

# Ridge Danyers College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1998-99**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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*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.

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

## 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. 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

## Ridge Danyers College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected September 1998**

Ridge Danyers College is a sixth form college in the metropolitan borough of Stockport. It was established in August 1995 as the result of a merger of two sixth form colleges. The two campuses are about nine miles apart. The college's self-assessment processes are systematic. They build upon existing arrangements for quality assurance which are well understood and fully supported by members of the corporation and staff. Since the self-assessment report was written, the college has taken action to remedy some of the weaknesses that it identified. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report but considered that some strengths and weaknesses had been underestimated or omitted. In arriving at grades for some curriculum areas, the college paid insufficient attention to students' achievements.

The college offers school-leavers and adults a wide range of general education and vocational courses. It also offers work-related training. Provision covers nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Work in four programme areas was inspected; five grades were awarded. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected. Teaching is good; some is outstanding. On many courses, students'

examination results are improving but retention rates fluctuate and some are poor. The quality of the college's support for students is outstanding. Pre-entry guidance and interview processes are thorough. Students are able to participate in a wide range of enhancement activities. Careers education and guidance are excellent. Most buildings are clean, bright and provide a welcoming atmosphere for students. Some accommodation is of a high standard. IT facilities are up to date. Libraries are well stocked and used extensively by students. A high level of commitment from members of the corporation has helped to steer the college through a period of significant change over the last three years. Characteristics of the excellent management of the college include: strong leadership; effective involvement of staff in strategic and operational planning; good internal communications; well-executed marketing strategies; and firm financial control. The college should: evaluate appropriately students' achievements against demanding measures and targets; raise retention rates; develop further the use of IT to help students with their learning; continue its efforts to bring all accommodation up to an acceptable standard; and ensure that the corporation and its committees work fully in accordance with their responsibilities.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science	2	Support for students	1
Business studies	3	General resources	2
Health and social care, childcare, and counselling	2	Quality assurance	2
History, politics, religious studies and sociology	2	Governance	2
Modern languages	3	Management	1

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Ridge Danyers College is a sixth form college in the metropolitan borough of Stockport. It was established in August 1995 as the result of a merger of two sixth form colleges: The Ridge located in the district of Marple, and Margaret Danyers College located in the district of Cheadle. The college's two campuses are approximately nine miles apart.

2 The college attracts students from Stockport, Cheshire, Derbyshire and the southern suburbs of Greater Manchester. Two other sixth form colleges and a general further education college also provide post-16 education in the borough of Stockport which has a population of about 289,000. Manufacturing, engineering and service industries are the main sources of employment in Stockport. Some parts of the borough are comparatively affluent; others have high levels of unemployment, particularly among people aged 20 to 24 years. In July 1997, the unemployment rate in Stockport was 4.4% compared with a rate of 6.4% in the north-west and a national rate of 5.9%.

3 Although the college is designated as a sixth form college, in many respects it operates more like a tertiary college. For example, it provides courses in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and offers higher level courses in teacher training, childcare and management. School-leavers and adults at both campuses have a wide choice of general education and vocational courses. The college also provides work-related training some of which is funded by the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and the European Social Fund. In July 1998, there were 6,939 students enrolled at the college; 63% were studying part time. Of the full-time students based at Marple, 3% were from minority ethnic groups. At Cheadle the comparable figure was 18%.

4 The current management structure has operated from September 1997. The executive team consists of the principal and four directors whose areas of responsibility are: curriculum

and planning; curriculum services; finance, information and estates; and personnel and college services. The curriculum is managed through four faculties: arts; business; humanities; and science, mathematics and information technology (IT). Heads of faculty also have pastoral and cross-college responsibilities. Aspects of each faculty's work were included in the inspection. Support for students and activities that involve marketing and business development form part of the work of curriculum services. In July 1998, the college employed 230 full-time staff and 310 part-time staff.

5 The college's mission statement is concise: 'improving the quality of learning and the quality of life'. In interpreting its mission, the college has set the following priorities:

- to be the first choice for education and training for students aged 16 to 19 years and their parents
- to determine and respond to the needs of the wider community, particularly groups which are under-represented in further education
- to aim for excellence in the quality of learning
- to develop and maintain in staff high levels of expertise and an ability to respond to change
- to improve the college's financial health.

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in September 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1998. It also prepared data to supplement and correct some statistics for student retention and achievement that had been derived from the individualised student record (ISR) returns for 1996 and 1997. The ISR returns were incomplete because the college had not recorded all its students' achievements. Data supplied by the college were checked by the inspectorate against

# Context

primary sources, for example, class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies, and found to be accurate. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision which was to be assessed. The inspection was carried out by a team of 10 inspectors working for a total of 36 days. They observed 63 lessons, including tutorials, and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. The inspection team also included an auditor who worked for five days. Inspection team members held meetings with members of the corporation,

managers, college staff and students. They consulted a representative of the local TEC and an adviser from the local education authority (LEA), and observed a meeting of the corporation.

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 lessons observed, 70% were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% were less than satisfactory. This compares with the national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1997-98.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	9	13	9	0	0	31
GNVQ	2	6	3	3	0	14
Other*	3	11	3	1	0	18
Total (No.)	14	30	15	4	0	63
Total (%)	22	48	24	6	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*

\*includes access courses and tutorials

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

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Ridge Danyers College	12.7	84
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

## Science

### Grade 2

**9 The inspection of science focused on courses in biology, chemistry and physics at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), courses in astronomy, human physiology and health for the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), and the programme in science leading to the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) at advanced level. Eleven lessons were inspected. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses included in the self-assessment report. However, they identified a few weaknesses that were not given sufficient emphasis and some strengths which were overstated.**

#### Key strengths

- a broad curriculum that matches students' needs
- good teaching in all subjects
- consistently good pass rates in GCE A level physics
- substantial numbers of students progressing to science-related programmes in higher education
- well-maintained laboratories

#### Weaknesses

- below average pass rates in chemistry and human biology at GCE A level
- few passes at GCE A level at the higher grades
- some modest retention rates

10 The self-assessment report underemphasises the college's successful approach to the development of its science curriculum. The college has introduced a GCSE course in astronomy and an access to higher education course to respond to the interests and needs of adults. Unpopular GCSE subjects have

been withdrawn. Instead, full-time students can follow a course leading to intermediate GNVQs in science. Some aspects of the flexibility of the curriculum are acknowledged as strengths in the self-assessment report. For example, modular GCE A level programmes enable students to choose courses which match their individual needs.

11 Teaching in all subjects is effective. Eight of the 11 lessons observed were judged to be good or outstanding. Attendance of students averaged 90%. The profile of grades for lesson observations by college staff matches the profile from the inspection. Some teaching sessions last for longer than two hours but teachers are skilful in providing a range of suitable activities which maintain students' interest. Practical work is extensive, well carried out and carefully linked to theory. Staff are vigilant about safety in laboratories. Students are well disciplined and employ good working practices in the laboratories. These strengths were included in the self-assessment report.

12 Course documentation is helpful and comprehensive. As noted in the self-assessment report, tutors provide students with well-prepared practical schedules, problem sheets and course summaries. Students' progress is carefully monitored. The levels of assignments are well judged and match the stages reached by students in their development. Work is fairly marked, but does not always include enough written comments from tutors that would help students. Students achieve a wide range of standards in written and oral work. Some of their project work is good. Assignments indicate that the development and use of IT skills are well integrated with other parts of courses. This strength was mentioned in the self-assessment report. Some students have poor numerical skills. Informal tutorial sessions provide students with ample opportunity to receive additional help.

13 Most sections on students' achievements in the self-assessment report overstate the



# Curriculum Areas

strengths. Only in human biology and biology at GCE A level have retention rates exceeded 90% in two of the last three years. For the last three years, pass rates at GCE A level at grades A to E in physics have been consistently better than national averages for students of all ages in sixth form colleges. In biology, pass rates at grades A to E have steadily improved but only exceeded the national average in 1998. Grades in chemistry and in human biology have been at or below national averages for the last three years. As noted in the self-assessment report, GCE A level passes at grades A to C have not substantially exceeded national averages in any subject and, in most cases, have been significantly below. A few students take science options in the course leading to the international

baccalaureate and achieve good results. Many students taking advanced level courses, including a few achieving GNVQs, progress to higher education courses in science or science-related subjects, for example engineering. GCSE results are mainly in line with national averages for comparable groups in sixth form colleges.

14 Recent refurbishment at the Cheadle campus has provided specialist accommodation of a high standard. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, laboratories are well maintained. Overall, the range and level of equipment for lessons are good but require more careful management. In several lessons, groups of up to four students shared a set of apparatus.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	12	+	15
		Retention (%)	75	+	60
		Achievement (%)	100	+	100
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	*	6	20
		Retention (%)	*	83	80
		Achievement (%)	*	80	57
GCE A level biology	3	Expected completions	+	+	194
		Retention (%)	+	+	76
		Achievement (%)	+	+	91
GCE A level human biology	3	Expected completions	29	50	30
		Retention (%)	90	84	93
		Achievement (%)	46	80	61
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	128	142	122
		Retention (%)	76	71	65
		Achievement (%)	84	82	82
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	104	108	92
		Retention (%)	78	78	78
		Achievement (%)	90	88	99

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

+ISR-derived data were incomplete

\*college did not begin the course until 1995 and the first results were achieved in 1997

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Studies

### Grade 3

**15 The inspection covered programmes leading to qualifications at GCE A level, and GNVQs at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and also included access and book-keeping courses. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with several of the strengths and weaknesses noted in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses, particularly in teaching and learning.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- good schemes of work
- improving retention rates on GNVQ programmes
- pass rates on GNVQ programmes
- well-presented written work from students
- effective strategies to co-ordinate work across campuses

#### Weaknesses

- some poor teaching
- instances of poor retention rates
- some poor examination results at GCE A level and GCSE
- no strategy to update the industrial experience of staff
- no systematic feedback from students on the quality of provision

16 Staff prepare their courses carefully. Schemes of work are shared with students and most lesson plans are appropriately detailed. The best practice supports the claim in the self-assessment report that teaching methods meet the needs of individuals. For example, at the beginning of a book-keeping course, the teacher devised activities which enabled adult students who were returning to study to develop

confidence. She quickly established a rapport with the students and encouraged them to seek advice and help from her. By contrast, another teacher briskly took a group of first-year students through a series of activities but made little effort to relate to individuals or to check that they understood the work. Only one lesson observed was judged to be outstanding. In six lessons, inspectors found weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning which were not highlighted in the self-assessment report. The most common weaknesses included: poor question-and-answer techniques; an inappropriate selection of tasks for group work; and a failure to ensure that all students were engaged in learning.

17 Students' work is usually well presented. Portfolios belonging to GNVQ students include examples of key skills being effectively integrated with other aspects of the course. Students taking GNVQ courses consider alternative approaches before finalising their plans for assignments. By contrast, some GCE A level students undertake research projects with only a rudimentary notion of what their strategy might be. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, teachers provide appropriate levels of individual help and support for students. Written feedback on assignments is often detailed, and identifies not only errors and pointers for improvement but also acknowledges high standards and good work.

18 Students' performance on business courses presents a varied profile of achievement. Retention rates for GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes have improved significantly from 1996 to 1998. The rates have fluctuated for GCE A level and GCSE courses, and in certain years reached a poor level. In two of the last three years, the pass rates for students following two-year courses at GCE A level in business studies have been significantly lower than national averages for students of all ages in sixth form colleges. Results from students taking one-year courses leading to GCE A levels are poor; the pass rate has exceeded

# Curriculum Areas

50% in only one of the last three years. Declining enrolment and poor performance have resulted in the college withdrawing GCSE accounts from its portfolio of courses. Pass rates for GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses have declined over the last three years but still remain well above national averages. In 1998, the pass rate for the GNVQ at foundation level was 79%. The self-assessment report records most of the strengths but does not pay enough attention to the weaknesses in students' achievements.

19 The college has succeeded in bringing together staff with differing experience in teaching business to form a unified team which delivers courses at both campuses. This strength was noted in the self-assessment report. Some variation still exists in the quality and consistency of curriculum management, but good practice at one campus is now being

introduced at the other. The self-assessment report failed to record some particular weaknesses in management. For example, arrangements for obtaining feedback from students to improve the quality of provision are not systematic. There is no strategy to update the industrial experience of staff.

20 The self-assessment report acknowledges as a strength the quality of handouts available to students at GCE A level. Where students do not have access to such learning materials, the quality of information which they keep for future reference is sometimes poor. Links between teachers and the staff in libraries are not close enough to ensure that a range of suitable resources is readily available to students. Classrooms are well maintained but occasionally the space is insufficient for large classes to undertake activities in small groups.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE accounting	2	Expected completions	43	25	10
		Retention (%)	+	92	50
		Achievement (%)	+	45	25
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	67	+	46
		Retention (%)	30	+	74
		Achievement (%)	100	+	88
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	49	64	67
		Retention (%)	47	78	76
		Achievement (%)	96	81	70
GCE A level business studies (two-year course)	3	Expected completions	157	170	147
		Retention (%)	+	55	70
		Achievement (%)	+	87	80

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)  
+ISR-derived data were incomplete

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Social Care, Childcare, and Counselling

### Grade 2

**21 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering courses in nursery nursing, childcare and education, health and social care, and counselling. In most cases, inspectors agreed with the findings in the self-assessment report but they identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- effective teaching
- appropriate use of a wide range of learning resources
- well-managed and carefully supervised work placements for all full-time students
- frequent, systematic review and recording of students' progress
- good examination results for most courses

#### Weaknesses

- low retention rates for some courses
- unsatisfactory pass rates for the GNVQ intermediate course
- insufficient opportunities for some students to develop IT skills

22 The college offers a wide range of well-established courses at foundation, intermediate, advanced and higher levels, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Links with local employers in both public and private sectors are effective and contacts with local schools are extensive. Students progress well to employment and to courses in higher education.

23 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that organisation and management of courses are good. Schemes of work provide a sound basis for planning. Student handbooks include full details of course requirements and

the schedule of assignments. All full-time students benefit from work experience placements which are effectively organised and supervised. Team meetings are held frequently at both campuses and minutes are circulated to all staff. The recent relocation of some staff has improved communications between campuses; this development was noted in the self-assessment report.

24 The quality of teaching is good. Of the 12 lessons observed, inspectors judged 10 to be good or outstanding. As the self-assessment report states, lessons are well planned and include a suitable range of learning activities. Teachers frequently use appropriate learning resources to motivate students and to help them to learn. In an advanced health and social care lesson, students were introduced to the purposes, size and structure of blood vessels and the names of their component parts. They carried out a number of practical tasks to measure blood pressure and pulse rates, and used bioviewers to study cross-sections of arteries and veins. To reinforce points covered in the lesson, they used different colours of plasticine to make models of an artery and a vein. A few lessons moved too slowly to be fully effective, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Occasionally, a minority of students dominated discussions and the progress of others went unchecked. The average level of attendance in the lessons observed was only 81%.

25 Development of key skills is well integrated with other aspects of GNVQ courses. However, students taking childcare courses have insufficient opportunities to develop IT skills and make little use of computer-based learning resources. These strengths and weaknesses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Clear assessment procedures are applied rigorously. Teachers meet regularly to standardise marking and grading. Students receive clear, written briefings on assignments and ample feedback on the quality of their marked work. They have frequent reviews with teachers who monitor and record progress carefully.

# Curriculum Areas

26 Retention rates on most courses are well below the college target of 85% and some are declining still further. For example, retention on GNVQ courses has been below 80% for the last two years. The retention rate on the one-year course leading to the nursery nursing diploma dropped from 86% in 1996 to 75% in 1998. These weaknesses were insufficiently acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The two-year course leading to the nursery nursing diploma shows improvement in retention from 74% in 1996 to 100% in 1998. Retention rates for the intermediate level courses leading to a counselling certificate have not fallen below 88% over the last three years.

27 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that pass rates for health, care and counselling courses are usually good. Most results are at or above national averages. Pass rates for childcare courses have improved over the last three years. Pass rates for the one-year diploma course in nursery nursing improved from 75% in 1996 to 89% in 1998. Pass rates for most counselling courses are consistently

high. Although the pass rates for the GNVQ foundation and advanced courses in health and social care have declined from 100% and 95% in 1996 to 80% and 88%, respectively, in 1998, they remain significantly above national averages. Pass rates for the GNVQ intermediate course show a slight improvement from 57% in 1996 to 63% in 1998 but they are still below national averages.

28 Teachers are well qualified. Most have appropriate vocational qualifications and over half have assessor or verifier awards, a strength included in the self-assessment report. Some part-time teachers also continue to work professionally in fields that are directly relevant to the courses on which they teach. In addition, other professionals working in the community act as visiting speakers. These strengths were included in the self-assessment report. There is a good supply of learning resources, including CD-ROMs. Recent additions to the appropriate sections of college libraries supplement a well-stocked departmental library.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in health and social care, childcare, and counselling, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions	+	+	24
		Retention (%)	+	+	63
		Achievement (%)	+	+	80
Certificate in childcare and education	2	Expected completions	+	+	12
		Retention (%)	+	+	75
		Achievement (%)	+	+	100
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	+	+	31
		Retention (%)	+	+	77
		Achievement (%)	+	+	63
Nursery nursing diploma (one-year course)	3	Expected completions	+	+	12
		Retention (%)	+	+	75
		Achievement (%)	+	+	89
Nursery nursing diploma (two-year course)	3	Expected completions	+	+	12
		Retention (%)	+	+	100
		Achievement (%)	+	+	100

Source: college (1998)

+ISR-derived data were incomplete

# Curriculum Areas

## History, Politics, Religious Studies and Sociology

### Grade 2

**29 Inspectors observed 13 lessons which mainly covered provision at GCE A level but also included some work for the international baccalaureate and access courses. They agreed with almost all the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but concluded that the college had given insufficient emphasis or attention to some aspects of teaching and learning or to students' achievements.**

#### Key strengths

- some outstanding teaching
- good achievements on GCE A level government and politics, sociology and religious studies courses
- effective planning on all courses
- effective teaching materials
- rigorous monitoring of students' progress
- strong leadership and teamwork
- well-equipped classrooms with excellent displays

#### Weaknesses

- some below average achievements in GCE A level history
- poor retention on some courses
- students not always sufficiently involved in learning
- underdeveloped use of IT

**30** The human studies team was established in September 1997. Staff teach mainly on full-time courses at GCE A level in the subjects inspected but also contribute to other college courses. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that courses for which the team is responsible are effectively managed. Staff meet

regularly; opportunities to share good practice are increasing. Common approaches to the planning and delivery of courses at both campuses are developing well. Schemes of work are appropriately detailed. Teaching is planned carefully and incorporates regular reviews of students' progress. Work is pitched at an appropriate level and some students produce coursework of high quality, a strength mentioned in the self-assessment report. Only tentative steps have been taken to integrate IT with other aspects of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report acknowledges this weakness.

**31** Across all subjects, most of the teaching is effective. Five of the 13 lessons observed were judged to be outstanding and four were assessed as good. The average level of attendance was 90%. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to maintain students' interest and help them to learn, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. They are adept at using simple examples to help students to gain a clear understanding of complex issues. For example, students in a sociology class at GCE A level were given a cartoon and accompanying notes from which they had to decide whether a suicide or murder had taken place. The activity prompted lively group discussions which were well handled by the teacher. The lesson was effective in illustrating two contrasting theories of the cause of suicide. A common feature of the better lessons was the extent to which teachers regularly checked students' understanding. Some weaknesses in teaching and learning were omitted from the self-assessment report. In the weaker lessons, teachers did not involve students sufficiently and failed to sustain their interest in topics. Some lessons developed too slowly.

**32** Retention rates vary from one subject to another, but most have improved over the last three years. On the two-year sociology course at GCE A level, retention rates were above 90% in 1997 and 1998. The corresponding retention rates for history were 81% and 85%. Although the self-assessment report referred to high retention rates in some subjects, it did not

# Curriculum Areas

identify courses where retention was poor. For example, in at least two of the last three years, retention rates were no better than 75% on the two-year courses leading to GCE A level government and politics and religious studies. On the one-year course leading to GCE A level sociology they were below 60%.

33 The college's judgements relating to students' examination results were well founded. Over the last three years, GCE A level examination results in all subjects have improved or maintained high pass rates. In 1997 and 1998, percentages of students achieving grades A to E and grades A to C in government and politics, sociology and religious studies at GCE A level were above national averages for students aged 16 to 18 years in sixth form colleges. In 1998, 70% of students taking government and politics and 62% of students taking a two-year courses in sociology

at GCE A level achieved grades A to C. In each of the last three years, all students who took GCE A level religious studies examinations were successful. The self-assessment report refers to weaknesses in students' achievements on the two-year course in history at GCE A level which recruits more than 100 students each year. Pass rates were below national averages in two of the last three years but were above the national average in 1998.

34 Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subjects. Two teachers are guest lecturers on education courses run by Manchester Metropolitan University. There is an ample supply of audiovisual equipment and specialist texts to support all courses. Classrooms are well furnished and contain attractive displays of students' work, a particular strength noted in the self-assessment report.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in history, politics, religious studies and sociology, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level history (two-year course)	3	Expected completions	+	+	114
		Retention (%)	+	+	85
		Achievement (%)	+	+	88
GCE A level politics (two-year course)	3	Expected completions	+	+	22
		Retention (%)	+	+	95
		Achievement (%)	+	+	95
GCE A level religious studies (two-year course)	3	Expected completions	+	+	13
		Retention (%)	+	+	54
		Achievement (%)	+	+	100
GCE A level sociology (two-year course)	3	Expected completions	+	+	79
		Retention (%)	+	+	92
		Achievement (%)	+	+	97
GCE A level sociology (one-year course)	3	Expected completions	+	+	34
		Retention (%)	+	+	56
		Achievement (%)	+	+	89

Source: college (1998)

+ISR-derived data were incomplete

# Curriculum Areas

## Modern Languages

### *Grade 3*

**35 The college offers a broad range of modern languages courses. As well as GCE A level and GCSE provision, there are accredited courses at four levels designed to attract adults, and a course which concentrates on using French in a business context. Modern languages are also a significant part of the course leading to the international baccalaureate. Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering courses in French, German and Spanish. They concluded that the self-assessment report was appropriately detailed and realistic, and reflected sound professional judgements. They agreed with the report's findings and identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective teamwork amongst modern languages staff
- good teaching in all subjects
- a thriving exchange programme with European countries
- hard-working students with well-developed study skills
- a wide range of learning resources

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor GCSE examination results
- below average pass rates in French and Spanish at GCE A level
- poor retention
- insufficient emphasis on oral work
- insufficient use of IT to enhance learning

**36 After a difficult period, teachers of modern languages are now working effectively as a team. Purposeful leadership and a willingness among staff to raise standards are clearly in evidence. Measures have been taken to improve retention rates and examination results. These**

include: the introduction of a foundation course to bridge the gap between standards at GCSE and those expected at GCE A level; an induction procedure which is specific to languages; regular meetings to plan improvements to the curriculum and to share good practice among team members. These strengths were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Courses are well managed. Schemes of work are clear. Students receive a week-by-week outline of their course as well as details of assessment arrangements. A particular strength of the provision noted in the self-assessment report is the opportunity for students to participate in the exchange programme with German and Spanish students.

**37 In all subjects, the quality of teaching is good. Of the 10 lessons observed, two were outstanding and six were judged to be good. As the self-assessment report recognised, teachers conduct lessons in the target language, involve students in an appropriate variety of activities and make effective use of resources. In the best lessons, students enthusiastically practised speaking in the foreign language. For example, by throwing a 20-sided dice, students quickly learnt the German for numbers between one and 20. A board game was used effectively in a GCE A level lesson to enable students to practise talking in Spanish about themselves. In the weaker lessons, students were expected to listen for long periods without participating. For example, an exposition on the rules of Spanish pronunciation went on for too long and the opportunity for students to practise what they had learnt was lost.**

**38 Standards achieved by students in their oral work are not mentioned in the self-assessment report but vary considerably. In the lessons observed, most students tried to express their ideas and opinions on a range of topics but sometimes success eluded them because of a lack of confidence and an inadequate vocabulary and grasp of grammar. By contrast, second-year GCE A level French students were able to use overhead transparencies to present themes of Truffaut's work to others in the class. Some students attempted their presentations in French, without using notes.**



# Curriculum Areas

39 The self-assessment report deals rigorously with strengths and weaknesses in students' achievements. Retention rates for courses at GCE A level and GCSE are poor and have shown few signs of improvement over the last three years. In Spanish and French, pass rates for GCE A level courses have been consistently below national averages for students of all ages in sixth form colleges although the pass rate for French is improving. A similar improvement in German brought the pass rate above the national average for the first time in 1998. Results in languages for students taking the international baccalaureate are encouraging. In 1998, 27 students out of 28 achieved grades that were rated at or above the satisfactory mark.

40 The use of IT as a tool for learning modern languages is not yet fully exploited. For example, authentic television programmes accessible by satellite links are not used regularly to develop students' listening skills. This weakness was noted in the self-assessment report. A wide-ranging selection of books, journals, audio cassettes and resources made by their teachers are available to students. The appropriateness of teaching rooms is justifiably seen as a strength in the self-assessment report. Although in poor decorative order, classrooms have a strong subject identity and contain impressive displays, some relating to the European exchange programme. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that staff are well qualified and fluent speakers of their respective languages.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in modern languages, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE French	2	Expected completions	55	62	#
		Retention (%)	16	68	#
		Achievement (%)	44	54	#
GCSE German	2	Expected completions	35	20	#
		Retention (%)	17	55	#
		Achievement (%)	33	100	#
GCSE Spanish	2	Expected completions	101	84	47
		Retention (%)	38	65	72
		Achievement (%)	53	47	65
GCE A level French	3	Expected completions	53	117	82
		Retention (%)	81	59	79
		Achievement (%)	63	67	78
GCE A level German	3	Expected completions	36	42	38
		Retention (%)	78	67	79
		Achievement (%)	78	86	90
GCE A level Spanish	3	Expected completions	9	31	32
		Retention (%)	56	52	53
		Achievement (%)	40	56	47

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)  
#course not running

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## Support for Students

### Grade 1

**41 Inspectors confirmed the college's judgements in the self-assessment report on the quality of support for students. Some strengths were understated and an identified weakness had been remedied since the report was compiled.**

#### Key strengths

- clear and effective links between support teams
- good counselling and welfare services
- close attention to pre-entry guidance and interview processes
- a well-conceived and well-planned tutorial programme
- a wide range of enhancement activities
- excellent careers education and guidance

#### Weaknesses

- variations in the quality of tutorials

42 Teams of staff provide a suitable range of support services for students. Collectively, they demonstrate a strong, shared sense of purpose and a genuine regard for the needs of students. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that links between the different teams are clear and effective. For example, representatives from other support teams regularly attend tutorial team meetings. Members of an established and experienced counselling, chaplaincy and welfare team are fully integrated with other support services. They work hard and imaginatively to help staff and students understand their role. Support services are located in spacious and attractive student centres. Nurseries and crèches are also available at both campuses.

43 As noted in the self-assessment report, effective links with schools and the provision of

impartial advice to potential students are high priorities for the college. Links with 11 partner schools are well established. In response to schools' needs, the college devises activities and participates in events designed to familiarise pupils with opportunities in further education. Links between subject teachers are less well developed. Procedures for interviewing prospective students are thorough, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. All full-time applicants are interviewed twice. Initial interviews of between 30 and 45 minutes are rigorous, and follow a common format. There is a core team of experienced and trained interviewers. Arrangements for the second interview at the time of enrolment are not so tightly controlled.

44 Efforts to improve the processes of assessing and meeting the needs of students who require additional support with their studies are evident. Literacy and numeracy skills of all full-time students are assessed at the beginning of the teaching year. This year, to try to improve the numbers of identified students taking up offers of additional help, which was a weakness noted in the self-assessment report, students were contacted personally by a member of the learning support team. This team provides detailed feedback to teaching teams, particularly those in vocational areas, on the needs and progress of students receiving support. As part of a strategy to involve more staff in supporting students who need additional help, a group of 12 staff are working towards a qualification in basic skills support. Effective systems are in place to identify the needs of adult students on daytime courses, but none are in place for part-time evening students.

45 The self-assessment report did not do justice to the considerable strengths evident in the design of the college's tutorial system. Tutorial support for part-time students is well developed. A clearly identified programme includes induction, opportunities to review progress and guidance on how to progress to

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higher level courses or employment. Lessons focusing on study skills and on examination techniques are offered to part-time GCE A level students on Saturdays. Arrangements for full-time students are co-ordinated by three team leaders and implemented by personal tutors. Staff who indicate that they wish to become personal tutors receive extensive training. Regular opportunities for reviewing students' progress and for target-setting are incorporated within a carefully planned tutorial programme. In tutorials, students build up portfolios which form the basis of their national records of achievement. They also provide evidence to show they are improving their own learning and performance, which is an approach that constitutes one of the key skills. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, students' experience of tutorials varies. In a few group tutorials observed by inspectors, students were not sufficiently involved. Personal tutors were overly concerned with dissemination of information and administrative tasks. Some tutor groups are too large to be fully effective.

46 Students receive excellent careers advice and guidance, a strength fully reflected in the self-assessment report. A key feature of the service is the close links with the tutorial team. Careers education is integrated with the tutorial programme. It meets the needs of students seeking employment as well as those aiming for higher education. An extensive programme that includes talks, visits to open days at universities and a series of evening meetings to which parents are invited, enables students to make informed choices about their career paths. Students find the careers staff welcoming and supportive. Considerable efforts are made to ensure that the service is equally accessible to part-time evening students. In the self-assessment report the college refers to the need to provide guidance as a matter of routine to students who leave courses before completing them.

47 Inspectors confirmed that a particular strength of the college is its wide range of enhancement courses which enable students to develop personal qualities and further skills. Up to 40 courses in sport, outdoor pursuits and performing arts form the bulk of the enhancement programme. College teams are successful in national and regional competitions. Short courses covering topics such as sign language and first aid also feature in the programme and enable students to gain further qualifications. Many students participate in enhancement activities but information on retention and levels of attendance is sparse.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**48 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, though they identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a comprehensive IT strategy effectively implemented
- the purpose-built learning resource centre at Cheadle
- well-stocked libraries
- displays of students' work in teaching and communal areas
- an accommodation strategy matched to curricular needs

#### **Weaknesses**

- limited access to some areas for students with restricted mobility
- at Cheadle an inadequate sports hall and deficiencies in the Moseley building

49 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that facilities to enable students to develop and use IT skills are of high quality. The ratio of students to computers has improved

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from 15:1 in 1996 to 9:1 in 1998. A purpose-built learning resource centre at the Cheadle campus houses 120 networked, multimedia computers some of which are used for timetabled lessons for part of the week. At least 35 machines are available for students to use at times which suit them. At Marple, there are 148 modern, networked machines. All networked computers carry the college intranet which enables students to gain access to learning materials from a wide range of curriculum areas. A computing specialist has been appointed to work with curriculum teams to extend this range of learning materials. The intranet also holds a copy of the college charter and complaints procedure, an information page for each faculty, the prospectus and the weekly bulletin, as well as news of interest to staff and students. Although the networks at each campus are compatible, the link for the intranet is not yet in place.

50 At each campus, there is a modern, well-stocked library offering a range of services, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The bookstock was considerably extended and updated in 1997-98. Other services provided by libraries include: quiet study areas; computing facilities which students can book in advance and use at times which suit them; and an inter-library loan scheme. The library at Cheadle also has facilities for students to view extracts from television and video tape recordings. College surveys show that over 90% of students express satisfaction with library services. Libraries are well used; they can become crowded at peak periods. However, students report few problems in finding study areas or available computer workstations. Effective links between staff in libraries and staff in curriculum teams ensure that students have access to an appropriate range of resources when completing assignments. Library staff regularly audit bookstocks to ensure that they meet curricular needs.

51 Most buildings are clean, bright and litter free. They provide a welcoming atmosphere for

students. Reception areas are modern and the staff who work there are friendly. Signposting is clear. Communal areas are decorated in strong, corporate colours and there are displays of students' work in many corridors and classrooms. Common rooms have been replaced by social areas containing easy chairs. Students use and value the services provided by refectories and snack bars. As noted in the self-assessment report, the newly refurbished sports hall at Marple provides a first-class facility. Pitches and playing fields at Cheadle compensate for the inadequacies of the sports hall on that site. Measures have been taken to improve security arrangements and include: a closed-circuit television system at Marple; and alarms and smoke devices in the learning resource centre at Cheadle.

52 The college has a clear accommodation strategy, which it implements effectively. Improvements to the standard of accommodation since the formation of the merged college are driven by curricular needs. Efficient use and systematic maintenance of accommodation results from productive communications between members of the estates team and curriculum managers, a strength omitted from the self-assessment report. Most curricular areas have a dedicated suite of classrooms or specialist accommodation. For example, an area where physics is taught at Cheadle is known as the physics tunnel. A few rooms are in need of decoration or lack blinds. In a few instances, inspectors judged classrooms to be too small for the number of students using them.

53 The poor condition of the Moseley building at the Cheadle campus is a particular weakness mentioned in the self-assessment report. Parts of the building are closed but areas which are still being used by students have, where necessary, been decorated. The FEFC has approved the college's plans to demolish the Moseley building and erect a new one over the next 18 months. Ramps have improved access to buildings but inspectors agreed with the

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college's assessment that some areas of the college, for example rooms in the tower block at Marple, cannot be used by students with restricted mobility. There is a lift to the mezzanine floor of the library at Cheadle but not to the mezzanine area in the library at Marple.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**54 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its quality assurance arrangements but identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- a strong commitment to continuous improvement
- improvements in many examination results
- a clear, straightforward and coherent quality assurance framework
- processes for assuring quality that are understood and valued by staff
- a well-established and comprehensive review process
- sharply focused staff development activities

#### Weaknesses

- the narrow focus of the internal validation process
- the limited evidence used to judge the quality of teaching and learning
- some insufficiently demanding measures and targets

55 The college's arrangements to assure quality are developing well. At the time of the merger, the system operating at Marple was very different from that at Cheadle. Over the last three years, the college has succeeded in

developing its thinking about quality assurance and in creating a unified and workable system. The effectiveness of its arrangements are evident in improvements to examination results over the last three years. For example, college data show that the average GCE A level pass rate rose from 85% in 1996 to 88% in 1998.

56 A board set up in March 1997 oversees the strategic direction of the quality assurance system as it develops. It is chaired by a governor and membership includes the principal and an adviser from the LEA. The board has had a key role in creating the appropriate climate in which to develop and implement policies and procedures. Staff support and understand the purpose of quality assurance processes; these particular strengths are acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The board has also been responsible for tightening up some procedures, for example the scheduling of reviews. However, it has allowed some rather lax standards of self-assessment to go unchallenged.

57 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the framework for quality assurance is clear, well documented and linked to the planning cycle. The framework depends for much of its effectiveness on a well-established process in which all curriculum and cross-college service teams assess their own performance annually. Training for support teams and helpful guidelines assist the process. A few team leaders are unclear how their reviews are linked to the college's strategic priorities, but most understand the connection. For example, the reception team's plan reflects the college's priority for widening participation in further education.

58 Team reviews are moderated by the quality evaluation and support team known as QUEST. As the self-assessment report recognised, the work of this group is a particular strength of the system for quality assurance. Its purpose is to oversee, validate and ensure the rigour and objectivity of team reviews using defined

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standards. Membership is drawn from a cross-section of staff and includes an external adviser. In most curriculum and cross-college areas, a member of QUEST undertakes observations of lessons or other interactions with students, and tests the validity of written evidence to confirm judgements. A weakness of the arrangements, which is not included in the self-assessment report, is the extent to which poor analysis of students' achievements by curriculum teams can be overlooked by QUEST when validating grades for curricular areas.

59 As the self-assessment report notes, teams draw on a variety of sources to inform their judgements, including observations of lessons and tasks. Documentation to support lesson observations is particularly helpful and sensitive, and helps to promote the sharing of good practice. Many curricular teams make clear and specific judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. However, some teams base their judgements on fewer than 10 observations over a two-year period. Not all teams ensure that observations cover the full range of courses. These weaknesses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

60 Many teams make effective use of focus groups to elicit students' views about provision and bring about improvements. For example, the catering team, whose analysis of and response to surveys of students are exemplary, has recently provided halal meat at the request of some Muslim students. Two curricular areas have introduced a system whereby core sets of notes are issued to students on specific dates. This action was taken in response to students' comments that there were inconsistencies in the approaches adopted by teachers. Some curricular areas are not systematically gathering sufficient feedback from students to bring about improvements, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report.

61 The college has prepared a self-assessment report for each of the last three years. The version used by inspectors was updated in

September 1998 to take account of recent achievements by students. All sections of the college contributed to the report which was clearly written, evaluative and cross-referenced to evidence. Most sections focusing on aspects of cross-college provision were comprehensive but curriculum sections lacked rigorous analysis of students' achievements. Teams were not required to use the full set of available performance indicators when preparing their judgements and some used comparators that were insufficiently challenging. For example, some teams did not give enough attention to retention rates. New guidelines came into operation in September 1998 and are more demanding.

62 Staff development plans are closely linked to achievement of the college's strategic priorities. The appointment of an officer with an industrial background for training and professional development has helped the college and its teams to draw up realistic training plans and to evaluate their effectiveness. The strength of this aspect of the college's work is noted in the self-assessment report and recognised by the Investor in People award.

## Governance

### *Grade 2*

**63 The inspection team agreed with some of the judgements reported in the self-assessment and identified additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- a high level of commitment to the college
- involvement in developing the strategic plan
- participation in the college's self-assessment process
- monitoring of students' achievements

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- monitoring of the management accounts by all governors
- effective conduct of corporation meetings

## Weaknesses

- insufficient work on developing ways to measure the corporation's performance
- insufficient formal monitoring of capital projects
- occasions where the audit committee has exceeded its remit

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

65 A high level of commitment from members of the corporation has helped to steer the college through a period of significant change over the last three years. Members are aware of their responsibilities and have dealt effectively with key issues relating to accommodation. The corporation has 16 members; most took up their appointment on 15 August 1995. Some members had previously served on one of the governing bodies of the two constituent colleges. The principal is a member of the corporation. The nine independent and three co-opted members, and the nominee of the TEC, serve for four years; the two staff members are nominated and elected for a two-year period. The corporation has acted appropriately to prevent the terms of office of a majority of members coming to an end simultaneously in August 1999. To encourage students to become involved in its activities, the corporation invites two student representatives to attend and participate in its meetings.

66 As noted in the self-assessment report, the corporation has clarity of purpose and a sense of direction. Business is conducted effectively at meetings. Corporation and committee agendas and supporting papers are comprehensive. Normally, they are sent out well before the relevant meetings. Minutes are prepared and distributed promptly. Corporation meetings are chaired effectively. A brisk, business-like approach is balanced by the need to allow time for discussion when the need arises. Members participate well in meetings. They are prepared to challenge senior managers in a non-adversarial way, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. In September 1998, the college updated a comprehensive information pack for members. A formal training programme of 10 sessions began in June 1998. Finance and the curriculum were the themes of the first two training events which were held prior to corporation meetings. Since his appointment in January 1997, the clerk to the corporation has not attended many formal training events to help him to fulfil his role.

67 A particular strength noted in the self-assessment report is the corporation's close involvement in strategic planning. Members hold an annual planning day to set the college's strategic direction. They debate and establish an order of priority for strategic objectives before granting them formal approval. To monitor the college's performance against its targets, members receive regular reports including data on students' achievements. Members have been pro-active in requesting further analysis of these data to help them to judge the college's performance against national benchmarks. In July 1998, a new format of reporting was introduced to try to ensure that members monitor all aspects of the operating plan systematically. Although the corporation has taken an active role in the college's self-assessment for the last three years, it has been slower to establish and monitor formally measures of its own performance. To help members in this task, a set of indicators was

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developed in December 1997 but these have not been formally approved. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

68 Inspectors were unable to agree fully with the college's judgement that the procedures of the corporation conform to the best practice of public and corporate bodies. Corporation minutes are publicly available in the college's libraries. A code of practice on whistleblowing, a code of conduct and a register of members' interests exist but they will need further development if they are to accord fully with best practice.

69 There are four standing committees: finance and employment; audit; governance; and remuneration. The remits of these committees are not in accordance with best practice. An action point included in the self-assessment report refers to a review of these remits later this year. The corporation and the finance and employment committee frequently monitor the college's management accounts. An estates board consisting of members of the corporation and staff effectively managed recent capital projects undertaken by the college. This board is not a fully constituted committee of the corporation. A particular weakness not referred to in the self-assessment report is that neither the corporation nor the finance and employment committee took an active role in formally monitoring these projects. The audit committee vigorously reviews reports from internal auditors but does not monitor independently the implementation of audit recommendations. It relies upon the internal auditors to carry out this task. On occasions the audit committee has exceeded its defined role, thus potentially impairing its impartiality and independence.

## Management

### *Grade 1*

**70 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found that the report was too modest in its estimation of**

**the college's success in managing the merger and its after-effects. Since the self-assessment report was written there has been discernible progress in remedying identified weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- strong leadership
- effective management of change
- a clear management structure
- good internal communications
- involvement of staff in strategic and operational planning
- firm financial control
- well-executed marketing strategies, based on sound research
- effective arrangements for the promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities

#### **Weaknesses**

- inaccuracies in ISR and attendance data

71 The executive team provides strong leadership. It is perceived by staff as open, supportive and responsive. Its determination to build a team culture within the college has had an impact at all levels of management. Despite the difficulties of split-site working, staff feel that they belong to a single institution. This achievement is not fully acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The management structure is straightforward. The overall aim underlying the structure, to unify teams across both campuses, is mainly proving successful. Staff understand their roles and have received appropriate training to carry out their responsibilities. The executive team considers that the role of faculty head needs to be more clearly defined.

72 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that systems to keep staff well informed about strategic and operational matters are effective and improving. A schedule



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of meetings enables staff to meet regularly in different groupings. Minutes of meetings are placed in libraries. Members of the executive team lead weekly briefings at both campuses. A weekly bulletin deals with immediate issues and updates staff on the progress of college initiatives. The college makes strenuous efforts to involve part-time staff in team activities. Informal communications are assisted by the accessibility to the staff of the executive team and other managers.

73 The executive team has a clear view of the action needed to take the college forward. Staff are involved in setting strategic objectives, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. The strategic plan incorporates targets which are linked to the college's mission, national priorities and the needs of the local community. Progress towards achieving targets is formally reviewed twice a year. Curriculum, support and cross-college teams refer to strategic objectives and college targets when drawing up annual operating plans. Some curriculum teams are not yet sufficiently rigorous in deciding how to achieve these targets nor in monitoring progress towards their achievement.

74 The college's information systems vary in their effectiveness. College managers receive timely and detailed information on enrolments, retention and achievements. However, reports on students' attendance, monitored through an electronic system, are not yet fully reliable. The college has been slow to establish an efficient computerised system to meet the needs of split-site working. Examples of inaccuracies in ISR-derived data relating to students' achievements were identified in most of the FEFC's programme areas. The college acknowledges fully the inadequacies of its arrangements in the self-assessment report. A data link between the sites and appointment of specialist staff are beginning to remedy weaknesses. These measures were included in the action plan of the self-assessment report. Despite difficulties with the computerised system, the college was able to

provide accurate data relating to students' achievements from paper-based records.

75 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance team is appropriately structured, qualified and experienced. Managers monitor the financial position closely and have taken action to ensure that the college is financially sound. The college has experienced historical cost surpluses and also operating deficits which are forecast to continue. These circumstances are attributable to high depreciation resulting from revaluation of the college's land and buildings. Management accounts have been prepared promptly each month but their content could be improved. The college returned its unqualified 1996-97 statutory accounts by the required deadline. The work of the internal and external auditors shows that the college has in place good internal controls.

76 The college collects and uses a significant amount of valuable information about the community which it serves. The marketing plan is clearly linked to the achievement of strategic priorities and implemented effectively. Analysis of postcode data and year-on-year comparisons show that the college is successful in increasing the numbers of students from groups that traditionally have been under-represented in further education. A particular strength mentioned in the self-assessment report is the high quality of publicity materials which make clear distinctions between provision for school-leavers, provision for adults and opportunities for work-based training.

77 Issues involving equality of opportunity are taken seriously and have a high profile in the college; these strengths are noted in the self-assessment report. The policy has clear standards and its implementation is monitored systematically by a reference group. The group has conducted surveys of staff and students and then drawn up an action plan. All teams are required to address equal opportunities issues in

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their operating plans. An annual report enables the executive team to judge the effectiveness of the policy.

## Conclusions

78 The self-assessment report provided a sound basis for planning the inspection. In the curriculum part of the report, 25 different areas were graded. Some areas contained a mix of subjects, for example modern languages, whereas other areas dealt only with one subject, for example biology. The remaining curriculum sections focused on provision which cuts across subject teams such as the international baccalaureate and access provision. Since the report was written the college has taken action to address some of the weaknesses that it identified. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths and weaknesses had been underestimated by the college. Two curriculum grades and two cross-college grades awarded by inspectors were identical to those given by the college.

79 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 1998)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	23
25+ years	56
Not known	4
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	13
Intermediate	13
Advanced	43
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	30
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	646	916	22
Agriculture	63	145	3
Engineering	10	68	1
Business	370	436	12
Hotel and catering	153	43	3
Health and community care	150	252	6
Art and design	222	509	11
Humanities	947	1,806	39
Basic education	29	174	3
Total	2,590	4,349	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 7% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	162	12	0	174
Supporting direct learning contact	27	0	0	27
Other support	110	2	2	114
Total	299	14	2	315

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£9,307,000	£10,062,000	£9,242,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£16.97	£16.50	£15.92
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	69%	*
Achievement of funding target	109%	112%	*
Diversity of income	18%	13%	*
Operating surplus	-£485,000	-£238,000	*

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

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

*Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), college (1997)*

*Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997)*

*Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), college (1997)*

*Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), college (1997)*

*\*audit accounts not yet available*

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