

Rother Valley College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Rother Valley College

Yorkshire and Humberside Region

Inspected October 1997

Rother Valley College is a general further education college in South Yorkshire.

The college's production of a self-assessment report was overseen by members of the corporation. Inspectors were able to validate many of the college's judgements about the strengths of its provision, but the self-assessment report was not sufficiently thorough in identifying weaknesses. Inspectors did not always agree with the grades awarded by the college as part of its self-assessment.

The college offers a range of courses covering all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in five of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. In the context of the closure of the coalmines the college has successfully developed its range of courses to meet local needs. Teaching is generally sound. Students' achievements are satisfactory, except on some GCSE and GCE A level courses in humanities, and some business studies courses, where examination results are below the national average. Support for students is effective; there are regular reviews of students' progress, and students have good access to welfare services and personal support. Links with local schools are effective, although these

were not identified as a strength by the college. Governors bring a wide range of professional skills and experience to the work of the corporation. They monitor closely the college's financial performance. The executive management team provides sound financial management and adopts an open management style which is valued by staff. Links with the Rotherham TEC are strong. A clear framework for curriculum quality assurance is in place. The college has made significant strides in raising the standard of accommodation and equipment since the last inspection. It should: develop further its curriculum links with employers; take steps to raise the low levels of achievement on some humanities and business studies courses; ensure that student support across the college is consistent; review the separation of the library and learning centres; strengthen quality assurance procedures to ensure a more self-critical culture within the college; improve management information; develop operational planning; improve the monitoring of curriculum performance by governors; and develop further its procedures for the recruitment, induction and training of governors.

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

Curriculum areas inspected	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	3	Support for students	2
Business	3	General resources	2
Health and social care	2	Quality assurance	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2	Governance	2
Humanities	2	Management	3
Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Rother Valley College was established in 1928 to serve the education and training needs of the neighbouring coalmining industry. The college has diversified its provision as the coalmines have been closed. It serves a rural part of South Yorkshire, and has its main site at Dinnington, seven miles south of Rotherham. Most students are recruited from the borough of Rotherham but some come from nearby areas such as Sheffield. There are six small centres in nearby villages and a number of community buildings are also used. The college provides courses in all 10 of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas. Within a radius of 20 miles there are six other further education colleges. In the Rotherham metropolitan borough there are eight schools with sixth forms.

2 The college contributes to the community provision provided by Rotherham Local Education Authority (LEA). It provides courses in partnership with Huddersfield University and as an associate college of Sheffield Hallam University. There are links with colleges in Spain and the Ukraine. The college offers general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses at intermediate and advanced levels in five curriculum areas and courses for 19 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects and 25 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects. There are also courses designed to provide access to higher education and a large number of other courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and other qualifications. Most of the college's students are enrolled on foundation and intermediate level courses; 34 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively.

3 The Rotherham economy is gradually coming out of recession as job opportunities are created, mainly in business services, hotels and catering, and retailing. However, the effects of the decline in the traditional industries of coal,

steel and heavy engineering are still significant. In February 1997, the unemployment rate for Rotherham and its travel-to-work area was 12.2 per cent compared with 6.5 per cent nationally and 9.5 per cent for South Yorkshire. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic backgrounds is small; less than 1 per cent in the wards surrounding the college. Thirty-six per cent of the pupils aged 16 in the Rotherham LEA achieved five or more GCSE subjects at grade C or above in 1996. This is 8.5 per cent below the national average for that year.

4 In 1996-97, the college enrolled 6,422 students. The number of full-time students increased by 170 to 1,280, but enrolments overall fell by 400. Between 1995-96 and 1996-97 the college increased its provision funded by the FEFC from 326,500 units to 370,000 units, exceeding its growth targets. Seventy-five per cent of the students are aged 19 years and over. The college employs 176 full-time equivalent permanent staff of whom 103 are teachers. Thirty-one full-time equivalent teachers are on fixed-term teaching contracts. The college has six schools: business and professional studies; care, health and science; general education; land-based provision, catering and recreation; technology; and access and continuing education. Five of these schools were inspected. In addition, 'Roval', the college company, provides full-cost training for industry.

5 The college's mission statement commits the college to offer high-quality opportunities to help individuals reach their full potential, and to contribute to local strategies to stimulate social and economic regeneration. In particular, the college commits itself during 1997-98 to:

- widening access to provision
- achieving the college targets for students' retention and achievement
- developing further the delivery of key skills.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was one of the first to be inspected in the new inspection cycle. Inspection took place during one week in October 1997. Inspectors had previously analysed the college's self-assessment report and information on the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on its students' achievements for the three years 1994 to 1997. However, the data showed some variation when checked before the inspection against registers and examining body pass lists. These variations brought into question the validity of the data and hampered the ability of the inspectorate to assess the college's self-assessment report. Achievement data presented in this report had to be specifically validated during the inspection week.

7 Ten inspectors and an auditor spent 46 days in the college. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff, students and with representatives of the Rotherham Chamber Training and Enterprise

Council (TEC) and local secondary schools. Inspectors observed teaching sessions and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents.

8 Of the 71 lessons inspected, 61 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 18 per cent were less than satisfactory. This compares with the average of 61 per cent and 8 per cent respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 77 per cent, similar to the sector average for 1996-97. The highest attendance was in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (93 per cent) and lowest in engineering (62 per cent). The average class size, at 8.2 students per class, was lower than the average of 10.8 recorded in the chief inspector's annual report. It was largest in hairdressing and beauty therapy (10 students) and smallest in engineering (6.3 students). The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE AS/A level	1	3	1	2	0	7
GNVQ	1	6	2	3	1	13
NVQ	1	8	4	0	0	13
Other vocational	4	11	4	2	0	21
Other	3	5	4	5	0	17
Total	10	33	15	12	1	71

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

9 The inspection of engineering included the observation of 12 lessons. The college's self-assessment report did not include direct evidence related to the quality of the teaching, and it overstated some of the strengths claimed.

Key strengths

- expansion into new areas of work
- schemes of work and detailed lesson plans used by most teachers
- effective monitoring of students' learning by most teachers
- a strong emphasis on safety
- good retention and pass rates on some courses

Weaknesses

- few opportunities for progression within the college
- some course files of poor quality
- small class sizes
- the small proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding
- the low proportion of teachers qualified to act as internal and external assessors
- some shortcomings in equipment and accommodation

10 The number of engineering courses is small and the opportunities for progression to more advanced engineering courses in the college are few. Nevertheless, some breadth of provision is maintained and new courses in electrical installation and media production have been introduced to improve students' choice. Class sizes are small and some groups are combined to maintain the viability of the provision. Some flexibility is allowed in attendance at courses to meet the needs of students, for example, women

with young children. Course files are not always appropriately maintained by teachers. Some lack important details and no central course file was maintained for one course. The self-assessment report did not identify this weakness.

11 Most teachers follow appropriate schemes of work and the majority use clear lesson plans. In most practical and classroom sessions, teachers ensure, through close supervision and individual questioning, that all students are benefiting from their experience. A strong emphasis is placed on safety and the college provides protective overalls and boots for students who spend a substantial time in the workshops. In a minority of sessions, the teaching was ill prepared, the resources available were poor and there were errors in the material being presented. Overall, the profile of grades awarded to the sessions was appreciably weaker than that given in the FEFC's national survey on engineering.

12 The achievements of students varied considerably from course to course. In 1997, retention rates varied and, on some courses, a high proportion of the students left before the course finished. Pass rates were good on the range of welding courses offered but poor on other courses, particularly at advanced level. Accurate data for preceding years were not readily available. The self-assessment report recognised both the strengths and the weaknesses in students' achievements.

13 All full-time staff are qualified teachers. They have substantial industrial experience but this was often acquired a considerable time ago and few have had opportunities to update their expertise and knowledge of industry. Only half of the full-time teachers are qualified to act as internal assessors or verifiers for courses leading to NVQs; this is low compared to the proportion seen nationally. Engineering equipment is sufficient to support the present numbers on most courses. Funding has been

Curriculum Areas

committed by the college to improve the poor level of equipment which supports the new courses in electrical installation and media production. Specialist rooms are of variable quality. Some are too small for the larger groups, and some lack appropriate facilities.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, C&G diploma)	Retention (%)	*	*	57
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	33
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ, C&G certificate)	Retention (%)	*	*	63
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	48
Welding courses	Retention (%)	*	*	82
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100

Source: college data

*college data could not be validated during inspection

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

14 Courses at intermediate, advanced and higher levels in business for full-time and part-time students were inspected.

Ten lessons were observed by inspectors. Some aspects of the college's assessment of this area of work were found by inspectors to be accurate. The college's assessment of students' achievements was considered overgenerous.

Key strengths

- the development of courses designed to promote access to further education and progression to higher education
- well-planned and well-managed courses
- good opportunities for students to undertake work experience and European visits
- generally good teaching
- well-presented portfolios of work
- good pass rates on courses in business administration

Weaknesses

- teaching strategies which failed to meet adequately the needs of all students
- low pass rates on several courses
- some poor accommodation
- the limited range of professional courses
- the failure to inform parents regularly of younger students' progress

15 As noted in the college's self-assessment report, the school offers a range of courses which go some way towards meeting the needs of the local community. Enrolment targets have been achieved for the last two years. In order to maintain appropriate entry level courses and facilitate access to higher levels, some courses

such as those leading to the GNVQ at intermediate level and the higher national certificate in business are run with low student numbers. The range of management and professional courses is limited, with some gaps, for example, in marketing and personnel. Course leaflets provide appropriate information to students. Links with employers are weak and there is no business studies advisory committee.

16 Strong leadership is provided by school managers. Meetings at course and school levels contribute effectively to curriculum planning and to the monitoring of course delivery and students' progress. The friendly relationships between staff and students promote learning. Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods and this helps them to maintain students' interest. Students are encouraged to draw on their own experiences as a means of making learning more relevant. In some lessons, however, teachers fail to take adequate account of the different abilities of students, and do not provide enough opportunity for all students to participate in discussion. Assessment schedules are well planned and students' work is marked and returned promptly. Regular tutorials help students and teachers monitor and evaluate progress. Parents of 16 to 18 year old students are not kept informed of progress.

17 Students are well motivated, enjoy their studies and take pride in their completed work. They understand the tasks set and speak confidently about them. Written work is generally of a good standard. GNVQ students' portfolios are well presented and show that the students have progressively acquired a range of appropriate skills. Pass rates on business administration and text processing courses are good, but they are below the national average on a number of courses, including the advanced level GNVQ, higher national certificate and accountancy courses. The self-assessment report did not recognise this fully. The college is confident that some students will eventually

Curriculum Areas

achieve their target qualification after assignments have been resubmitted or external tests retaken.

18 The provision is located in the main college building and in poor-quality temporary classrooms which are isolated from most other teaching accommodation. Learning resources are generally good. Full-time and part-time teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational courses	Retention (%)	*	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	44
Intermediate vocational courses	Retention (%)	*	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	80
Higher level courses	Retention (%)	*	*	66
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	25
Accounting technician courses	Retention (%)	*	*	87
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	10

Source: college data

*college data could not be validated during inspection

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

19 The inspection covered child, health and social care courses. Ten lessons were inspected. In most cases, inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its strengths. The college did not mention some important weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong links with local professional care services
- carefully planned and well-organised lessons providing a variety of activities
- well-integrated work placements
- appropriate attention to the development of key skills
- well-organised assessment and detailed feedback to students
- some good pass rates on childcare courses
- effective course management
- good book resources which are well used

Weaknesses

- teachers' failure in a minority of lessons to help students by summarising the important points to be learned
- a failure to review teaching methods to meet the changing needs of students
- poor retention rates on a number of courses
- limited analysis of students' achievement data
- poor-quality equipment and accommodation which adversely affects teaching
- new course developments which are not supported by staff development

20 The wide range of full-time and part-time courses is designed to meet the needs of the local community. Courses are offered at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels and these enable students to progress to higher level courses or to relevant employment. There is growing competition from local schools, for example, to recruit students to the GNVQ at intermediate level and the diploma in nursery nursing. The strong links with local education and care services benefit the college and the community. For example, the consultancy activity of college staff on issues relating to child abuse and fostering has led to improvements in curriculum content. Staff work closely together and their expertise is used effectively across the different courses. Courses are well managed, and students' records and course portfolios are efficiently maintained. Annual course reviews are completed diligently but there is insufficient analysis of, for example, retention and achievement rates.

21 Course teams have carefully-prepared schemes of work. Teaching is well organised. Students respond well to the variety of activities. Experience gained on work placement, chosen from a wide range of care settings, is used skilfully in class and assignment work. Appropriate emphasis is given to the development of key skills such as communication, numeracy, and information technology. Assessment of students is well managed and students receive detailed feedback on their performance. In some of the poorer lessons, teachers did not do enough to reinforce students' understanding of important points or they failed to use teaching methods which were appropriate for particular groups of learners, such as adults returning to study.

22 Students' written work is well presented and their files are generally well organised. Pass rates on many of the childcare courses are high but retention rates on several courses are poor.

Curriculum Areas

23 The care section is housed in temporary classrooms which are situated on the edge of the college campus. They are in a deteriorating condition and are subject to vandalism; consequently, little students' work can be displayed. It is difficult to control the temperature of rooms and they are often uncomfortable to work in. Teaching equipment is of poor quality but teachers produce good handouts and students make good use of the well-stocked library. The self-assessment report recognises that accommodation is a weakness. A refurbishment programme is planned.

Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (diplomas)	Retention (%)	*	*	74
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	98
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ and certificate)	Retention (%)	*	*	71
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100

Source: college data

*college data could not be validated during inspection

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 2

24 The inspection covered all aspects of the college's hairdressing and beauty therapy provision. Ten lessons were inspected. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's assessment of this provision.

Key strengths

- a good range of full-time and part-time courses
- generally good teaching supported by high-quality learning materials
- students' well-presented portfolios of work
- carefully planned assessment materials
- modern salons equipped to a high standard

Weaknesses

- aims of lessons not always shared with the students
- most teachers' failure to summarise learning points
- poor retention rates on some courses

25 There is a good range of full-time and part-time courses leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The part-time provision meets the needs of local industries, which are represented on the curriculum area's advisory group, and which also provide work experience for the students. Programme co-ordinators manage their own courses effectively. However, aspects of provision shared by a number of courses, such as the organisation of reception work, are not co-ordinated as effectively as they might be.

26 Most course teams have well-designed schemes of work and lessons are carefully planned. The quality of teaching is good. There is an appropriate balance between practical and

theoretical work. Learning materials are of good quality, enabling students to work effectively at their own pace. Work placements are well organised and teachers make good use of students' workplace experience in lessons. Students have their performance carefully recorded and they are kept informed of their progress. Course assignments contain detailed marking schemes. Teachers' written comments on students' work are helpful and constructive. In some lessons, teachers fail to take sufficient account of students' differing abilities.

27 Students work well in the practical sessions, producing work of a good standard and developing relevant professional skills. Their portfolios are well organised and their writing is of an appropriate standard. Retention rates on some courses, for example the full-time level 2 course in beauty therapy, are poor. Pass rates are good on level 2 courses in beauty therapy and hairdressing and on the level 3 course in beauty therapy.

28 The new hairdressing and beauty therapy salons provide a realistic working environment. The wide range of modern equipment compares well with professional standards.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Full-time beauty therapy level 2	Retention (%)	*	*	50
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100
Full-time hairdressing level 2	Retention (%)	*	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	88
Full-time beauty therapy level 3	Retention (%)	*	*	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	100

Source: college data

*college data could not be validated during inspection

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

29 Inspectors covered GCSE and GCE A level humanities subjects, courses designed to enable women to return to learn and courses designed to enable adults to gain access to higher education. Eighteen lessons were inspected. Inspectors considered the self-assessment report overestimated the strengths in this area of work.

Key strengths

- the range of humanities subjects
- provision which meets the needs of the community
- good opportunities for students to gain qualifications
- flexible arrangements for students' attendance
- some good teaching
- effective co-ordination across the college

Weaknesses

- inadequate schemes of work and lesson plans
- wide variation in the standard of teaching
- some poor retention rates
- some poor teaching accommodation
- examination results in GCSE and GCE A level subjects

30 The college offers a broad range of GCE A level and GCSE humanities subjects for full-time and part-time students. Students may attend at times and places which suit their circumstances. Many subjects can be studied, using specially designed learning materials. This allows the college to maintain its range of subjects and teach small student groups economically. Courses are available to suit individual needs, from studies for beginners to

GCE A levels. There is effective co-ordination of teaching across the college. Full-time and part-time teachers meet regularly. A common timetable allows students from all vocational areas to take humanities subjects as additional studies, although few currently do so. Students are offered effective tutorial support. Key skills development and enrichment activities help lend cohesion to students' studies. Some courses have been designed specifically for women from communities particularly hard hit by social and economic deprivation. This provision concentrates on information technology, numeracy, English and personal development. Residential opportunities are available.

31 Many schemes of work fail to mention teaching methods, assessment and resources. Lesson plans, where available, sometimes failed to identify the skills and knowledge to be developed. The self-assessment report overestimates the quality of planning. Teaching was good on courses for women and on English courses. English teachers, in particular, elicited a lively response from students. Teaching on access courses and other humanities subjects was generally sound, but less consistent. Some teachers failed to involve all students sufficiently in lessons. On courses for women and access courses teachers took care to develop students' confidence.

32 Examination results in most GCSE and GCE A level humanities subjects are at or below national figures for general further education colleges. Candidates in GCSE psychology, sociology and law, and in the one-year course in GCE A level English literature, achieved pass rates above the national average. Most students are adults, and many choose not to sit the examinations. In 1997, only 70 per cent of students completed their courses, 10 per cent below the college's target. Students on the courses for women produced work of a good standard. Most attended regularly and attained recognised qualifications. In 1996-97, the retention rates and pass rates on these courses

Curriculum Areas

were good. On the access courses, however, they were not as good. Many students on these courses have few formal qualifications on entry and benefit substantially from the courses they follow even when they do not pass.

The college's self-assessment report identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses on students' achievements in the courses for women but it overstates the strengths on other humanities courses.

33 Some of the rooms used in centres outside the college are badly furnished and too small for the numbers which occupy them. However, they are situated conveniently in the communities the college serves. Starting times for courses allow mothers to attend easily and childcare facilities

are available. There are computers in some of the centres for lessons in computing but computers are not used to support teaching in other subjects. The size of some rooms limits the range of activities which can take place. Apart from modern languages, there are no specialist subject bases, and teaching rooms lack adequate display and storage facilities. Full-time students are well provided with textbooks on loan and the library contains an adequate stock of texts. Students' access to relevant video and computer software, however, is limited. The self-assessment report identifies the strengths of resources but it does not identify weaknesses.

Examples of students' achievements in humanities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Women's courses	Retention (%)	*	*	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	90
Access courses	Retention (%)	*	*	62
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	67

Source: college data

*college data could not be validated during inspection

Curriculum Areas

Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

34 Eleven lessons were inspected. The inspection findings supported some of the strengths identified by the college. A number of the weaknesses identified through inspection had not been recognised by the college.

Key strengths

- some creative teaching which helps students to learn
- links with a range of external agencies
- some students working competently and confidently in practical lessons
- good use of residential experiences

Weaknesses

- the lack of individual programmes with identifiable overall targets
- lessons which are not well matched to students' needs
- ineffective recording of students' progress
- lack of clarity about the rationale for the curriculum offered
- some unsuitable accommodation and resources

35 The college makes provision for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective links have been developed with many external agencies enabling the college to recruit students and to provide them with the specialist support they need to learn. The curriculum offered is narrow. In the teaching of basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, there is too much emphasis on paper-based classroom activities which are not linked to real life experiences or to other aspects of the curriculum. There are too few opportunities for students to undertake

vocational training in areas where the college has identified employment prospects.

36 The most effective teaching is well planned to enable students to learn the skills they will need to progress to more advanced level courses or employment. Good use has been made of residential experiences to extend students' learning. In a few lessons, teachers have given careful thought to the methods which are most effective in helping students to learn.

For example, a mathematics lesson had been planned around the making of papier mâché pots. The activity covered concepts of length and shape and included opportunities for students to develop problem-solving skills. In some lessons, particularly those for students with severe learning difficulties, insufficient thought has been given to prioritising what students need to learn. Individual programmes for students, stating overall goals, the skills required to reach those goals and interim objectives against which progress can be monitored, have not been established. Many teachers work in isolation and there are few opportunities for them to share good practice. In some lessons, the relevance of the work was not clear to the students. Some rapidly became bored and misbehaved in ways which disrupted the lesson.

37 Some of the claims relating to students' achievements in the college's self-assessment report required clarification. Although assessment criteria on some courses allow students to receive substantial help and support from staff in order to reach their goals, the level of support given is not recorded alongside the statements of students' achievements. This makes the claims for a 100 per cent level of achievement open to misunderstanding. Since the college does not set clear targets for learning for each student, it is difficult to monitor the progress students are making and little attention is given to analysing what they have learned. Some students are able to work competently and confidently with minimal supervision from staff.

Curriculum Areas

Some have been able to progress to more advanced level courses, including those in vocational areas. Individual students have taken part in local and national competitions and won awards. Although a significant proportion of students gain considerably in confidence and self-esteem, the current assessment and recording systems do not measure and record this effectively.

38 Students have access to specialist accommodation and equipment in some vocational areas and this helps them to learn. Many lessons, however, are held in temporary classrooms which are of poor quality. The lack of blinds, for example, makes it difficult for students to see overhead transparencies. One room is used as a thoroughfare to other rooms which is particularly distracting for students who often find it difficult under normal circumstances to maintain their concentration. Some staff recognise the importance of providing appropriate resources to support students' learning but others rely too heavily on worksheets and handouts which not all students can read. Computing equipment is not available in the classrooms. Few teachers have qualifications which are related specifically to the teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

39 The strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors differed in some respects from those set out in the self-assessment report. Some strengths were considered to be understated.

Key strengths

- strong informal support from staff for all students
- effective provision of additional learning support
- the positive contribution made by the student services unit
- helpful reviews of progress with individual students
- accessible and effective support on personal issues

Weaknesses

- insufficient cross-college co-ordination of support for students
- the lack of a strategy for implementing the college's commitment to students' social, cultural and personal development
- underused careers guidance facilities

40 The college markets itself as the 'local, friendly college', a description which inspectors consider well-founded. Students speak positively of the accessibility of staff and their willingness to give them individual support. Responsibility for student support is shared between the manager of the student services unit and the heads of school. There are no management structures to ensure co-ordination and consistency across the college in relation to the various elements of support. The quality of the support provided is insufficiently evaluated: for example, it does not feature in annual course reviews. The self-assessment report makes no mention of this as a weakness.

41 The student services unit is situated at the main college entrance and includes a suite of interview rooms, which provide for privacy, as well as information desks and displays of helpful leaflets. The unit provides accessible and effective support to students who, in turn, speak highly of the service offered. The unit's staff have received appropriate training. They provide guidance on a range of matters including college courses, benefits, transport and finance. They also administer the college's hardship fund. Where students require it they arrange further support from the college's counsellors or from specialist agencies, with whom they have good links. Childcare in the college's day nursery is free to full-time students, and is highly regarded. Some students receive help in making and financing other arrangements for childcare.

42 Although the college has identified the lack of a school liaison team as a weakness, it has the usual range of links with local schools, and staff from the college visit the schools to provide pupils with information about the college and the programmes it offers. Innovative events such as a 'battle of the bands' competition have been successful in encouraging prospective students to visit the college. Applications for courses are received centrally and then referred to the appropriate college school. Students are able to apply for more than one course and procedures are in place for them to transfer between courses. Careers officers are available within the college, but careers guidance is not always provided for those students who are uncertain about which course to take. Inspectors could not agree with the college's statement of its impartiality regarding admissions procedures in its self-assessment report.

43 Students receive a general induction to the college and its facilities. This is supplemented by a course-specific induction. Full-time students are tested on entry to the college to assess whether they need additional support in mathematics and English. The tests are

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centrally administered and the results sent to tutors who are asked to encourage students to apply for additional support through the learning centre. Effective procedures are in place to contact students who have been identified as needing support but have not requested it. Learning packages have been developed by staff. Key skills tutors are assigned to course teams to help students and encourage the use of the packages, which are particularly effective for students who are reluctant to attend additional support sessions. Links with external agencies such as the educational psychology service and the speech and language therapy services extend the range of specialist support available to students.

44 Each full-time course includes timetabled opportunities for personal tutors to meet their students either as a group or individually. Tutorials are usually used for reviews of progress and discussion of personal matters. Students speak positively about these reviews and the quality of support they receive. There is helpful documentation on action planning and individual action plans are used to record progress and set targets for future improvement. On some courses, staff issue reports to the parents of 16 to 18 year old students and offer opportunities for them to come to college to discuss their children's progress. Despite the commitments in the mission statement and students' charter that the college will promote social, cultural and personal development, only a few courses have tutorial programmes which address these

matters. There are no college policies concerning, for example, health education or drugs awareness. Personal tutors lack central guidance on the content of tutorials, and there is no specific staff development to help them develop their tutorial role. The self-assessment report does not identify these weaknesses.

45 The college has a service level agreement with Lifetime Careers, the local careers service, which provides the college with five careers advisers for a total of 100 days in the year. Each full-time course is allocated a named careers adviser who liaises with course teams to arrange group sessions and individual interviews. There is also a 'drop-in' facility, held fortnightly, when students can receive careers advice. Advisers from a specialist education guidance service for adults also visit the college periodically and hold individual interviews. The take-up of individual interviews is low, and many of the students and some course leaders are unaware of the arrangement or the identity of their allocated careers adviser. The use which is made of the careers service varies considerably between courses.

46 The college records the destinations of full-time students who achieve their intended qualifications. The following table gives these as a percentage of those completing their courses in 1996. Overall, the destinations of about 76 per cent of full-time students are known. Only 6 per cent of those achieving qualifications at level 3 progress to higher education.

Students leaving with the following qualifications	Number of students	Higher education %	Further education %	Employment %	Other %	Unknown %
Level 1	209	0	49	16	18	17
Level 2	205	0	43	21	12	24
Level 3	278	6	29	23	14	28
Level 4	12	0	0	25	33	42

Source: college data

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General Resources

Grade 2

47 The self-assessment report concludes that the college's general resources are an area of strength, though it acknowledges some weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment though they identified different weaknesses.

Key strengths

- many improvements since the last inspection
- main buildings which are welcoming, well maintained and clean
- the good services and facilities provided by the library and learning centre
- the emphasis given to the needs of those with disabilities
- improved external security measures

Weaknesses

- temporary classrooms which provide a poor environment for teaching
- the unhelpful separation of the library and learning centre
- overcrowding at peak times in computer rooms

48 The college is developing its accommodation in line with a detailed strategy and has made considerable progress since the last inspection. New buildings house the hair and beauty, construction, and animal care provision. A bid for European funds to meet part of the cost of the next phase of development has been successful. The original building was a school dating from the 1930s. Other buildings have been added since this date. The permanent buildings provide an attractive and appropriate environment for learning. Seventeen temporary classrooms are also used. These are in poor condition and it is planned to replace them. Their condition, although commented on in the

college's accommodation strategy, is not included as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Staff accommodation has been improved since the last inspection, but shortcomings remain. The accommodation is maintained to a planned schedule. Room usage is regularly monitored. Health and safety is well managed and the college received a national safety award in 1997 as well as a national award for the cleanest educational institution.

49 The library and the learning centre provide good services and facilities. There is good provision of books and journals for most programme areas. At both centres students have open access to information technology facilities including multimedia machines and an increasing range of CD-ROMs. The library holds an extensive range of audiovisual aids. Neither centre, however, can accurately monitor the use of its facilities. Rooms allocated for teaching information technology are sometimes overbooked and this leads to groups using the learning centre, disadvantaging other users. The two centres are separate and some distance apart. In consequence, there is some duplication of staffing and other resources. Although this weakness is recognised in the accommodation strategy, it does not appear specifically in the self-assessment report. Proposed changes to the accommodation would bring the two centres together in a purpose-built block. The college has not yet established a replacement programme for capital and other equipment to support its strategic planning. Staff have access to information technology facilities in dedicated workrooms but not all staff rooms have a computer. Staff have insufficient direct access to photocopying facilities.

50 The main building has a welcoming entrance, and corridors and other circulation areas are carpeted and well decorated. Staff and students have common rooms which are kept tidy. The catering curriculum section manages the college bistro as well as the training restaurant. Menus are designed to

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encourage healthy eating. All teaching areas in the main buildings are accessible to wheelchair users. Some of the toilets for people with disabilities include shower facilities, and one has been designed for students with severe disabilities. A successful bid with local partners for government funds has provided improved lighting and closed-circuit television surveillance to improve external security. Sports facilities on the site are limited to a modest gymnasium and small multi-gym.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

51 Improvements made to the quality framework since the last inspection are recognised in the self-assessment report. The links between some of the strengths and the supporting evidence are not clear. For example, it is assumed that the existence of an audit team in itself ensures consistency of practice in the implementation of college policies. In general, the strengths are overstated and the weaknesses understated.

Key strengths

- a clear framework for the assurance of curriculum quality
- school reviews, which promote continuous improvement
- the use of the annual cycle of course reports which inform the college-wide curriculum report

Weaknesses

- some college quality assurance groups which do not function appropriately
- many incomplete course reviews
- underdeveloped cross-college service standards
- a self-assessment report which understates weaknesses and overstates strengths

52 The college's mission and quality assurance policy make commitments to offer high-quality learning opportunities and to continuous improvement. The quality assurance framework has been strengthened since the last inspection to include a college programme development team. This team, composed of the director of curriculum, the heads of school and departmental heads, oversees quality assurance issues, including school annual reviews, and reports to the academic board. School quality assurance groups are intended to monitor the quality of the reviews of courses within each school and an audit team has been established to assess whether course portfolios comply with required standards. Some of the groups do not comply with their terms of reference. The quality assurance groups, for example, do not fulfil their remit to scrutinise course reports regularly.

53 The quality assurance framework includes questionnaires to ascertain students' views. A summary of all the students' comments is made but students do not routinely receive feedback on their responses. Cross-college quality standards have been established in some functional areas, for example, the student services unit. The college recognises that other areas would benefit from more explicit standards. There is a small amount of outward collaborative provision. The college has undertaken audits of the provision which is managed by their training providers but providers' quality systems are not yet fully compatible with the college's requirements.

54 College targets for students' retention and pass rates have been set and course report forms provide space to record information about retention, achievements and destinations. There is no space to record data for previous years making it difficult to demonstrate continuous improvement at course level. The quality of the course reports is mixed. In some cases, commentary is inadequate and achievement data are incomplete. Action plans do not always

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address the issues raised in the reports. Course reports are aggregated into school annual reports which are supported by performance data over two years. Some of these data, however, proved difficult to verify. The 1995-96 report for the school of care, health and science is particularly detailed and includes an analysis of achievement and retention by course. Other reports are less detailed. Achievements in the school of business, for example, were described simply as 'very good' and without reference to specific courses. A college curriculum report was produced for the 1995-96 academic year drawing on the school reports. It provides an analysis of strengths and weaknesses against the headings of the former FEFC inspection framework, although it includes only a small amount of performance data. It has not been presented to the corporation.

55 The college charter is comprehensive and includes sections, for example, on learning programmes, equal opportunities, financial support, and the complaints procedure. Some of the statements contained in the charter, for example, the commitment for teachers to provide feedback on assignments 'within five working days' are measurable. Others are descriptive and more difficult to measure. The previous inspection report made reference to the intention that the college management and academic board would receive regular reports on performance in relation to the standards in the charter. Reports are prepared in relation to customer service commitments but not for all the charter standards.

56 The college's self-assessment report conforms to the headings of Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Each of the major programme and cross-college areas is graded. Strengths and weaknesses are specifically stated; sources of supporting evidence are listed for the strengths but not for weaknesses. The process of self-assessment was based on school development plans and annual reports, and was supported by staff

development. A pilot lesson observation scheme has been established in order to inform judgements about teaching and learning. Questionnaires to clients, lesson observation profiles and other statistical information are not used in the report to support judgements. Little attention is given to the quality of the students' experiences in the classroom. An action plan is provided to address each weakness, indicating the action to be taken, allocating responsibility and giving a timescale for its completion. Some of the action points are stated in general terms making their completion difficult to measure.

57 Staff development funds for the current year represent 1.25 per cent of college income. Staff are also able to use, at no charge, the range of education and training programmes offered by the college. In part because the personnel manager has only recently been appointed, there is no agreed training plan for the current academic year. It is intended to produce a revised training plan, to give a greater priority to corporate needs. Training records exist for previous years which illustrate that a broad range of opportunities has been offered for both support staff and teachers. They are costed by course attended and aggregated to school and service area levels. Appraisal is well established in the college and Investor in People status was awarded in 1995. There is an intention to move from a two-year appraisal cycle where appraisees have some flexibility in the choice of their appraiser, to an annual line-managed system.

Governance

Grade 2

58 The self-assessment report judges that the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses. The inspection team agreed with this conclusion but considered that the corporation possessed insufficient information in order to judge the quality of curriculum performance.

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Key strengths

- the good balance of skills and experience possessed by corporation members
- effective committee structures and reporting arrangements
- close monitoring of the college's financial performance
- good attendance at corporation and committee meetings
- clerking arrangements which give good support to the corporation

Weaknesses

- no formal process for the recruitment of new governors
- lack of formal arrangements for the induction and training of governors
- lack of standing orders for the conduct of corporation meetings
- inadequate monitoring of curriculum performance and the governors' own performance

59 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the college's instrument and articles of government and substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

60 The corporation has 14 members, two of whom are women. Three vacancies have been unfilled for over a year. Whilst there have been attempts to recruit new governors during this period a search committee has not yet been established. Members, between them, possess a range of appropriate expertise including accountancy, finance and estates management. The corporation includes staff and student governors although attendance by student governors is poor. A comprehensive governors' handbook is supplied to all board members.

This includes useful advice on a wide range of matters including, for example, where to obtain independent professional advice. All governors undertake some induction and training and other training is arranged to meet specific needs. The governors' intend to review training needs formally in order to construct a planned training programme.

61 The corporation meets quarterly and is well supported by the clerking arrangements. The clerk has a detailed job description covering the key functions of his role. There are no standing orders to determine how corporation meetings are conducted. Attendance at both corporation and committee meetings is carefully monitored. Average attendance is good at around 80 per cent. Governance at the college is conducted predominantly through the finance, audit, human resource development and remuneration committees. The committee structure is appropriate; all committees have adequate reporting arrangements to the corporation and their terms of reference have recently been updated. Management accounts are sent to members of the finance committee every month and the committee, which meets approximately every six weeks, reviews variances from budgetary projections. In addition, the full corporation receives summary financial information at each meeting.

62 Governors consider the strategic direction of the college at corporation meetings. More detailed discussion about aspects of the draft strategic plan takes place in the committees. The financial performance of the college is effectively scrutinised, but the monitoring of curriculum performance is less systematic. The last college curriculum report was not presented to the corporation. Although they receive an annual report from the principal on examinations results, governors have few benchmarks by which to measure students' success. The corporation recognises in its self-assessment report the need to develop indicators to assess its own performance.

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Management

Grade 3

63 The college states in its self-assessment report that it has made progress in ensuring effective and efficient management of scarce resources. However, there are important shortcomings in other aspects of management.

Key strengths

- a strategic plan which was developed after wide consultation and market research
- sound monitoring of finance
- an open management style which values the contribution of staff
- effective relations between governors and managers
- the range of initiatives to increase educational and training opportunities for the local community

Weaknesses

- some inadequate cross-college management
- an academic board which has little impact
- unreliable management information, particularly in relation to students' achievements
- underdeveloped use of operating plans
- limited liaison with industry at curriculum level

64 The executive team comprises the principal and three directors who are responsible for curriculum, finance and services. It meets weekly to formulate policy, and monitors progress against strategic objectives. The members work well together, encourage teamwork among staff, and adopt an open management style which values the contribution of staff. The college programme development

team deals with operational matters. It meets weekly. Staff understand their individual roles. Communication between senior managers and staff is good. A fortnightly newsletter and regular staff forums help to ensure effective communications within the college.

A well-structured timetable of meetings has been established. These include twice-weekly common meeting times which enable course and support teams to meet regularly.

65 The college has maintained a flat management structure through a period of rapid growth. There are inconsistencies across the college in the quality of, for example, curriculum management, students' support and the implementation of college procedures relating to quality assurance. In order to address these inconsistencies the college has begun to appoint cross-college co-ordinators. It is too early to measure their effectiveness. The academic board meets at least termly. Staff do not have a good understanding of its activities and it is not fully effective in discharging its role.

66 Governors, college staff, and a broad range of external bodies have all contributed to the production of the strategic plan. The college has also undertaken market research to supplement that, for example, produced by the TEC. Links between the strategic plan and operational plans are not always explicit. The range of operational plans does not cover all aspects of the college's activities, nor does the college draw together common issues arising within different schools. For example, there is no plan to cover the college's GCE A level provision. Many operational plans are limited in content and detail. For example, the college's actions to support the implementation of 'inclusive learning' are written in general terms and are not incorporated within the college's operating plan. Action planning and target-setting are at an early stage of development. Teaching staff are not always clear about targets within their own areas of work and there is little use of benchmarks against which performance can be measured.

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67 Staffing costs have been significantly reduced over the last three years from 80 to 66 per cent of the college's expenditure, which is low compared with sector norms. This reduction in cost has been achieved by the redeployment of support staff and the review of job roles as the college's enrolments have increased. There has been little action to reduce the amount of classes which have low numbers of students. Registers are often poorly kept. Students are not recorded as having withdrawn from courses even after long periods of absence. Teaching rooms are not always allocated appropriately.

68 The college has established partnership arrangements with a wide range of organisations, including higher education establishments, colleges in the area, local community groups and schools. Successful bids for funding have allowed the college to develop its learning centre and increase the provision of adult students who wish to progress to higher education. Strong links exist with the local authority, for which the college provides an extensive community-based programme in a substantial number of centres. Some courses are also available on Saturdays. Some curriculum areas such as care and provision for the land-based industries have advisory committees, but in other areas there are few links with employers at school level. Roval offers full-cost provision to business, but its earnings are small.

69 The ability of the college's computerised management information system to assist staff in day-to-day course management and to inform decision making is limited. Middle managers lack ready access to information. The two existing systems are not fully compatible. The college has disbanded its management information system user group because it was proving ineffective. It intends to give the academic board a role in keeping users and providers appropriately informed. Currently, no group undertakes this role and contact between

users is made only on an informal basis. Inspectors were unable to rely on the data on students' achievements supplied by the college in advance of the inspection. The college has not been able to agree its performance for the achievement of qualification aims in 1995-96 with the FEFC. There were discrepancies between achievements recorded in the college's annual report and in other college publications and those contained within the Department for Education and Employment publication of information on students' achievements. There are no routine procedures for the production of reports on students' progress to employers or to parents of students aged 16 to 18. In 1995-96, the college was able to identify the destinations of 81 per cent of the full-time students who achieved their intended qualifications. However, course teams made little use of this information to assess the relationship between course outcomes, progression rates and careers.

70 Within the scope of its review, the FEFC's audit service concludes that the financial management of the college is good and the reports of the internal and external auditors do not indicate any significant weaknesses of internal control. The finance team is led by an appropriately-qualified director of finance and other staff are encouraged to obtain relevant professional qualifications. The college is currently in the process of strengthening the finance team through the recruitment of a financial controller. Comprehensive management accounts are produced manually in accordance with required deadlines. Accounts are reviewed monthly by the college executive. The college's financial regulations, which have a number of major omissions, are currently being updated by the director of finance. Budget holders receive accurate, timely reports on expenditure. However, they require further training to ensure they can fully understand their implications.

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Conclusions

71 Inspectors endorsed many of the strengths included in the college's self-assessment report. However, they judged that the college did not identify a significant number of weaknesses. As a result, about half of the grades awarded by the college to curriculum and cross-college areas were considered overgenerous by inspectors.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	13
19-24 years	9
25+ years	66
Not known	12
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	34
Intermediate	45
Advanced	14
Higher education	0
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	7
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	148	760	14
Agriculture	154	60	3
Construction	79	27	2
Engineering	108	138	4
Business	126	472	9
Hotel and catering	106	107	3
Health and community care	258	409	10
Art and design	61	464	8
Humanities	200	2,168	38
Basic education	42	535	9
Total	1,282	5,140	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	103	31	0	134
Supporting direct learning contact	19	0	0	19
Other support	54	0	0	54
Total	176	31	0	207

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£4,457,000	£5,468,000	£6,109,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£13.16	£13.84	£14.65
Payroll as a proportion of income	80%	67%	66%
Achievement of funding target	99%	101%	pub data n/a
Diversity of income	20%	13%	13%
Operating surplus	-£403,000	£321,000	£123,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)
 ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)
 Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)
 Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)
 Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)
 Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)
 Note: figures for 1995-96 subject to a prior year adjustment

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	4	9	19
	Average point score per entry	3.1	1.8	2.9
	Position in tables	bottom third	bottom 10%	bottom third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	*	41	17
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	85%	29%
	Position in tables	*	top third	bottom 10%
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	22	45
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	50%	24%
	Position in tables	*	bottom third	bottom 10%

Source: DFEE

*1994-95 intermediate and advanced vocational results not published

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