.

33 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that examination results are good. Most pass rates show improvement over the past three years. In 1996, of the five subjects inspected, only GCE A level law achieved pass rates above the national average for sixth form colleges. In 1997, pass rates for all five subjects were higher than the national averages. More than 60% of students gained high level passes in geography, law, philosophy and archaeology. In 1997 and 1998, pass rates in geography and archaeology were consistently high. There are declining trends in retention in history, archaeology and geography, and continuing poor retention in philosophy. These weaknesses were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

34 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified by the college in its assessment of staffing and specialist resources. Teachers are well qualified and confident in their grasp of their subjects. Staff and students have access to a suitable range of IT resources, research and reference materials and audiovisual aids. Students make good use of IT for wordprocessing and for gathering information from both the intranet and the internet. In archaeology, artifacts from the local county museum added realism to an investigation of neolithic technology. Books in the library and learning resource centre are well used, but at peak times the stock is inadequate to meet demand. Teaching takes place in subject rooms which have relevant subject displays, are generally well furnished and of an appropriate size.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in archaeology, history, geography, law and philosophy, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level geography	3	Expected completions	98	94	98
		Retention (%)	91	83	79
		Achievement (%)	73	97	97
GCE A level history	3	Expected completions	69	67	89
		Retention (%)	86	73	71
		Achievement (%)	76	88	90
GCE A level law	3	Expected completions	37	55	51
		Retention (%)	62	69	76
		Achievement (%)	91	89	82
GCE A level philosophy and archaeology	3	Expected completions	*	23	38
		Retention (%)	*	70	66
		Achievement (%)	*	87	92

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

35 Inspectors agreed with the key strengths and weaknesses identified in the relevant section of the self-assessment report. The few weaknesses identified in the report are being addressed.

Key strengths

- wide-ranging and successful links with schools
- clear information and useful advice for prospective students
- clearly-defined admissions procedures and effective induction
- very good academic and personal support for students
- thorough system for reviewing students' progress
- comprehensive guidance on higher education

Weaknesses

- insufficient central recording of additional learning support
- underdeveloped careers education and guidance for those seeking employment

36 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that students receive very good support. Staff and students enjoy good working relationships based on mutual respect. Students speak warmly of the support they receive and of the secure and friendly atmosphere of the college.

37 Arrangements for pre-entry guidance and student recruitment are highly effective. Links with local 11 to 16 partner schools are strong and well established. College staff visit partner schools regularly and get to know prospective students before they join the college. There are also good contacts with other schools outside the

immediate locality. Prospective students are given useful guidance at entry through promotional literature and a range of activities which includes open evenings and a 'college experience day'. Detailed and impartial advice is given to students at these events, and at individual interviews. Interviews are carefully monitored by the admissions manager to ensure consistency in approach and advice. Applicants are given ample opportunity to consider and discuss the courses they wish to pursue.

38 Students receive an effective induction to individual courses as well as to the wider college environment. Staff emphasise the college's high expectations of students' work and behaviour, and the challenging nature of their studies. Students who want to transfer between courses receive support and guidance from their personal tutor and subject teachers. The induction process is carefully checked to ensure it runs smoothly. However, the induction of some late applicants is less well managed. The college acknowledged this weakness in its self-assessment report and is taking steps to remedy it.

39 Inspection findings confirmed that the well-developed tutorial system generally provides highly effective support for students. Each full-time student is allocated a personal tutor who is normally one of their subject teachers. Regular tutorial sessions provide tutors with the opportunity to talk to students individually and to offer advice and support to those who need it. Students spoken to during the inspection were enthusiastic about the advice and help they received from personal tutors. Tutorials cover performance on academic courses as well as other aspects of college life. Consistent review and careful setting of minimum target grades for individual students form an important part of the tutorial process. Punctuality and attendance are also closely scrutinised. Parents are kept informed throughout. The student services team has established links with statutory and voluntary

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organisations to which students may be referred for expert help. The college identified in its self-assessment report some unevenness in the quality of tutorial support which it is in the process of addressing.

40 Students value the opportunity to receive learning support which may cover any area of their studies as well as basic skills. All students are entitled to learning support. It is the responsibility of personal tutors or subject teachers to identify the needs as they occur. There is close liaison between the student services team and subject teachers to determine the exact form such support should take. Referrals for learning support may come from subject teachers or personal tutors, or the students themselves may elect to receive support. Students who are found to have particular learning needs at various stages of their courses receive additional support either through the tutorial system or through referral to the student services team. There are also subject workshops to which teachers may refer students during the year as needs are identified, or students may use the workshops on their own initiative. This flexible pattern of learning support and the diverse ways in which such support is provided makes central monitoring of students' progress difficult. The self-assessment report acknowledged this weakness and outlines the progress the college has made towards developing a common recording and reporting system.

41 The careers guidance and support provided for students who wish to progress to higher education is comprehensive and of a high quality. It is widely publicised and readily available to students. Tutors efficiently disseminate essential information related to academic progression. Students are highly appreciative of the help they receive from personal tutors and the access they have to the information they need to enable them to make choices about their future. Careers education and guidance for those seeking employment is

less well developed, falling short of the high level of support and guidance provided for entrants to higher education.

General Resources

Grade 2

42 Inspectors agreed with most of the findings of the college's self-assessment report which provides a comprehensive evaluation of the college's resources. Some of the weaknesses noted in the report are in the process of being addressed.

Key strengths

- pleasant, compact, well-maintained site
- efficient use of accommodation
- good provision of, and access to, IT resources
- good-quality classrooms with appropriate audiovisual equipment
- well-resourced enrichment activities

Weaknesses

- no access to some rooms for people who have restricted mobility
- insufficient social areas for students
- some poor temporary teaching accommodation

43 The college is situated on a compact and attractive single site. It has a pleasant frontage, sports pitches to the rear and well-planted areas of grass and trees. Most buildings date from the 1960s or 1970s, and are well maintained. Elmfield House, a Victorian building, has been refurbished to a high standard. Most general teaching rooms are well furnished and appropriately decorated. Overhead projectors, video players and monitors are widely available. Some of the hatted classrooms provide a less than satisfactory learning environment.

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44 The college makes efficient use of its accommodation. Room usage and occupancy rates are high. Some of the accommodation is in use in the evenings, mostly for community education and by the Open University. At the time of the inspection, most rooms were appropriate for the size of classes being taught in them. The pressure on available teaching space has meant that Elmfield House is only used for part of the time as it was intended, that is, for adult and short courses, because it is needed for full-time programmes for students aged 16 to 19. The accommodation strategy addresses this issue and others, such as wheelchair access, the replacement of the hatted classrooms and the accommodation needs of music and physical education. The strategy is clearly written and includes appropriate analyses of issues and options.

45 The support provided for teaching and learning by IT is very good. A policy of taking almost all computers out of classrooms means that students have easy access to IT facilities. Subject staff ensure that study materials are on the college network. Students make good use of the college's intranet, the internet and electronic mail facilities which are available to all of them via the network. A high proportion of students' work seen during the inspection demonstrated effective use of IT resources. Students spoke highly of the service provided by the IT helpdesk, which is situated in the main learning resource centre. Some subject areas, such as mathematics and science, have developed workshops where specialist learning materials and computers are available for use at any time. Communications between staff and students are enhanced by electronic noticeboards and the use of the college computer network.

46 Staff in the main learning resource centre, which includes the library, are in the process of cataloguing the large number of items held in subject areas, over which there is at present little stock control. The library has improved significantly since the last inspection. The

budget has been increased, old stock in many areas removed and access and security improved. Student usage is increasing rapidly. The self-assessment report acknowledged that some curriculum areas are still under-represented in the library stock.

47 The college acknowledges that the lack of student communal and social space is a weakness. The restaurant doubles as the only student common room. Vending machines are available for students in the evenings. Students consider that the restaurant service is good, but it becomes very crowded at peak times. Circulation areas are congested when students move between lessons. Students make good use of the college grounds in suitable weather.

48 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that despite the small size of the sports hall, the college makes effective provision for the sporting interests of its students. There are good on-site football, hockey, netball and rugby pitches. Extensive rental arrangements for off-site facilities provide for indoor sports such as swimming, badminton and basketball. The college's music and drama resources are also used to support a wide range of performance activities.

49 The college has responded well to the needs of individual students with disabilities. For example, a computer workstation with specialist software has been reserved for a student with visual impairment. Classes have been relocated to the ground floor and one hut is ramped for the two students who currently use wheelchairs. However, the self-assessment report recognised that access for people with restricted mobility is limited. The lack of lifts makes some specialist teaching rooms inaccessible to wheelchair users. The learning resource centre, most specialist teaching rooms, the restaurant and appropriate toilet facilities are all accessible. College publicity and student charters present an accurate picture of current difficulties.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

50 Inspectors confirmed many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Considerable improvements have been made in this area since the last inspection. However, some of the strengths noted in the self-assessment report relate to recent developments and have not yet been tested in practice.

Key strengths

- well-documented and well-understood quality assurance procedures
- good use of students' views to identify areas for improvement
- clearly defined quality standards
- effective use of value-added data
- good arrangements for observing teaching
- effective staff development and appraisal
- thorough self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- some aspects of the college's work not covered by the quality assurance system
- some overcomplex and inconsistently applied quality assurance procedures
- lack of analysis of student achievement trends by some course teams

51 The college has systematically improved its arrangements for quality assurance since the last inspection. The quality assurance policy reflects the college's objective of encouraging a self-critical culture to support continuous improvement. A quality systems committee is chaired by the assistant principal who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the quality system across the college. Self-assessment has been effectively integrated with

the college's quality assurance arrangements. The college pays close attention to the views of students and responds positively to them. Some quality assurance procedures are too complex. The self-assessment report acknowledged the need to review some of its quality assurance procedures and make them more manageable.

52 The self-assessment report produced for the inspection was based largely on existing quality procedures. Governors were fully involved in the assessment of governance, and they monitored the college self-assessment process through the academic planning and quality committee. Staff at all levels were involved in the preparation of the report. The final report was approved by the corporation. Evidence was carefully assembled from course review reports, lesson observations, samples of students' work, examination results and other sources of evidence, such as student satisfaction surveys. Assessment of the college's performance against a range of targets contributed significantly to the judgements. The report is mostly clear, comprehensive and frank. Strengths, weaknesses and evidence are clearly stated. There is frequent use of data, such as pass rates, to substantiate judgements. The report drew on the outcomes of lesson observations, which were carried out by a trained team of 16 staff, including the principal. The process was well managed and appropriately documented.

53 College targets for students' achievements, retention and attendance are set annually. Some course teams set targets for pass rates within their curriculum area. A number of teams analyse pass rate trends over several years, but this is not standard practice across the college. Minimum target grades are set for each student on the basis of value-added calculations derived from the student's qualifications on entry to the college. This provides an effective benchmark for monitoring and encouraging improvements in individual performance.

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54 There is a systematic annual cycle for course quality reports. These identify strengths and weaknesses and include action plans to address weaknesses. Evidence used to support the judgements includes data on students' achievements, lesson observations, students' coursework, the college self-assessment report and the views of moderators, employers and parents. Particular attention is paid to the results of students' opinion surveys. The best reports are based on sound analysis of evidence and are appropriately evaluative. Action plans include responsibilities and timescales and identify any training and resources needed for success. A minority of reports tend to be descriptive and to overemphasise the impact of shortcomings in equipment and accommodation. The self-assessment report acknowledged the need to disseminate examples of good reporting practice across the college.

55 The quality assurance system does not yet cover every aspect of the college's work. In some areas the use of standards and the reporting process is underdeveloped. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. However, admissions, marketing, personnel and learning resources do provide annual reports on specified areas of their performance. The college intends to develop service standards and extend target-setting to all parts of the college in the forthcoming year. In addition, a few courses for adults are not covered by the quality assurance system.

56 The college has developed a number of comprehensive charters. The main charter document is attractively presented. It states the overall standards of service that students, parents, community users and employers can expect. When appropriate, charter statements are linked to the national charter for education. There is a well-publicised complaints procedure. Complaints are resolved within set timescales. Information on specific aspects of the college is provided in more detailed course and service charters.

57 Staff development is well planned to meet both the college's strategic objectives and individual staff training needs. Training is effectively planned, funded and evaluated. Individual training needs are identified through course quality reviews and the annual staff appraisal and development scheme. For teaching staff, this includes lesson observations, and for non-teaching staff, observation of tasks. The scheme has the confidence of staff and is regularly reviewed. The college gained the Investor in People award in 1998.

Governance

Grade 3

58 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses included in the self-assessment report. However, inspectors and the audit service found additional deficiencies in financial reporting and monitoring.

Key strengths

- effective procedures for recruitment of governors resulting in a broad range of relevant expertise
- proficient clerking
- comprehensive code of conduct and code of ethics

Weaknesses

- deficiencies in financial reporting and monitoring by the finance and general purposes committee
- lack of consideration and approval by the corporation of a key financial return to the FEFC
- inadequate monitoring of some key policies

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

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The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

60 Inspectors and the audit service judged that governors were insufficiently involved in financial monitoring between April and November 1998. Governors did not receive management accounts for the months of May, June and July. As a result of these omissions and the nature of the college's reporting cycle no financial information was received and discussed by governors between April and November 1998. Although during this period there was close financial monitoring by the principal who was in regular contact with the chair of the corporation board and the finance and general purposes committee, this lack of formal monitoring by governors is a significant weakness. The mid-year financial forecast was discussed and accepted by the finance and general purposes committee, but there is no record of its approval by the corporation. The three-year financial forecast was submitted to the FEFC without consideration by the finance and general purposes committee or approval by the corporation.

61 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that governors have a wide range of relevant experience. Their skills include expertise in accountancy, law, business and education. Four of the 17 governors are foundation governors. They are the trustees of the college estate and of the trust fund established by the founder.

62 Effective procedures for the recruitment of new governors have ensured that the corporation has an appropriate range of expertise. A skills audit was carried out to compare existing governors' skills with those considered necessary to ensure the future success of the college. Although recruitment procedures reflect the principles of openness and good practice, they are not yet fully detailed

in standing orders or terms of reference. If a vacancy arises for a foundation governor, the remaining three foundation governors nominate an existing member. This procedure is well established, but it is not documented. The self-assessment report identified weaknesses in training and induction of governors which the corporation has begun to address. For example, new governors now receive an induction pack.

63 Governors are strongly committed to the college mission, although they recognise that it needs reformulating to take account of college plans for business development and the recruitment of more adult students. They have a clear understanding of the strategic issues facing the college and were closely involved in the preparation and approval of the strategic plan. The establishment of a business development committee is evidence of the corporation's commitment to reduce the college's dependence on FEFC income. However, inspectors judged the committee to be insufficiently critical of planning for the diversification of income.

64 There are good working relationships between governors and senior managers. The chair and principal meet regularly. Arrangements for the appraisal of the senior postholders are appropriate. Governors actively support college activities. They regularly attend parent evenings and music, drama and sports events. Many governors are well known to college staff.

65 Corporation agendas and supporting papers are sent out in good time in advance of meetings. Concise minutes clearly show the decisions taken. A brief summary of each committee's business is presented at the start of corporation meetings. This helps to focus discussion on key issues requiring decisions. Governors pay close attention to students' achievements, in particular the public examination results. There is an appropriate range of committees, each with clearly defined

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membership and terms of reference. An annual calendar of meetings sets out key matters for discussion and decision at corporation and committee meetings, but it is not synchronised with the college's financial reporting cycle.

66 The corporation has introduced a comprehensive code of conduct and a separate code of ethical practice. A statement of openness and a 'whistleblowing' procedure are due for discussion at the next corporation meeting. The register of interests is completed by all governors, although guidance on matters to be included is not yet fully comprehensive. Policies and procedures to determine the conduct of corporation and committee meetings are found in several different documents. This makes it difficult to identify some of the guidelines and procedures clearly. Policies have received corporation approval, but governors' monitoring of the implementation of key policies, including those for equal opportunities and health and safety, has been inadequate.

Management

Grade 2

67 Since the last inspection, the college has taken action to improve its management arrangements. The new senior management team has taken appropriate steps to address many aspects of the college's performance. Inspectors agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report. A few additional weaknesses were found by inspectors and the audit service.

Key strengths

- effective management of change
- open and consultative style of management
- good use of minimum target grades to monitor the progress of individual students

- excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activities
- close and productive links with 11 to 16 schools

Weaknesses

- late production of some internal financial reports
- lack of clarity in recording reasons for students leaving courses
- inconsistent application of monitoring arrangements for some key policies

68 In recent years the college has made good progress towards its mission. Student numbers have steadily increased. Students' achievements have been maintained at a high level. Staff understand and support the mission. Actions and targets in the operational plan are linked to strategic objectives. The operational plan includes appropriate targets for attendance, retention and achievement. At the end of each year, progress towards operational objectives is evaluated. Action plans for course teams are contained in their annual course quality reports. These plans are not explicitly linked to strategic objectives or the college operational plan. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the use of performance targets by course teams needed further development.

69 The college has a full range of policies and procedures. Practice does not always accord with policy and there has been inconsistent application of monitoring arrangements. The use of value-added measures is a strength which enables each student's progress to be monitored by reference to their minimum target grade.

70 Changes to management structures have recently been introduced for both teaching and support areas. Staff were consulted, and the process of change was effectively managed. Staff value the open and consultative style of management. Line management is clear and

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staff are aware of their new responsibilities. At the time of the inspection, some staff were temporarily occupying dual roles and there was one unfilled post. Communication in the college is good. There are weekly staff briefings and regular bulletins written by key staff on a wide range of issues. Staff also participated in the self-assessment of management by completing a detailed questionnaire.

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Budgetary responsibilities are clear and budget holders receive appropriate reports of actual and committed expenditure. Deployment of staff is cost effective and workloads are accurately calculated. However, financial reports to senior managers and governors have not always been produced in accordance with required deadlines and some have been omitted. The college expects its recent reorganisation of the finance department to overcome this problem. The overall financial position of the college has improved since 1995-96. The reports of internal and external auditors in 1996-97 identified some significant weaknesses in the college's systems of internal control. According to the internal auditor's report for 1997-98, most of these have been addressed. The college has determined a timetable for addressing the outstanding issues.

72 The information on students' achievements provided for the inspection was generally reliable, although it contained some errors. There have been some significant improvements in the college management information system in the past 12 months. As the self-assessment report recognises, opportunities for staff to use the system are still limited. Class registers and attendance records are now accurate following the introduction of a new system. College data identify the number of students who do not successfully complete their courses. Retention is declining in a number of subjects. However, there is no clear distinction between those who change course and those who drop one of their

subjects. This makes it difficult for the college to track retention trends accurately.

73 The recruitment of students is well planned and the college has exceeded its recruitment targets in recent years. Close links with local 11 to 16 schools enable the college to predict with accuracy the demand for its courses. The college does not have well-developed business links and it recognises in its self-assessment report the need for increased use of labour market information to support its business development activities. In 1996-97, 88% of the college's income was provided by the FEFC. A business development unit has been established to develop other sources of income.

74 The college has an active equal opportunities group and an appropriate policy. Recent activities have raised awareness of equal opportunities issues. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that monitoring of the policy is not well developed. The college broadly fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* for collective worship and religious education.

Conclusions

75 The college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the college's self-assessment report. Strengths were generally confirmed by the inspection. A few weaknesses were given more significance by the inspectors than by the college. Lessons observed and graded by the college resulted in a profile of grades which was similar to that awarded by inspectors. At the time of the inspection, action to address some of the weaknesses identified through self-assessment had already taken place. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the curriculum grades awarded by the college in the areas inspected, and all but one of the grades for cross-college provision.

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76 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 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	94
19-24 years	4
25+ years	2
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	0
Intermediate	1
Advanced	99
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	352	12	30
Agriculture	28	1	2
Business	109	47	13
Hotel and catering	37	0	3
Health and community care	33	0	3
Art and design	112	5	10
Humanities	462	14	39
Total	1,133	79	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 5% 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 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	54	0	0	54
Supporting direct learning contact	21	0	0	21
Other support	18	8	0	26
Total	93	8	0	101

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£3,149,000	£3,319,000	£3,417,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.15	£16.32	£16.35
Payroll as a proportion of income	65%	64%	64%
Achievement of funding target	108%	122%	102%
Diversity of income	11%	12%	14%
Operating surplus	-£161,000	£36,000	£17,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	–	139	173	–	29	14
	Retention (%)	–	69	83	–	59	93
	Achievement (%)	–	78	84	–	64	71
2	Expected completions	200	390	348	10	71	118
	Retention (%)	97	92	79	100	56	80
	Achievement (%)	53	80	86	60	78	54
3	Expected completions	–	1,701	1,935	–	89	98
	Retention (%)	–	95	75	–	83	80
	Achievement (%)	–	79	91	–	62	86
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	–	–	–	20	22
	Retention (%)	–	–	–	–	100	91
	Achievement (%)	–	–	–	–	n/a	40
Short courses	Expected completions	214	26	266	31	72	85
	Retention (%)	100	100	100	100	57	82
	Achievement (%)	34	100	99	90	100	71
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	403	483	2	13	21	–
	Retention (%)	99	100	50	100	76	–
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	33	n/a	–

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

n/a not applicable

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