

# Ruskin College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**2000-01**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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## Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

## Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

# Summary

## Ruskin College

### *South East Region*

#### **Inspected October 2000**

Ruskin College is a small residential adult education college in Oxford. The college has strong links with the trades unions and labour movement, and with the local community. Students are recruited from all over England for some courses. The college has not yet been required to collect and submit data for the ISR. College data for students' retention and achievements were checked and found to be substantially accurate. The college's self-assessment report provided an accurate assessment of its work. The report was thorough and evaluative, and there was sufficient evidence to substantiate most strengths and weaknesses. Governors, teachers and students were involved in the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. By the time of the inspection, some weaknesses had been addressed. The college's main programme is the certificate of higher education. Most students following this programme do so full time and are residential. There is also a range of part-time courses. More than 90% of students are aged over 24 years and many have few previous qualifications.

The main subject areas are humanities and social sciences, and 94% of all provision is in these subjects. Most teaching is of a high

standard. The proportion of lessons judged by inspectors to be good or outstanding was significantly better than the national average and better than the college achieved in the last inspection. The tutorial approach to teaching and learning is successful. Teachers are highly qualified in their subjects. Students' achievements on the long courses offered are good. Students benefit from studying in a residential learning environment and many report that their studies have transformed their lives. Facilities for IT have improved considerably since the last inspection and library resources are outstanding. The quality assurance framework is clear and detailed. Students are productively involved in the process of assuring quality. Governors direct strategy effectively and use their extensive links to other organisations for the benefit of the college. The college is well managed. Communication is good and staff are involved in planning and decision-making. There are a number of issues that the college needs to address. These include: some teaching that does not take account of the learning needs of all students; some low or declining retention rates; inadequacies in responses to students' basic skills needs; underdeveloped health and safety procedures; inadequacies of some accommodation; insufficient use of performance standards; deficiencies in staff development and appraisal; and insufficient monitoring of some policies by governors and managers.

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>
Social, political and economic studies	2	Support for students	2
English, history and humanities	2	General resources	3
		Quality assurance	3
		Governance	2
		Management	2

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Ruskin College is a small residential adult education college in Oxford. It is one of six residential colleges in England designated, under section 28 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, as eligible to receive financial support from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college was founded in 1899 with two main purposes: enabling working class students to fulfil their potential and have access to university education; and training the actual and potential leaders of the working class movements. The mission of the college is to provide educational opportunities for excluded and disadvantaged people, and through education to transform their lives. The college has a long history of contributing to lifelong learning and social inclusion. There are strong historical links with the trades unions and labour movement, and with the local community. Former students include the deputy prime minister, John Prescott, two former Trades Union Congress general secretaries, and seven members of the House of Lords. The college has established partnership arrangements with employers and a wide range of agencies and voluntary organisations. Students are recruited from all over England for some courses.

2 The college operates on two main sites that are 3 miles apart; Walton Street in the city centre and Ruskin Hall in Headington on the outskirts of the city. There are teaching and residential facilities on both sites. The main administration centre, the library and the Ferguson Learning Centre are all based at Walton Street. The senior management team comprises the principal, general secretary, and dean. In July 2000, there were 70 full-time equivalent staff of whom 21 full-time equivalents were teachers. The college has strong historic links with Oxford University and students have access to some of the university's facilities and provision. In July 2000, the college had 1,273

students enrolled. These included 188 full-time students of whom 96 were residential. More than 90% of the students are aged over 24 years and the average age is 38; 52% are women. Students studying full time for the certificate of higher education are normally eligible for an adult education bursary that covers tuition, examination and validation fees and a maintenance grant. Some students receive scholarships from trades unions and other organisations. The college recruits some students from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.

3 The college's main programme is the certificate of higher education, validated by the Open University Validation Service. This programme had 134 students in 1999-2000; most study full time and are residential. A community and youth work certificate is offered separately within the certificate of higher education programme. Part-time courses include the Ruskin Learning Project, for students returning to learn, validated by the National Open College Network (NOCN). More than 300 students enrol on the programme each year, mostly on courses lasting eight weeks. The college has expanded its short course programme in partnership with the General Federation of Trade Unions. The main subject areas of the college's full-time and part-time courses are humanities and social sciences, and 94% of all courses are in these subjects. The college also offers courses that are not funded by the FEFC, including a two-year full-time diploma in social work, a diploma of higher education in social change and two part-time master of arts postgraduate courses.

## The Inspection

4 The college was inspected in October 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by the FEFC. The college has not been required to provide data for the individualised student record (ISR), and so the

# Context

only data available to inspectors were those supplied by the college. Inspectors checked these data and found them to be substantially accurate. Students on the Ruskin Learning Project courses have few opportunities to achieve external awards, and so achievement data for this programme are not included in statistical tables. The inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors and an auditor working in the college for a total of 36 days. Inspectors observed 27 lessons. They examined students' work and documents relating to the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, residential support staff, students and representatives from organisations associated with the college.

5 The inspection of the curriculum areas was based on a sample of subjects in three of the college's programmes: the certificate of higher education, community and youth work, and Ruskin Learning Project. The certificate of

higher education is modular in structure. Students choose three core and six complementary modules, and all of these must be passed to achieve the certificate. Most of the lessons observed by inspectors were on certificate of higher education core modules. Subjects were grouped into two areas for grading.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 78% were judged to be good or outstanding compared with the national average for 1999-2000 of 62%. No lessons were less than satisfactory. This profile of grades is significantly better than that for the sector in 1999-2000.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Certificate of higher education core modules	7	4	4	0	0	15
Certificate of higher education complementary modules	1	2	1	0	0	4
Community and youth work	0	3	1	0	0	4
Ruskin Learning Project	1	3	0	0	0	4
Total (No.)	9	12	6	0	0	27
Total (%)	33	45	22	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000(%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

# Context

7 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Ruskin College	10.4	77
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

*Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*



# Curriculum Areas

## Social, Political and Economic Studies

### Grade 2

8 Inspectors observed 15 lessons in social sciences, politics, economics, psychology and management. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

#### Key strengths

- good teaching and learning
- effective use of tutorials for teaching
- students' significant gains in confidence and in their ability to communicate
- high level of students' achievements and progression
- outstanding library resources and good information technology (IT) facilities

#### Weaknesses

- failure of some teaching to meet the needs of all students
- poor quality of module planning on the certificate of higher education
- insufficient cross-referencing between subjects

9 The certificate of higher education programme has been redesigned in a modular form to enable students to join in January and April, in addition to September, each year. Students choose from a wide range of modules. Many of the students on the certificate of higher education course are unwaged and some have no formal qualifications. The Ruskin Learning Project provides part-time courses, mainly for local adults. Some are designed specifically for disadvantaged adults who wish to return to learning. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the programmes are successful

in meeting the needs of the intended groups of students. Provision is organised through programmes, not curriculum areas. Modules on the certificate of higher education course have been improved to take account of the reports of external examiners. Certificate of higher education students attend useful study skills sessions linked to the core modules. Planning and documentation is good on the community and youth work course, but is less effective on the certificate of higher education. There is insufficient integration and cross-referencing between social science modules to enhance students' learning. There are few opportunities for teachers to share good practice or learning resources. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers respond quickly to students' academic concerns.

10 Much of the teaching is good; of the 15 lessons observed 11 were judged to be good or outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of their students. They use an appropriate variety of methods to encourage students to develop their analytical skills. In a political journalism lesson, students worked productively in groups to provide a press release based on position statements from pressure groups. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that some teaching does not fully take account of the learning needs of all students. The effectiveness of lesson plans, and teachers' use of them, is uneven. In a few lessons, teachers make insufficient checks on students' learning and students are slow to become fully engaged in the work. Teachers are sensitive in handling equal opportunities issues in lessons. The use of tutorials for small groups or individuals is an effective method of teaching and learning. Inspectors found that the self-assessment report understated this strength. In a law tutorial, the teacher carefully reviewed previous work and then discussed and recorded the learning outcomes for individual students. Most teachers give detailed and constructive

# Curriculum Areas

written feedback to students on their assignments. Essays, assignments and projects are assessed using clear criteria, but teachers use a restricted range of assessment methods in some subjects. On the community and youth work course students are encouraged to draw on their past experiences and relate them to theory. Teachers relate key concepts to the practical applications found in the students' work placements. There is detailed reporting on the students' progress in work placements.

11 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that students gain in confidence and make significant progress in their ability to study and communicate. Teachers encourage students to work co-operatively and organise self-directed study groups. Students benefit from studying in a residential learning environment. They are enthusiastic and excited about learning. Some students on short courses participate in a residential option and then progress to the certificate of higher education. Most of the certificate of higher education students develop their written work to a good standard. Overall, rates of achievement on the certificate of higher education are good. The proportion of students attaining credits for the social science modules is consistently high. Of the 165 core modules completed in 1999-2000, 157 were completed successfully. In 1999-2000, 82% of certificate of higher education students

completing the course also achieved a full certificate. All of the students completing community and youth work modules passed them in 1999-2000. The overall retention rate on the certificate of higher education declined in 1999-2000 to 83%. Retention on the Ruskin Learning Project is lower, and has been at 75% for the last three years. The majority of students progress to higher education from the certificate of higher education course, mostly to the first year of degree courses. An increasing number go directly into appropriate employment.

12 Teachers are highly qualified in their subjects. Their academic qualifications, research interests and experiences are valued by students. Inspectors agreed with the weakness recognised in the college's self-assessment report that not all staff have teaching qualifications. Some printed learning materials are of high quality, colour coded and presented to make reading easier for students with dyslexia. Students make good use of the Internet and other IT facilities, some of which are available for 24 hours a day. Teaching rooms are fit for purpose. The college library provides exceptionally good facilities, and this is further strengthened by the links with the social science faculty library at Oxford University and the Bodleian Library.

# Curriculum Areas

## English, History and Humanities

### Grade 2

**13 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in English literature, creative writing, history, women's studies and return to learning. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Progress had been made in addressing some recognised weaknesses in teaching methods.**

#### Key strengths

- high standards of teaching
- the wide breadth of the humanities curriculum
- effective tutorial teaching and support
- good rates of progression and achievements
- good quality of students' work
- outstanding library and other learning resources

#### Weaknesses

- narrow range of assessment methods
- failure to take account of the learning needs of some students

14 The curriculum is effectively managed. At subject level, informal liaison between teachers plays an important role. Most teachers now produce lesson plans and schemes of work, a development recognised in the self-assessment report. However, some are better than others and there is scope for sharing good practice. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the curriculum is relevant to the needs and interests of a diverse range of students. Humanities modules in the certificate of higher education programme are designed to develop skills, theoretical concepts and

knowledge appropriate for higher education. Modules in history and women's studies cover a broad range of social issues. The twentieth century literature module includes black and women writers, and the creative writing curriculum supports and encourages students to publish their work. The college acknowledges that the modular structure of the certificate of higher education causes some difficulties for students. These include some restrictions on subject choices and the difficulty for students joining well-established groups in mid-year.

15 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching is well planned and effective. Standards of teaching are high and of the lessons observed, 11 were judged to be good or outstanding. Teachers use appropriate methods, including work in pairs and groups and student presentations. A wide range of printed worksheets is used, including extracts from texts, newspaper articles, 'mind maps' and cartoons. Teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to extend students' thinking, and draw on the wide range of students' experience to inform discussion of the topics being taught. For example, in a session on mental health, students were invited to comment on the acceptability of words used in the media to describe mental illness. The personal reflection that arose from this was used to encourage discussion of the attitudes to mental health found in society. The structure and purpose of some lessons is not clear to students. Teachers do not always take adequate account of the learning needs of some students, especially those students who are finding learning difficult. Inspectors agreed with the strength recognised in the self-assessment report that the tutorial programme is a distinctive and beneficial feature of students' learning. Teachers use tutorials very effectively to extend students' learning.

16 Many students who come to Ruskin College with few or no qualifications make rapid progress. Inspectors agreed with this judgement

# Curriculum Areas

in the college's self-assessment report. Students become articulate and confident in class and show enthusiasm for their studies. Most prepare well for tutorials, seminars and lectures. They make relevant connections between ideas introduced in earlier sessions and in their reading. Much of the written work is of good quality, and this is reflected in the comments of external examiners. A high proportion of students who complete their modules also pass the formal assessment requirements. In 1999-2000, 112 modules were completed and 109 were passed. The range of assessment methods used is narrow: much of the formal assessment is based on written essays. Levels of achievement of complementary modules are slightly lower than for core modules. Certificate of higher education students achieve high levels of progression from their programme. In 1999-2000, 72% progressed to higher

education and 17% to relevant employment. The college recognised in the self-assessment report that the overall retention rate for the certificate of higher education has declined. Few of the Ruskin Learning Project courses provide opportunities for students to gain external awards.

17 Staff are knowledgeable in their subjects and well qualified. The college has outstanding library facilities for the English and humanities curriculum. History students, in particular, benefit from access to the Bodleian Library collection. The Internet, electronic serial articles and electronic mail are available to students. Teachers currently make insufficient use of these facilities in their teaching. There is no opportunity for students on the literature modules to see live theatre productions.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**18 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified one additional weakness.**

#### Key strengths

- residential learning environment and the college's mutually supportive community
- good pre-entry advice and information
- effective induction arrangements
- comprehensive and effective study skills support
- highly valued counselling service

#### Weaknesses

- inadequacies in diagnosis of, and support for, students' basic skills
- insufficient initial help for some students returning to learning

19 The college is successful in its mission to use education to transform individuals' lives. Students, regardless of mode of attendance and residential status, speak passionately about the educational and personal value derived from their time at the college. The college is a community in which students benefit from each others' experience in addition to the expertise of the staff. Residential students, in particular, benefit from their learning environment. The interests of residential students are represented on the college's community and residence committee. Resident tutors at both of the college's sites work closely with support staff to ensure the well-being of the students. Students can gain Oxford University union membership and participate in a range of social activities organised by the Oxford and Ruskin students' unions.

20 There are good opportunities for prospective students to find out about the college's courses. Staff use their network of professional, trades union and community contacts to reach people who lack formal qualifications. Open days for prospective students are run throughout the year to enable visits to the college and meetings with staff. Applications are processed efficiently. All applicants for the certificate of higher education programme are interviewed. Induction arrangements are good for full-time and part-time students. Many new students on the certificate of higher education programme are invited to attend an introductory weekend when they can stay in the residential accommodation and attend lessons. This is followed by an induction lasting one week for students who join their course in September, or a one-day induction for the smaller number of students joining in January or April. Students are able to change their modules or courses, where appropriate.

21 The college has improved its learning support arrangements since the last inspection. Some of these are more fully developed than others. Students on the certificate of higher education programme complete a piece of free writing during the induction programme. This is analysed to determine their language support needs. Support for dyslexic students is good and includes individual tuition and the use of laptop computers for their studies. The college is less effective in responding to the needs of some other students. A small amount of group and one-to-one tuition is available in literacy. This year, no students have been identified as in need of numeracy support. All students on the certificate of higher education programme are required to achieve a wordprocessing award if they do not already have one. The initial assessment of students' prior knowledge and basic skills is underdeveloped. The college does not systematically monitor the uptake and impact of basic skills support.

# Cross-college Provision

22 The college has developed a pack of stimulating distance learning materials for students about to start the certificate of higher education programme. For some students this is a powerful means of reviving study skills and of reviewing their life experience. For other students, entry to their courses is daunting and demanding. Insufficient attention has been given to help students who are returning to learning. The literacy level of some materials is high and this may deter some students from completing the work. Students are encouraged to develop their study skills. Study skills sessions are an integral part of the certificate of higher education programme for which teachers have developed relevant materials. Students are allocated a personal adviser. Advisers have a pastoral role in addition to overseeing students' academic progress. Students rely mostly on their tutors for support. A group, chaired by the principal, that includes tutors, advisers and the dean reviews students' progress at least twice a term. Students can seek additional help from learning support staff if they need it. Advisers, tutors and support staff provide a high level of personal and academic support. This is helpful for the growing number of students who are coping with personal difficulties that may interfere with their studies.

23 Students rely mainly on their tutors for careers advice and guidance. They are encouraged also to make an appointment with the qualified careers officer who visits the college one day a week. The college's range of careers literature is small. The college's counselling service, which operates three days a week, offering appointments and 'drop-in' consultations, makes an important contribution to college life. The service is well used and highly valued. Its effectiveness is carefully evaluated. The counsellor is professionally qualified and runs support groups on specific themes in response to students' needs.

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

**24 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report and with the overall assessment. A few weaknesses identified in the self-assessment had been addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- extensive, well-used and high-quality library facilities
- computer provision improved to a good standard
- responsive and well-organised residential services

#### Weaknesses

- poor recreational facilities for students
- some drab classrooms and general lack of display material
- inadequate access for students with restricted mobility at the Walton Street site
- underdeveloped health and safety procedures

25 In addition to the two main sites, the college also owns a small number of houses that provide additional residential accommodation. At peak times, there is overcrowding in some teaching rooms but overall the college underuses its accommodation. Study bedrooms are adequate but some are in need of modernisation. The college is beginning to address some of these weaknesses. Governors approved an accommodation strategy for 1994 to 1997. A revised strategy document was drafted for 1997 to 2000. Managers and governors have carefully considered some options for accommodation, and a new strategy

# Cross-college Provision

is being produced. Consultations and feasibility studies are being carried out with a view to bringing the college onto one site. Since the last inspection, the college has carried out some improvements at both sites for students with restricted mobility. These include the installation of ramps, platform lifts and toilet facilities for students with disabilities. The self-assessment report acknowledges that weaknesses remain. Restricted access to the library and dining room continues to be a cause for concern for the college. It is attempting to resolve this within the current academic year. There are a few bedrooms that have been adapted for students with disabilities.

26 The college is a welcoming place for adult students. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that residential services are well organised and responsive to students' needs. There are student common rooms on both sites. There is some accommodation for students with families. Minor repairs are carried out promptly. Students speak highly of the catering service. The standard of cleaning in the college is good. The self-assessment report identified some teaching accommodation as not being suitably equipped in terms of teaching and learning aids but this had been addressed by the time of the inspection. The college has a maintenance schedule and some classrooms and bedrooms have been recently refurbished. Other teaching rooms are plain, uninteresting and untidy, and there is a lack of display material. Heating and ventilation is a problem in some rooms. The self-assessment report recognises that recreational facilities at the college are inadequate. There is a formal agreement to use the university squash facilities.

27 The college has a health and safety committee that meets termly. The domestic bursar is responsible for day-to-day management of health and safety. Managers recognise that they need to do more to promote health and safety awareness. There is a health and safety policy statement but there has been

insufficient development of formal documentation and procedures. A comprehensive risk assessment was completed in May 2000. This identified 115 problems of which 20 were deemed unacceptable and 28 posed significant risk. The college has been working to address this and has employed consultants to develop appropriate procedures. Security is also an issue that is being considered and exterior lighting has been improved.

28 The library facilities at Walton Street, which provide for students on both sites, are outstanding. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this is a strength. The opening hours have been extended and the reference section is open 24 hours a day. There are three full-time members of the library staff. They teach library skills to students. Students are inducted into the library and sessions are arranged to suit the needs of individuals and groups of students working on particular topics. Library staff have good links with teachers, for example, in selecting books and materials. The librarian is a member of the academic committee and library staff attend programme boards. The library contains 40,000 books, 9,000 pamphlets and 150 periodicals. There are collections of audio and videotapes and CD-ROMs. There are specialist collections, including national and local labour movement archives and the papers of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. Most students are taught on both sites. Students at Headington, where a smaller number of lessons are taught, have a reading room with some reference material.

29 The college has made significant improvements to its IT provision since the last inspection and inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this is now a strength. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:5. The short course programme has its own computer facilities. This addresses an issue identified in the self-assessment report. Hardware is up to date and students and staff have access to Internet,

# Cross-college Provision

intranet and electronic mail facilities. Students are able to use computers at any time on both sites. The college recognises that more staff development is needed to ensure that all staff are using IT resources effectively.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**30 Inspectors agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered that some strengths were overstated and that some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- thorough, reliable and self-critical self-assessment
- clear and detailed quality assurance framework
- extensive and productive involvement of students in quality assurance
- effective use of external advisers

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient use of performance standards
- incomplete implementation of appraisal scheme
- inadequate evaluation of the effectiveness of staff development

31 As the self-assessment report recognises, the college is introducing a more rigorous approach to quality assurance while retaining the most effective features of existing good practice. The quality assurance policy is linked to the strategic plan. It has been considered and approved by governors. Programme boards effectively review reports about courses. The academic committee and the quality assurance committee receive reports from programme boards and act on their recommendations.

Students are well represented on these committees and make valuable contributions. There are clear terms of reference for the quality assurance committee. A particular feature of the arrangements for assuring quality is the use made of external advisers. Inspectors agreed with this strength which was recognised in the self-assessment report. The advisers are often teachers from higher education institutions who contribute to evaluation and advise on the implementation of good practice. Reports from external examiners are generally very positive.

32 Students state that their involvement in decision-making bodies is an important part of their experience at Ruskin College. The college seeks the views of students through their representation on boards and committees and through surveys. Questionnaires are supplemented by structured group discussions. There has been a low response rate to some questionnaires, and this weakness is recognised by the college. Students report that the college responds effectively to their comments and suggestions, for example, in relation to the provision of IT facilities and residential issues. The learning and support handbook includes the student charter. It contains much useful information for students about college services and procedures. There is a complaints procedure that tells students how to make complaints and how to get help with making complaints. It also describes other methods for expressing concerns, for example, through programme boards. The appeals procedure is inadequately described. Unusually, the college does not keep a complaints file or other record of complaints. Almost all complaints are dealt with informally.

33 The observation of lessons has been recently introduced. Teachers work in teams of three to observe each other. Most teachers have now been observed. A well-constructed form enables structured feedback on strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are perceptive in their comments but some grades given are not



# Cross-college Provision

consistent with the written comments. Grades awarded by inspectors for lessons have improved since the last inspection; 78% were judged to be good or outstanding compared with 61% in the last inspection. There is some use, particularly by governors, of benchmarks drawn from other comparable courses and providers. The college is not working towards, nor has it achieved, any external quality awards. Managers make little use of performance standards. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. There has been some attempt to match levels of satisfaction from student surveys to quality standards. These standards are undemanding. For example, responses that show levels of satisfaction greater than 70% are deemed to be excellent.

34 The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first one to be based on Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. The report was thorough and detailed. Judgements were evaluative and self-critical. Most staff contributed to its production through cross-college working groups, and were able to comment on and approve drafts through membership of committees. Students and governors were also involved. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. There was a high degree of congruence between self-assessment grades and those awarded by inspectors. Inspectors concluded that the college had improved the self-assessment process since the last inspection.

35 The staff development policy clearly describes the college's approach and its priorities for teachers and support staff. To increase awareness of good practice in teaching and learning, a series of staff development events has been introduced. Attendance has been poor. The opportunity for teachers to gain teaching qualifications, a weakness recognised by the college, has not been given a high priority. Support staff can claim up to £100 towards the costs of any learning activity

through the Ruskin Employee Development Scheme. Staff have used this funding during the last year for Tai Chi classes, driving lessons and the learning of foreign languages.

Arrangements for the evaluation of staff development activities are inadequate, and this weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The staff appraisal scheme has not yet been effectively implemented, a weakness recognised by the college. At the time of the inspection, 24% of teachers and 12% of support staff had been appraised. There are significant differences in the scheme for teachers and support staff. The documentation is relevant, appropriate and includes the setting of performance objectives. The scheme makes clear links between appraisal, staff development and strategic planning.

## Governance

### *Grade 2*

**36 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Some of the weaknesses were overstated and others had been addressed by the time of the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- active support for the college's mission
- well-informed governors
- productive use of governors' external links and range of skills
- effective contribution to the strategic direction of the college
- good understanding of staff and students' views
- effective use of good practice to inform and develop new procedures

# Cross-college Provision

## Weaknesses

- underdeveloped training programme
- insufficient monitoring of some college policies
- poor attendance by a small number of governors

37 The roles and responsibilities of governors and managers are clear. This has improved since the last inspection and governors now spend more time dealing with matters of strategy and policy. Managers provide clear and useful papers to inform governors. Governors are offered options to consider and make decisions based on their good knowledge of the college. Major decisions, such as the rationalisation of the college's estate, are well informed by thorough documentation, a feasibility study and consultations with staff. Governors are committed to the college and its mission, and work to maintain its role as a strategic partner for the trades unions and labour movement. They are closely involved in setting the strategic direction of the college and have a good understanding of the strategic issues facing the college. They have supported proposals to widen the college's curriculum and the move towards more part-time provision. Governors also have ensured that the residential character of the college has been maintained.

38 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The governing executive substantially conducts its business in accordance with its memorandum and articles of association. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

39 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governors have a broad range of skills and expertise that are appropriate to the needs of the college. Governor appointments are informed by a

detailed audit of skills encompassing both the college's governing executive and council. Members of the governing executive are concerned that their composition does not fully reflect the gender and ethnic mix of the college. They are committed to addressing this through future appointments. Students and staff are well represented on the governing executive. A search committee intended to help inform the appointment process has recently been established, but it has not yet met. The governing executive meets four times each year, twice at the college and twice in London. Many governors live a long distance from the college, reflecting the college's national status. As recognised in the self-assessment report, there is some poor attendance at meetings. Governors have now set a target of 75% for attendance at executive meetings. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governors do not monitor some college policies adequately. They receive some reports regarding the ethnicity and gender of students who have been recruited, but no analysis of how well particular groups perform in the college. Governors have received little information regarding health and safety issues in the college and are now addressing this.

40 Administration of corporation business was not specifically referred to in the college's self-assessment report. Inspectors judged it to be good. Clerking arrangements are effective. Agendas, supporting papers and minutes are consistently produced. They are timely and of a good standard. The clerk ensures that the governing executive is fully informed of new developments. Reports, such as the National Audit Office report on *Managing Finances in English Further Education Colleges*, are carefully reviewed and good practice is adopted. The governing executive operates an appropriate framework of policies and procedures such as a code of conduct, 'whistleblowing' policy and standing orders. There is a register of interests that fully accords

# Cross-college Provision

with good practice and is available for public inspection. Audit and finance committees effectively support the work of the governing executive. These committees work within appropriate terms of reference.

41 For the last three years governors have received reports on students' retention, achievements and destinations. They are aware of the trends that these figures show and have discussed with managers some appropriate responses. They have also discussed the college's performance as described by FEFC performance indicators, and compared performance to other residential colleges and the sector as a whole. Inspectors did not agree with the weakness stated in the self-assessment report that governors are inadequately informed about students' performance. Many governors are skilled at working as members of committees, but recognise their need to become more familiar with the work of the college. The self-assessment report recognises that the need for training is not fully met, but some progress has been made. There is now a basic induction pack for new governors and some training events have been organised.

## Management

### *Grade 2*

**42 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements stated in the self-assessment report. Some of the strengths were overstated and some weaknesses have been addressed.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective leadership from the senior management team
- clear management and committee structure
- staff commitment to the college's mission

- good consultation with and involvement of staff in effective strategic planning
- close links with a wide range of national and local partners
- good communication across the college

#### **Weaknesses**

- little use of targets and performance indicators for teaching and learning
- ineffective monitoring of some policies

43 The management and leadership of the college are effective. Strengths identified during the last inspection, such as the involvement and commitment of staff, have been carefully maintained. The college has a clear mission that is well understood by staff and students. The senior management team has been reduced in size and is now more appropriate for the college. Managers work well together. Staff and governors regard them as accessible. They are clear about the priorities for the college and these are expressed in the detailed strategic plan and annual operating statements. Objectives are referenced to the accountable managers and have relevant timescales. Communication across the college is effective and has improved since the last inspection. Inspectors did not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that communication is a weakness. Staff are closely involved in discussing and developing the strategic plan. There are full staff meetings each term and questionnaires are used to collect views about important decisions. Recently, there has been a poor response to one such questionnaire.

44 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has a long history of setting, and operating to, a balanced budget. This approach has not, however, enabled the college to establish a

# Cross-college Provision

financial cushion within its reserves. The requirement for the college to join the funding methodology will bring greater financial pressure to bear and a commensurate need to address issues of costing courses. This is acknowledged by staff and governors and is being addressed through the strategic options review. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that cost centre managers make effective use of budget reports. Variances from budgets are discussed at their monthly meetings and remedial action is agreed. The formats for some reports to cost centre managers, the finance committee and the governing executive have weaknesses. Reports provide the current readership with useful information but lack clarity of presentation. They do not include a rolling 12-month cashflow forecast or a written commentary.

45 Inspectors agreed that there are effective links with a wide range of partners. The college successfully sustains its longstanding relationships with the trades union and labour movement. The college has also developed provision with other local and national partners. This includes a new diploma in social work with UNISON and Suffolk County Council. Some aspects of market research are at an early stage of development, but the recently established marketing committee is addressing these issues. The college is effective in reaching its target groups. It has well-established programmes for disadvantaged adults who do not readily return to learning. The provision of short courses, and open and distance learning materials, is developing well. The college works with trades unions to provide a national programme of short courses. It has also worked closely with the prison service to develop new courses for prisoners to prepare them to study in higher education.

46 Staff are effectively deployed. The college has used its internal auditors to evaluate the effectiveness of staff deployment and associated budgetary control. For a small college, there are

a lot of committees. They have clear remits, but the minutes show that some discussions are duplicated. Many committees hold long meetings with full agendas. Staff view them as time consuming but essential, and attendance is generally good. The debate and consensus is regarded as important. There are regular team meetings for administrative and other support staff. As the self-assessment report recognises, the monitoring of policies concerning equality of opportunity is insufficient. There is a range of clear policies concerning equality of opportunity but no group to oversee the implementation of these policies.

47 The college has begun to collect and submit data for the ISR during the last year. This is in line with the recommendation from the FEFC on the college's entry to the funding methodology. The manual system used to record data about students is sound and well maintained. The use of performance data and targets for teaching and learning is underdeveloped. Teachers do not regularly use data to inform their reviews and planning of provision. The college does not use data disaggregated by subjects for monitoring or planning purposes. Targets for recruitment, retention and achievement are set, but teachers' understanding of these is incomplete. There is little use of data regarding gender and ethnicity of the student body to inform curriculum planning or to assess the progress of particular groups of students.

## Conclusions

48 The college produced its second self-assessment report, and the first using the guidelines in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*, in preparation for the inspection. The inspection team found the report useful in planning and carrying out the inspection. The report was thorough and comprehensive. Most judgements were supported with sufficient evidence. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and

# Cross-college Provision

weaknesses identified in the report. Some weaknesses recognised in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors agreed with both grades awarded by the college for the curriculum areas, and with four of the grades for cross-college areas. One grade awarded by inspectors for a cross-college area was higher than that in the college's self-assessment report.

49 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 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	0
19-24 years	7
25+ years	90
Not known	3
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	0
Level 3 (advanced)	0
Level 4/5 (higher)	58
Level not specified	42
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 2000)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Health and community care	52	22	6
Humanities	136	1,063	94
Total	188	1,085	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 20% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	15	6	0	21
Supporting direct learning contact	13	0	0	13
Other support	36	0	0	36
Total	64	6	0	70

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£2,413,000	£2,559,000	£2,660,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	69%	64%
Achievement of funding target	101%	109%	110%
Diversity of income	52%	52%	51%
Operating surplus	-£32,000	-£6,000	-£77,000

Sources: Income – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

ALF – not applicable

Payroll – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – college (1998, 1999 and 2000)

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000
Certificate of higher education	Number of starters	135	135	134
	Retention (%)	91	95	83
	Achievement (%)	85	76	82
Community and youth work	Number of starters	12	10	13
	Retention (%)	100	100	85
	Achievement (%)	67	100	90
Ruskin Learning Project	Number of starters	319	344	344
	Retention (%)	75	75	75
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: college

n/a not applicable

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