The Rutland College

Contents

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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report
Sample size: 104 college inspections

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 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which 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

The Rutland College is a small sixth form college in Oakham which serves communities in Rutland and the surrounding counties. The college's self-assessment process benefited in its development from established arrangements for course review and evaluation. It is a thorough process in which all staff and governors take part. The self-assessment report contained clear statements of strengths and weaknesses and appropriately detailed action plans. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. They found some additional weaknesses. In one area, weaknesses had been overstated. At the time of the inspection, the college had started to work on rectifying weaknesses but many planned improvements are at an early stage. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the grades that the college had proposed.

The college offers courses in eight out of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Provision in two of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Since 34% of total provision in the college is in humanities two grades were awarded in this programme area. Much of the teaching is good. The proportion of lessons graded as outstanding or good was 5% above the national average for 1998-99. There are high pass rates for most

GCE A level subjects. Course organisation and planning are effective. Students receive good pre-entry and initial guidance and effective individual on-course support. The planning of tutorials is thorough but the practice is uneven in quality. The college has an attractive and well-maintained site and a well-used library resource centre. Quality assurance procedures make effective use of target-setting and value-added data to improve individual student performance. The governance of the college is outstanding. Governors are committed to the work of the college and have many skills. They have undertaken extensive reviews to determine the strategic direction of the college. There is an open style of management and good communications within the college. The college should improve: the poor and declining retention rates on some courses; the small proportion of lessons which do not fully meet the needs of all students; the accuracy of some retention and achievement data; for students, the provision of recreational areas; quality assurance procedures in non-curriculum areas; and medium to long-term planning for financial contingencies.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and mathematics	3	Support for students	2
English	1	General resources	3
Other humanities	2	Quality assurance	2
		Governance	1
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1   The Rutland College is a small sixth form college situated in Oakham. The college is the only institution providing full-time post-16 courses which is funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) in the county of Rutland. There are three 11 to 16 community colleges in Rutland which are funded by the FEFC as external institutions for adult work. Other providers of post-16 education in the locality include further education colleges in Melton Mowbray and Stamford and a campus of the Tresham Institute in Corby. There are also a number of independent schools. At the time of the inspection the college was proposing a merger with Tresham Institute.

2   Rutland has a total population of approximately 34,000. The largest employers are the public services, the armed forces and the hotel and catering industries. There is some light industry in the market towns of Oakham and Uppingham, including specialist plastic factories, but most firms are small and operate within the services sector. Many local residents commute to work in the surrounding large towns and cities. In December 1999, the rate of those who were unemployed and seeking benefits in Rutland was 1%, well below the regional and national averages.

3   Prior to 1994, the college concentrated on providing general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses for students aged 16 to 19. Since that time it has broadened its range of activity to include other courses and provision for adult education. In September 1999, the college offered 26 GCE A level subjects, 10 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects, two GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects, three general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at advanced level, three GNVQs at intermediate level, specialist full-time courses in nursery nursing and caring for young children and a certificate programme in administrative and secretarial procedures. In addition, a wide programme of adult education classes was offered at five locations in the community. In 1999, the college made a successful bid for direct funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and was able to launch two higher national diploma programmes. In November 1999, the college had enrolled a total of 1,051 students. Of these, 395 had enrolled as full-time students and 656 part-time students. Most students live in Rutland, but the college also recruits from parts of Lincolnshire, east Leicestershire and north Northamptonshire. There are also 40 full-time boarding students.

4   The management structure comprises the executive group (principal, deputy principal and director of finance) and a senior management team of the executive group, two directors of programme and a director of staff and student services. The three directors manage the main curriculum areas of the college and are supported by an adult programme/learner services manager, a work experience, enrichment and business development co-ordinator and a higher education co-ordinator. There are three deputy directors, one of whom co-ordinates careers and national records of achievement. A boarding manager reports directly to the principal and is responsible for the welfare and pastoral care of all boarding students. There are 36 full-time equivalent staff who teach the curriculum and 31 other full-time equivalent support staff.

5   The college's mission states 'we aim to serve the community by striving for the highest standards in the teaching, support and guidance of all our students'. To endeavour to achieve this mission the college has adopted the following values and aims:

- 'each member of the college community is an individual worthy of respect and dignity

- all staff should strive for the highest standards of customer care in all they do
- all teaching staff should endeavour to provide the highest professional standards possible in teaching, guidance and support. As part of this process they should ensure that they keep up to date in curriculum developments and teaching methodology
- college management and communication systems will be clear, open and transparent
- all members of the college community deserve to have their successes celebrated both internally and externally'.

The Inspection

6   The college was inspected during the week commencing 28 February 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements derived from the individualised student record (ISR) for 1997 and 1998 was used. Some errors had been identified by the college in the ISR data; updated figures were supplied to inspectors. The college supplied retention and achievement data for 1999. The college data were checked against primary sources, such as class registers and results lists issued by examining and validating bodies. Following the correction of some minor inaccuracies the data were found to be generally reliable. The college was notified just over two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by seven inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 34 days. Inspectors observed 33 lessons, examined students' work, inspected a range of college documents and observed tutorial sessions. They met governors, managers, staff and students. They also consulted representatives of Rutland County Council education department, the Leicestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and local 11 to 16 community colleges.

7   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed 70% were judged to be good or outstanding and none were less than satisfactory. This profile compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	10	9	3	0	0	22
GCSE	1	1	3	0	0	5
Other	1	1	4	0	0	6
Total (No)	12	11	10	0	0	33
Total (%)	37	33	30	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report

Context

8   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
The Rutland College	10.7	87
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Mathematics

Grade 3

9   Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good GCE A level pass rates
- effective course organisation
- strong specialist support for individual students
- effective and prompt feedback to students on their work

Weaknesses

- poor and declining retention rates in GCE A levels
- poor achievement in GCSE mathematics
- failure of some lessons to meet the needs of all students

10   There is a good range of courses in computing and mathematics. GCE A levels in mathematics and computing and GCSE mathematics are offered. City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numeracy courses at levels 2 and 3 provide an alternative to GCSE mathematics. The GNVQ intermediate in information technology (IT), Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) introduction to the Internet and National Open College Network (NOCN) mathematics for scientists were introduced in 1999. A high proportion of full-time students undertakes OCR computer literacy and information technology as enrichment to their main course. Courses in computer literacy and information technology are also offered part time in lessons run during the day and in the evening.

11   The standard of teaching ranges from satisfactory to good. Schemes of work are comprehensive. They cover the examination syllabuses and, particularly for computer literacy and information technology courses, are adapted to meet the needs of the different student groups. Lessons are well planned. Most teachers check regularly during lessons to ensure that students are understanding their work. This approach was identified in the self-assessment report as a strength. Teachers ask questions effectively although in some lessons a few quieter students did not respond. In good lessons all students were taking part and found the work appropriately demanding. These lessons had clear introductions and teachers provided realistic examples from the workplace when setting exercises. In a lesson with a small group of adult students undertaking OCR introduction to the Internet, the students were creating hyperlinks to website pages. The students had a very wide range of different abilities but they progressed well through the tasks set. The teacher gave very effective one-to-one support and supplemented this help with good handouts. The students' skills were good and confidence high for this beginners' course. However, in a few lessons the needs of all the students in the class were not met fully. This weakness was also recognised in the self-assessment report. In one such lesson with a group of students of different abilities the teacher introduced the topic, worked through examples on the board and then gave the students problems to solve. Some students had difficulty in completing the task set. Before these students had finished, the teacher introduced more advanced work and further exercises. Students are provided with good-quality handouts. Homework and other assessments are set regularly, marked constructively and returned promptly. Students are very appreciative of the level of informal support which they receive from their teachers who give freely of their time to provide additional help outside lessons. One example in

mathematics is the lunchtime support sessions which include help with study skills and portfolio checks to ensure that all notes are complete and well ordered for revision. There is a policy of open access to computers. Students can use machines and receive support through the 'drop-in' IT centre and in all the specialist classrooms.

12   There is effective course organisation. All teachers have comprehensive well-organised course files which include teaching schemes, assignment schedules, mark schemes and progress reviews. Students are provided with useful, appropriately detailed course handbooks. The college had identified problems in accurately monitoring the retention and progress of students studying computer literacy and information technology in all groups. New tracking procedures have been introduced which have resolved this issue effectively. Teaching teams are small and most communication between the teachers is informal. The computing and IT staff do not meet together formally. There is no overall IT policy for the college. Teachers are well qualified and they take up opportunities for professional updating of their knowledge and skills. There is adequate technician support for daytime lessons. The accommodation is good and enhanced with appropriate display

material. Inspectors agreed that specialist equipment is satisfactory to meet course needs. Access to the Internet is adequate. More networked machines are being introduced in April 2000.

13   Inspectors agreed that students' work is of an appropriate standard. Students perform well on GCE A level computing and mathematics courses. Pass rates are above the national averages for sixth form colleges. Pass rates at the higher grades of A to C are particularly good. Whilst achievement on GCSE mathematics has improved it is still below the national average. In 1999, 45% of GCSE students had not improved their grade after a further year of study. The pass rate on the C&G numeracy course at stage 2 is good. Full-time students undertaking computer literacy and information technology as an additional qualification to their main programme of study also perform well. A high proportion progress and achieve integrated business technology at stage 2. The retention rate on GCE A level courses is poor and has declined over the past three years as the college recognised in its self-assessment report. In order to try to halt this decline, induction and monitoring procedures have been strengthened. This action has resulted in an improved retention rate for current first-year students.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing and mathematics, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	68	55	66
		Retention (%)	74	87	79
		Achievement (%)	50	18	37
C&G numeracy	2	Number of starters	22	23	20
		Retention (%)	77	78	75
		Achievement (%)	93	100	87
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	47	37	43
		Retention (%)	77	73	67
		Achievement (%)	89	85	89

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing and mathematics, 1997 to 1999 (continued)

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	21	24	24
		Retention (%)	71	63	54
		Achievement (%)	50	87	92

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

English

Grade 1

14   Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with the strengths and overall judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong management and leadership
- most teaching outstanding
- a clear focus on developing critical thinking and independent learning
- GCSE and GCE A level achievement consistently above national averages
- excellent tradition of success in regional and national competitions

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

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15   The English department offers students a choice of two GCE A level courses in the daytime and also a one-year evening course. Students can study for GCSE in the daytime or in the evening.

16   Course management and leadership are strong. This strength was understated in the self-assessment report. Staffing, methodology, organisation and documentation for GCSE courses have improved significantly since the previous inspection. The department is administered effectively and efficiently. Teaching methods are refined constantly and successful initiatives are shared so that they become common practice. Areas for improvement and development arising from the self-assessment report are outlined in an action plan with agreed dates for completion. Students enjoy and benefit from a very good variety of extra-curricular activities including theatre visits to performances locally, in

Stratford-upon-Avon and in London. Students also learn from and enjoy poetry readings and visits from working poets. They attend conferences on examination texts and techniques.

17   Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. They take up relevant opportunities for staff development and are also engaged as moderators and examiners, which benefits their specialist knowledge and their teaching. One staff member is a published author on Shakespeare for GCSE. Library bookstock is adequate and there is a very good stock of specialist videos. At the time of the inspection, one of the rooms used for English teaching was too warm and stuffy, and also suffered from considerable noise intrusion. Wall displays of students' work and of supporting materials are very attractive. They help to encourage learning and give a sense of identity to the departmental area.

18   Teaching is consistently good and most is outstanding. The standard of teaching was understated in the self-assessment report. Teachers have built up a shared methodology which focuses on developing the individual students' critical thinking and independent learning. Students learn to discuss ideas in pairs and groups and then one group reports back on key points. Such student feedback is often of high quality and shows good perceptiveness. The teacher and other groups in the class then make further contributions to extend and refine statements. This approach results in a considerable body of analysed views. Discussions with fellow students and with teachers help individuals to gain confidence in their own critical ability. Students learn how to sustain an argument that is supported by references to relevant evidence from the text. Lessons are invariably thoroughly prepared and skilfully organised. Aims and objectives are shared. This approach to learning contributes to the excellent working relationships between staff and students which are based on mutual

respect. The pace of lessons is demanding but flashes of good humour often enliven the serious learning. Notes prepared by teachers for students' guidance are excellent in terms of both presentation and content. Teachers find imaginative ways of helping students to follow the intricacies of a plot or to visualise the staging of a play. In one lesson, an oversize chessboard with quotations attached to the chess pieces was effectively used to map the intellectual moves made by each player in Jill Paton Walsh's *Knowledge of Angels*. In another lesson, students working in small groups gave presentations on how opening scenes could be staged dramatically. After ideas had been pooled and thoroughly discussed, a short video clip illustrated the thoughts and reasoning behind the filming of a particular version of *Jane Eyre*. Very careful and conscientious marking of students' written work helps them to make progress. Detailed comments on scripts show students how to improve. In student files, the improvement in students' essay writing skills can be traced over a period of time as they follow the guidance written on their scripts. Teachers are always willing to advise and support students outside lesson times.

19   Oral work in debate and discussion is generally of a high standard. Students express their ideas fluently and with considerable confidence. Similarly, written work, which is sometimes weak and unsure initially, soon improves. Some of the essays produced towards the end of courses are highly perceptive and the standards of grammatical accuracy are good. Students work very well together in pairs and groups and they clearly enjoy their learning. The self-assessment report identified the good results at GCSE and GCE A level as a strength. Overall achievement at GCSE and GCE A level literature is well above national averages for sixth form colleges. In GCE A level English language and literature, the percentage of higher grade passes is well above the national average. Retention on all courses is slightly above benchmarks. The college enjoys a tradition of success in poetry competitions at regional and national level. For example, almost 60 of 75 college entries were accepted for publication in a Leicestershire poetry initiative. One GCE A level student won the first prize of £500 in the Middlesex Arts Project.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	39	36	44
		Retention (%)	74	83	77
		Achievement (%)	76	81	76
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	38	40	49
		Retention (%)	*	78	82
		Achievement (%)	*	*	95
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	29	29	32
		Retention (%)	*	79	81
		Achievement (%)	100	96	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Other Humanities

Grade 2

20   The inspection covered provision in government and politics, history, psychology and sociology. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with the overall judgements in the self-assessment report. One additional weakness was identified.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons and schemes of work
- good teaching
- imaginative exemplar resource materials in psychology
- effective use of the Internet as a learning resource
- consistently high results and achievements in psychology at GCE A level
- many students' achievements above their target grades

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses
- poor pass rates in GCE A/AS level sociology
- insufficient feedback on some students' work

21   The college offers a wide range of courses in humanities. It is successful in attracting part-time adult learners to courses. The numbers enrolled on sociology and psychology courses have fluctuated but recruitment to GCE A level psychology has risen significantly in the current year. There are strong links with the education department at the University of Leicester.

22   Lessons are well planned and involve an appropriate variety of relevant teaching methods and learning activities, as was identified in the self-assessment report. Schemes of work are suitably detailed. They incorporate opportunities for improving key skills although there is a need for further development in some subjects. Much of the teaching is good, and some is outstanding. In psychology for example, students were involved in an excellent collaborative project which required them to study different aspects of a topic to produce a class resource booklet. Small groups of students made effective use of the Internet as a research tool and drew on the display work of previous students and other well-produced resource material. Similarly, in a government and politics lesson students used research material from the Internet very effectively in preparing for a presentation on pressure groups. In some lessons, however, students were not stimulated and it was not always clear what had been learned. In such lessons the teacher made insufficient use of appropriate questions that required students to think and did not check that students were understanding the work. In other lessons some teachers did not always use appropriate teaching methods that took account of the different needs and abilities of all the students in the group. This weakness was identified by self-assessment. Steps to address this weakness have been taken on sociology courses. Comparisons of first-year and second-year students' files show clear and appropriate progress in the quality of the materials and activities for students.

23   There is significant variation in the quality of marking and written feedback both between subjects and teachers. This weakness was not identified by self-assessment. In history and government and politics, written feedback is thorough both on the assignment review sheet and on the script. Comments are helpful. They challenge the assumptions made by students. In other subjects, however, written feedback lacks enough detail and there is insufficient constructive comment on the scripts. In

psychology, extensive use is made of assignment review sheets. In sociology, progress has been made in the assessment of key skills but there is insufficient feedback to students on the standard of their written work. Across all subjects the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar in students' work is not sufficiently thorough.

24   Teaching staff are well qualified, many with higher degrees in their subject. Course co-ordinators are experienced examiners. Course handbooks and teaching materials are of a good standard. The standards of teaching materials in psychology are exemplary. Courses are well resourced and there is adequate access to the Internet and IT facilities. There are attractive and well-appointed specialist teaching rooms for most subjects where students' work is displayed to good effect to encourage and assist learning. The ambience and location of the sociology room was identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness. Inspectors agreed that the location did hinder access to IT facilities but felt the weakness to be overstated.

25   Pass rates are above the national averages for sixth form colleges for most subjects as identified in the self-assessment report. Students consistently achieve high grades in GCE A level psychology and government and politics. In GCE AS sociology, however, pass rates are significantly below national averages. The value added to students' achievements in most subjects is good. Many students achieve or exceed their predicted grades. There are poor retention rates on some courses, especially GCE A/AS level sociology. Retention rates are improving in psychology and progression rates to higher education are excellent. In 1999, 53% of students studying psychology progressed to psychology-related courses. Students are well motivated in lessons and attendance is good. Students are articulate and well informed. They demonstrate a high level of subject knowledge in all subjects. They speak highly of their teachers and value the individual support that they receive outside the classroom. Students achieve excellent standards of written work in most subjects. In history one student's personal study is to be published in a local journal. In 1997, a student was named as one of the best five performers nationally for GCE A level history.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in other humanities, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE psychology	2	Number of starters	16	24	27
		Retention (%)	63	71	63
		Achievement (%)	90	41	82
GCE AS sociology	3	Number of starters	7	12	10
		Retention (%)	71	67	78
		Achievement (%)	20	25	43
GCE A level government and politics	3	Number of starters	16	10	9
		Retention (%)	75	60	89
		Achievement (%)	92	100	88
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	47	36	26
		Retention (%)	*	72	81
		Achievement (%)	86	*	90

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in other humanities, 1997 to 1999 (continued)

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	**1998**	**1999**
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	24	19	27
		Retention (%)	63	84	59
		Achievement (%)	69	88	63
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	39	41	28
		Retention (%)	41	75	75
		Achievement (%)	100	100	95

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*data unreliable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

26   Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified an additional weakness and felt that one weakness was understated.

Key strengths

- impartial pre-course advice and guidance
- effective enrolment and induction
- careful planning of tutorial work
- the good range of services for careers and progression advice

Weaknesses

- the lack of sufficiently rigorous arrangements for tutors' reviews
- the uneven standard of tutorials

27   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college provides impartial and accurate pre-course advice and guidance. Where appropriate, staff discuss with potential students, provision at other colleges. There are clear entry criteria for each course. Prospectuses and course leaflets are informative. The college uses a suitable variety of well-established recruitment methods including visits and newsletters to local schools. Prospective full-time and, where appropriate, part-time students receive an interview before enrolment. Students are informed of the content and level of courses at interview, open evenings and 'taster' events. Interviews are available at the college or at a potential student's school. There are clear arrangements for admissions.

28   There is effective enrolment and induction. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff are provided with

training and written guidance for these activities. All full-time, and where appropriate, part-time students have an induction programme. This is supported by helpful documentation on college facilities and services, including a student handbook and copy of the charter. Students are informed of their rights and responsibilities. During this programme, time is devoted to independent guidance from curriculum specialists and the local careers service. Most students found that enrolment and induction were helpful and assisted them to settle into their work at college. Care is taken during enrolment to ensure that students are placed on courses at the appropriate level. This strength was also identified at the previous inspection.

29   The careful planning of tutorial work and the relevant policies to cover tutorial provision are strengths, which are recognised by the college. Tutors are provided with regular training. There is an outline tutorial programme and schemes of work which have clear aims and objectives and take account of the different requirements of tutorial groups. Teaching packages are provided for tutors. Each student has a personal tutor who for most part-time students is their class teacher. Tutorials include both group and individual sessions. Students find tutors helpful and supportive. The self-assessment report identified some variation in the standard of work done by tutors. This weakness was given insufficient emphasis in the report. In a number of tutorials students were not always interested in the topics being discussed. The college has an established system for monitoring students' progress and their plans to improve their performance. Most tutors' written records of monitoring students' progress at tutorials are satisfactory. Occasionally, comments do not clearly indicate how well a student is performing. Action plans resulting from tutor reviews of progress are often not clearly written or do not have target

dates for completion. This lack of consistently rigorous arrangements for conducting these reviews was not identified as a weakness by the college. Parents are kept informed about students' progress.

30   There is an appropriate range of services to support students with additional learning requirements. Help with communications, numeracy, study support and dyslexia is readily available. There are adapted materials, special equipment, computers and specialist support services to meet students' individual learning needs. Services are also provided by external agencies. Students can obtain support through individual appointments or by calling at the learning services centre. All full-time students receive a diagnostic assessment for literacy and numeracy, but some on substantial part-time programmes do not receive similar help. Most students who are identified as needing support receive it. In addition, tutors can refer students for help and students can refer themselves. The recording of progress and action-planning to improve performance is informal and not fully effective.

31   The college provides a range of services and facilities for careers progression and advice for full-time students. This strength was partially recognised in the self-assessment report. The main careers area, located in the library, is well resourced. It is effectively stocked with up-to-date information including software packages, books, videos and university prospectuses. Full-time students receive comprehensive careers education as part of their tutorial programme, including guidance on progression to higher education and employment. The college has a partnership agreement with the local careers service. Their advisers provide individual guidance interviews, career talks and support to students who have been identified as at risk of leaving their course early. Part-time students have the opportunity of an appointment with an adviser. Guidance on courses and career options is

available to students and their parents after the publication of examination results.

32   The college offers a number of other services to students. A personal counselling service is available staffed by a qualified counsellor. Students are referred to external agencies, for help where appropriate. Childcare facilities are provided for children aged from 0 to five years; students express their satisfaction with this service. Arrangements for the administration and allocation of monies from access funds are clear. The college provides an established range of enrichment activities including sports, social activities and visits both locally and abroad.

General Resources

Grade 3

33   Inspectors agreed with the overall balance of judgements in the self-assessment report but some of the significant strengths and weaknesses identified by inspection were different from those identified by the college.

Key strengths

- an attractive and well-maintained site
- the well-used library resource centre
- access to most areas for wheelchair users
- good accommodation for boarders

Weaknesses

- the lack of recreational areas for students
- inadequate decoration of some classrooms and circulation areas
- some deficiencies in the level of technician support
- under utilised sports facilities

34   The college is located on a single site that is attractive and well maintained, as noted in

the self-assessment report. Some part-time provision for adults and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are run in three community locations. The college has improved its accommodation since the last inspection and accommodation which at that time was considered to be of poor quality has been sold. The comprehensive accommodation strategy incorporates plans for further improvements including the removal of the two remaining wooden buildings. There are also plans for the provision of more storage and office space which the college recognises is a current deficiency. The college also identified in its self-assessment report that the lack of recreational areas for students is a weakness. Catering facilities provide students with a good range of hot and cold food. The dining area is well used. However, as the college recognises, the lack of communal areas puts considerable pressure on the dining area, which becomes overcrowded at peak times.

35   The college offers a well-maintained, welcoming environment. Most general classrooms are well equipped, carpeted, and appropriately furnished; they provide a suitable learning environment. Most subject areas benefit from having designated base rooms which are enlivened by displays of students' work and subject-related displays. The reception area and many corridors are used to display information and students' work to good effect. However, there are some classrooms and circulation areas which are in need of redecoration and refurbishment. While this weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report, it is recognised in the college's maintenance programme. Most areas of the college are accessible to wheelchair users. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report.

36   Inspectors agreed with the college that the library resource centre is a strength. It is spacious, centrally located and provides a pleasant learning environment. There are a good number of individual study spaces, some in a designated quiet area. There is no partitioned area for group activities. Some students complain about the level of noise at times. There is a computerised library management system, computerised access to the catalogue and digital camera software. The bookstock is satisfactory. Students are provided with a very good range of CD-ROMs, video tapes, audio tapes and slide sets. A scanner and colour printer are available. Students have access to the Internet through seven computers which are specified for research use. These are available on a 'drop-in' basis at designated times. At other times, students can book to use them. The library is well used. Surveys show that students and staff find it a good resource which supports learning effectively.

37   Inspectors did not agree that IT resources are a key strength. They considered that IT resources are adequate. In addition to the computers in the library resource centre, a further 47 machines are available in three classrooms which can be accessed during lesson time if there is space and on a 'drop-in' basis at lunchtime and after the college day. A further 12 machines are located in learning services exclusively for 'drop-in' use. These machines are not networked. There is currently a ratio of one machine to every seven full-time students or one to every nine full-time equivalent students. The college has a four-year rolling programme to maintain and upgrade the quality of the computer specification. More machines with an increased specification and modern software are to be installed in April 2000. The one classroom not currently networked is to be linked up at that time. In the self-assessment report the college recognises as a weakness the lack of IT technician support in the evening; it is being addressed. The college also recognises that there is no technician support in art and design.

38   The college has extensive sports facilities including a well-equipped sports hall, a sports field which can accommodate football, rugby or hockey and three tennis courts. The facilities provide an appropriate environment for running specialist sport and leisure courses but they are generally under utilised.

39   Inspectors agreed with the college that the good accommodation for students who need to board is a strength. Most boarders are students whose parents are in Her Majesty's forces or are working on temporary work contracts abroad. The accommodation is provided in Lonsdale House, which is an attractive Victorian building located in the college grounds, and in a cottage adjacent to it. Most bedrooms are shared by two or three students. The size of the rooms is adequate. The house has comfortable communal and recreational areas and a study room equipped with six computers. One of the computers provides access to the Internet so that boarders can send electronic mail to their families.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

40   Inspectors confirmed the overall judgements in the self-assessment report although they placed a different weight on some of the strengths and identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a thorough system of course review and evaluation
- a well-established and effective self-assessment
- the setting of appropriately challenging targets for students
- the effective use of value-added data
- the effective linkage of extensive staff development to strategic priorities

Weaknesses

- no formal written policy or procedures for quality assurance
- underdeveloped quality assurance procedures in non-curriculum areas
- no formal monitoring of complaints or charter commitments

41   The college has a strong commitment to continuous improvement which is expressed clearly in its mission statement and strategic objectives. Staff understand their responsibilities for assessing and improving the quality of provision. The academic board receives reports on quality issues regularly and makes recommendations for improvement. The college does not have a formal quality assurance policy. The self-assessment acknowledged that the lack of formal written procedures has led to some deficiencies in the application of quality assurance arrangements.

42   Inspectors agreed that course reviews are a strength. Since the last inspection the college has taken effective steps to improve the rigour and consistency of arrangements for course review and evaluation. Each course is subject to an annual review and follows a common format. Appropriate emphasis is given to evaluating students' achievements in comparison with college targets and national averages for the sector. More extensive reviews have been carried out for individual courses on a three-yearly basis. Reviews are being used more selectively to address areas of concern identified by self-assessment. The college has taken effective action to improve the quality of course documentation. Course folders follow a common format, are comprehensive and well organised. They are monitored closely by directors of programmes to ensure consistency.

43   The self-assessment report prepared for inspection was the fifth produced by the

college. It is comprehensive and thorough. Strengths and weaknesses are stated clearly and are generally well supported by relevant evidence including lesson observations, data on students' achievements and student evaluations. A self-assessment group which contained no external membership scrutinised the report. Self-assessment action plans are detailed but some fail to establish clear priorities for the action that is required. Effective action is being taken to address most weaknesses. For example, internal verification procedures for GNVQ programmes have been improved significantly.

44   The college has developed rigorous arrangements for lesson observations for all teachers. The observations are graded, used as evidence in self-assessment and can be used for appraisal. Grades were slightly higher than those awarded subsequently by inspectors. A system of peer observation has been introduced recently. Other opportunities for sharing good practice in teaching and learning are underdeveloped.

45   Target-setting for students' achievements is clear, well established and demanding. Appropriate use is made of national averages for the sector and of value-added data in setting and monitoring targets. Analysis of the value added to students' achievements using individual target grades for students based on their qualifications at the start of their course, helps teachers to monitor performance in GCE A level subjects. Inspectors agreed that the procedures provide students with a clear incentive to improve their performance. Achievement rates are consistently high in most subjects. At GCE A level the proportion of grades A to C has improved steadily from 50% to 57% in the period 1997 to 1999. Students' achievements on GNVQ programmes and in some GCSE subjects have been less satisfactory. The self-assessment report does not pay sufficient attention to the declining retention rate on some courses.

46   Inspectors agreed that there are effective procedures for gathering the views of students. The college uses questionnaires for obtaining student feedback. Results on teaching and learning are analysed by course co-ordinators and a report presented to the academic board. The college has introduced focus groups recently as an additional form of student evaluation. Effective action has been taken as a result of issues raised. The college has no systematic procedures to gather the views of parents or employers.

47   The college charter contains clear statements identifying what students can expect from the college. There is a short section relating to employers and the local community. The charter contains some measurable standards but these have yet to be monitored. The college recently revised its procedures for dealing with complaints. The procedures are well documented and well publicised. However, the self-assessment report failed to acknowledge that there has been no formal monitoring of complaints and no annual report to the corporation.

48   The previous inspection report identified the need to develop service standards for areas other than the curriculum. The college has only recently taken steps to address this issue. A set of standards and performance indicators for non-curriculum areas was drawn up in January 2000 in consultation with relevant staff. Monitoring procedures have not yet been established.

49   There are extensive staff development opportunities for teaching and support staff, both run by the college and through external agencies. Induction arrangements for new staff are well planned and helpful. The comprehensive staff development policy contains a clear set of institutional priorities. Staff development is evaluated regularly by the college management team. A staff development report is presented to the corporation annually. The college recognised some deficiencies in its

appraisal process and has introduced a new system based on the draft national standards in teaching and management for further education. At the time of the inspection, the system was being piloted and it was too early to judge its effectiveness.

Governance

Grade 1

50   Inspectors and auditors agreed with the overall judgements in the self-assessment report, although a minor weakness had been omitted.

Key strengths

- the effective recruitment and comprehensive induction of new governors

- close monitoring of student retention and achievement rates

- extensive reviews to determine the strategic direction of the college

- effective clerking arrangements

- effective committee structure

- the extensive range of skills and the commitment to the college of the governors

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped communication between governors and staff

- some out-of-date corporation procedures

51   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 instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

52   The corporation has debated the future strategic direction and financial viability of the college extensively. This strength was recognised in self-assessment. Governors are aware of the significant financial pressures that the college faces. The corporation is committed to retaining an educational presence in Oakham. It has re-affirmed the intention to merge with a neighbouring college in order to secure this commitment. The strength of strategic planning procedures was also recognised in the self-assessment report. The corporation has agreed an annual operating statement for a number of years. Many of the operational objectives have measurable results. The principal reports on the progress of the objectives at each corporation meeting. An annual report is presented to the corporation.

53   Governors possess a wide range of relevant skills and demonstrate a high level of commitment to the college, as recognised by self-assessment. There is a good balance of long-standing and recently appointed governors. The corporation has recently reviewed its size and decided upon a membership of 15. There are no vacancies. Four governors are female and there are staff and student members. Corporation and committee meetings are well attended.

54   Inspectors and auditors confirmed that governor recruitment and induction procedures are strengths. There is an active search and governance committee with clear terms of reference. Use is made of a skills analysis when appointing new corporation members. The college uses direct approaches to identify and recruit governors. The comprehensive induction procedure helps new governors to understand their role. There have been in-house and external training events for existing governors.

55   The corporation meets at least termly. Meetings are arranged one year in advance. The standard of agendas and minutes of meetings is high. Standing orders to guide the

conduct of corporation business are brief. As stated in the self-assessment, there are effective clerking arrangements. The clerk has a comprehensive job description, acts as clerk to all committees and reports directly to the corporation.

56   Governors have established an effective committee structure. Committees operate within their terms of reference, cross-referring work between themselves when necessary. The strategic planning committee regularly receives reports on progress against the annual operating statement and on issues that impact on the strategic direction of the college. The finance and general purposes committee monitors the college's financial position by receiving the monthly management accounts at its meetings, six times a year. The audit committee closely monitors the effectiveness of the college's control systems. The remuneration committee has considered the pay and conditions of the senior postholders and the clerk. Reporting arrangements to the corporation are good. Matters referred by committees to the corporation are logged by the clerk and drawn to the attention of the corporation for action.

57   The corporation has established many procedures for openness and accountability although some of these need developing and updating. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment. The procedures are usefully collated in a governors' handbook. A register of interests is maintained for governors and senior postholders and updated annually. The governors do not sign an annual declaration confirming their eligibility to act as governors. The code of conduct for governors is in need of updating. Corporation agendas, minutes and the register of interests are publicly available. The corporation does not have a formal

confidentiality policy, or any formal mechanism for reporting its activities and achievements annually to its external audience. A 'whistleblowing' policy has been adopted.

58   The self-assessment of governance involved all corporation members in a thorough appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses. This process was supported by the completion by individual governors of questionnaires on the conduct of board business. The corporation also reviews its performance annually outside the self-assessment process.

59   The working relationship between the corporation and the senior members of college staff is positive and supportive. Members of the executive group attend meetings of the corporation and most of its committee meetings. The respective roles of governors and senior managers have been recorded. Governors clearly understand their role. Individual governors are encouraged to take an interest in the curriculum and to support departments but these arrangements have not worked well. There are no formal channels of communication between governors and staff. These weaknesses were recognised in the college's self-assessment report.

60   Governors take a keen interest in student performance which was recognised in the self-assessment report. At each corporation meeting they are provided with information on students' achievements, retention, attendance and value-added data. The principal provides a useful written report to governors, which includes a commentary on the standards of teaching and students' achievements. Governors have discussed and approved the college targets for students' retention and achievements.

Management

Grade 2

61   Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- effective strategic planning
- open management and good communications with all staff
- clear reporting arrangements and responsibilities
- effective financial control
- regular monitoring of progress against operating targets
- productive working relationships with local organisations

Weaknesses

- some inaccuracies in management information data on students
- underdeveloped medium to long-term financial contingency planning
- lack of effective action on the decline in retention rates

62   The strategic management of the college is the responsibility of the executive group consisting of the principal, deputy principal and director of finance. As identified in the self-assessment report, this group deals effectively with strategic issues. Considerable effort has been spent in undertaking research to support the corporation review of the future of the college. The management group consists of the executive group, two directors of programmes and the director of staff and student services. It deals with operational issues. There are clearly minuted meetings. Minutes contain action points which identify those who are responsible for their completion. The annual operating statement links clearly with corporate aims and contains a range of quantitative targets that are monitored regularly. Staffing is tightly controlled within the target of 68% of income. However, there are missed opportunities to set precise targets for some objectives such as income generation.

63   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college enjoys high levels of reserves and solvency, in excess of sector averages. The current three-year forecast highlights a rapidly deteriorating financial position as FEFC funding reduces and expenditure increases. The college has considered various strategic options for its future. However, it has yet to formulate detailed contingency plans to address the medium to long-term financial difficulties the college would face should it remain an independent college. The director of finance, who is a qualified accountant, heads the small finance team. Monthly management accounts are produced promptly. They record historical and forecast information on the college's income and expenditure account and balance sheet and long-term cashflow, but the use of financial performance indicators is underdeveloped. The management group formally considers the monthly management accounts. Budget holders receive monthly reports of actual and committed expenditure against budget. Expenditure is scrutinised closely. Financial regulations need updating in some areas. The college's internal and external auditors have reported no serious weaknesses in the college's control systems.

64   Inspectors agreed that there is an open style of management which was noted as a strength in the self-assessment report. Staff feel able to approach the principal and other managers to discuss relevant matters. There is also good communication between managers and all staff. There are twice-weekly briefings by the principal. The communications about

the proposed merger have been handled sensitively and staff feel well informed. There are regular meetings of the whole college staff. There is a staff member on the corporation.

65   The management structure identifies clear reporting arrangements and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. All staff have job descriptions. There is a regular cycle of meetings for curriculum staff and cross-college teams. The effectiveness of the middle management structure has been the subject of two annual reviews since a major reorganisation. Resulting actions have led to improvements in effectiveness.

66   The college has productive working relations with local organisations and institutions that are involved in education. It is involved in a range of partnerships to plan and develop lifelong learning and widen participation. There are positive links with the local education authority (LEA) and the college has contributed effectively to a range of LEA projects. Links with local community colleges are positive. As identified in the self-assessment there is little liaison with the local TEC and few training opportunities for local employers.

67   The management information system is used to create regular reports for management groups and individual staff. There is direct access by staff to some student data. However, inaccuracies in data on students' achievements and retention has delayed the generation of some reports. The issue is being addressed.

68   The overall retention rates for level 3 programmes have been declining over the last three years to about the norm for sixth form colleges. Action has been taken on individual courses through the use of quality assurance procedures. However, there has been little discussion within the management group or the academic board to develop a clear college strategy for addressing this weakness, which was not identified in the self-assessment report.

69   There is an equal opportunities policy and a disability statement. There is no group with specific responsibility for monitoring the policy. Staff recruitment is monitored for gender and ethnicity. The curriculum provision is being developed to encompass a wider range of students' needs. The college partially fulfils the requirements of section 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. The college has a Christian union but there is no opportunity for a weekly act of collective worship.

Conclusions

70   The self-assessment report was comprehensive and thorough. It provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. The report prepared for inspection was the fifth produced by the college. The college has worked hard since the last inspection to achieve more rigorous arrangements for involving all staff in systematic quality assurance activities and to refine self-assessment procedures. Strengths and weaknesses were stated clearly and well supported by relevant evidence. A self-assessment group had scrutinised the report. Self-assessment action plans are detailed but some give insufficient priorities for the action that is required. Inspectors found evidence of effective action being taken to address weaknesses. A good attempt has been made to include quantifiable evidence. However, there are still frequent references in the report to sources of evidence rather than actual data. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. They found some additional weaknesses and noted that a few weaknesses had been understated. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the grades that the college awarded itself.

71   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 (January 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16–18 years	35
19–24 years	6
25+ years	58
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (January 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	33
Level 2 (intermediate)	12
Level 3 (advanced)	45
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	9
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	92	178	26
Agriculture	14	18	3
Business	43	87	12
Hotel and catering	31	8	4
Health and community care	14	15	3
Art and design	41	58	9
Humanities	149	206	34
Basic education	11	86	9
Total	395	656	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 0% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 2000)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	31	5	0	36
Supporting direct learning contact	0	0	2	2
Other support	28	0	1	29
Total	59	5	3	67

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£2,213,000	£2,116,000	£2,196,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£22.24	£20.40	£19.00
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	60%	62%
Achievement of funding target	110%	108%	104%
Diversity of income	18%	22%	27%
Operating surplus	–£60,000	£10,000	–£61,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)
Payroll – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
Diversity of income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)
Operating surplus – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	103	115	137	184	167	291
	Retention (%)	95	86	88	77	65	73
	Achievement (%)	97	92	97	97	77	94
2	Number of starters	311	276	360	117	127	104
	Retention (%)	85	83	79	80	57	69
	Achievement (%)	92	88	87	99	94	92
3	Number of starters	693	808	774	120	80	54
	Retention (%)	84	79	77	65	64	61
	Achievement (%)	82	83	87	89	70	100
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	4	14	50	141	279	390
	Retention (%)	50	79	98	79	85	87
	Achievement (%)	100	80	89	96	78	88
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	481	279	459	173	156	136
	Retention (%)	97	89	71	76	79	71
	Achievement (%)	97	99	100	100	76	98

Source: ISR
n/a not applicable

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