

# South Kent College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1999-00

THE  
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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 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

## South Kent College

### *South East Region*

Inspected October 1999

South Kent College is a large general further education college that provides a wide range of educational and training opportunities. It serves the substantial communities in and around the towns of Folkestone, Dover and Ashford. The college has strong links with Kent County Council and major employers in the area. The college offers courses in all 10 of the programme areas funded by the FEFC. The college produced its second self-assessment report for this inspection. It was a comprehensive, detailed and frank assessment of the college's provision. All staff were involved in the process. The report was validated externally, and submitted to the corporation for approval. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings but identified a few additional weaknesses and judged that insufficient weight had been given to others. Inspectors agreed with four of the six curriculum grades and three of the five cross-college grades awarded by the college. They also recognised the determination of governors, senior managers and staff to maintain the process of continuous improvement.

Under the leadership of a new principal, the college has made significant progress, in just two years, towards resolving its longstanding financial difficulties and is well on the way to completing a major refurbishment of its

accommodation. The new student services and learning centres on each of the main sites are attractive and well resourced. Students receive clear information and guidance to assist them in choosing their courses. The college has introduced new measures to support students and to widen participation. The improved self-assessment procedures embrace all college activities including its collaborative provision. The introduction of a comprehensive programme of lesson observation has led to an overall improvement in teaching and learning since the last inspection. Governors are active in supporting the college and have good working relationships with senior managers. The college acknowledges the urgent need to improve rates of retention and achievement which have been poor in several areas. The unreliability of some of the data produced by the college's management information system inhibits the setting of valid and appropriate targets for improvement. The college should improve: rates of retention and achievement in particular areas of provision; the reliability of some aspects of its management information systems; the use of measurable targets in planning and quality procedures; the arrangements for seeking students' views; appraisal arrangements that enable all staff to be appraised; the board's clerking arrangements; and induction and training for all governors.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and computing	4	Support for students	2
Construction	3	General resources	3
Engineering	3	Quality assurance	3
Business studies	3	Governance	3
Early years care and education	3	Management	2
Art, design and media	2		

## The College and its Mission

1 South Kent College is a large general further education college. It is based on three major campuses in Dover, Folkestone and Ashford and two smaller outreach facilities, one in Folkestone and another in Ashford. Dover is 25 miles from Ashford; Folkestone lies between the other two towns. The geographical area from which the college draws its students is very large, approximately 1,350 square kilometres, with a population of 305,000. Within this catchment, which is predominately rural, there are areas of high economic deprivation. The Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE's) index of local deprivation for the 60 districts in the south east shows Dover at number eight, Shepway at number 12 and Ashford at number 21.

2 In the last two years, the college has made significant improvements to its accommodation. Older buildings have been replaced and new student services and learning centres created on each main campus. Work is continuing on the renovation and improvement of other administrative and teaching accommodation. These developments have increased the college's popularity with school-leavers. Kent is a selective area for secondary education and there are grammar schools in most towns. Most non-selective schools also have sixth forms. The college has made sustained efforts to work more closely with schools and now has three partner schools which look upon the college as their sixth form. Almost all students entering the college come from non-selective schools. In 1997, only 28.8% of year 11 students from non-selective schools in Kent gained five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above compared with 45% nationally. The college's three partner schools have rates of 8%, 10% and 19%.

3 The college offers courses in all the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). In October

1999, the college had 2,133 full-time students and 3,750 part-time students. It employed 387 full-time equivalent permanent staff, of whom 118 were support staff not directly involved in teaching. In addition to its provision funded directly by the FEFC, the college has substantial and well-managed collaborative provision, mainly in health and social care and business.

4 The college's mission is to offer 'a first class learning environment where individuals make progress both educationally and personally'. Over the past few years, the college has created a culture in which 'students matter most' and in which they can develop a sense of identity with the college. The college's strategy is to develop provision that helps to widen participation in education and training and that is relevant to the needs of the very varied communities which the college serves. Provision is adapted as these needs change and as an increasing flexibility in modes of attendance enables more students to join the college, often from backgrounds that traditionally have not supported further education. Initiatives have been welcomed also that support students with learning difficulties and remotivate other students whose earlier experience of education had been negative. The college has responded positively to the urgent needs of the many refugees and asylum seekers in the area. The college's key strategic aims are:

- to create a culture which promotes success for all
- to confront and address student retention issues
- to match the college's offer and activities with individual and community needs
- to maintain and enhance the quality of the learning environment
- to improve the financial viability of the college
- to optimise the use and allocation of all college resources.

# Context

5 The college works closely with each district council and has a good working relationship with the county council. It is a member of the Kent Association of Further Education Colleges, and has strong links with local employers including a large pharmaceutical company, a ferry company and the Dover Harbour Board.

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during October 1999. A sample of collaborative provision was inspected during the previous week. Before the inspection, inspectors considered the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information from other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR) and supplemented by data provided by the college on students' achievements in 1999.

Inspectors found the data to be reliable and accurate with the exception of data for mathematics and computing. For this reason, the retention and achievement table for

mathematics and computing has not been included in the curriculum section. The inspection was carried out by 15 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 70 days. They observed 80 lessons and examined students' work and college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students.

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 inspected, 68% were judged to be good or outstanding, compared with 61% at the last inspection, and 6% were less than satisfactory. These figures are slightly better than the national profile recorded for colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	0	4	2	2	0	8
GNVQ	2	9	4	1	0	16
NVQ	3	9	6	1	0	19
Other vocational	7	11	8	1	0	27
Other	3	6	1	0	0	10
Total (No.)	15	39	21	5	0	80
Total (%)	19	49	26	6	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. The poorest attendance rate of 71% was in mathematics and computing.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
South Kent College	13.0	79
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

## Mathematics and Computing

### Grade 4

9 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in mathematics and computing. The self-assessment report included most of the weaknesses that were subsequently identified by inspectors. Some strengths identified in the report were unconvincing as they were based on insufficient evidence.

#### Key strengths

- the prompt action of new managers to address identified weaknesses
- comprehensive and well-documented schemes of work for all courses

#### Weaknesses

- an inadequate range of appropriate teaching methods
- teachers' low expectations of students
- poor retention rates for students
- unreliable record-keeping
- inadequate staff development

10 Most mathematics and computing courses take place at the college's Ashford campus. The college offers general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCSE mathematics courses as well as an alternative to GCSE mathematics that has been accredited by the local Open College Network. Under the heading of 'computing', the college offers GCE A level, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced and first diploma courses in information technology (IT). Shortly before the inspection, responsibility for mathematics and computing courses was re-assigned to two divisions: academic studies and IT; and computing and business administration. The managers of these divisions recognise the significant weaknesses in mathematics and computing courses.

Both groups of managers are working, together with course leaders and other teachers on a self-critical reassessment of the courses offered. Together they have devised strategies and implemented an action plan for improvement. There are early indications of the potential effectiveness of the plan, for example, in the improvement in learning support.

11 All courses have comprehensive and well-documented schemes of work. The majority of lessons observed by inspectors were carefully planned. In most lessons, teachers used an inadequate range of appropriate activities, and approaches to students' learning were usually unimaginative. Teachers had low expectations of students' potential to succeed on their courses. They explained students' poor achievement by reference to inappropriate qualifications on entry to the courses although there was no clear evidence to support this claim. In its self-assessment report, the college did not identify these weaknesses in the teaching. Some examples of good teaching were observed. In a GNVQ advanced IT lesson students worked in teams and were encouraged to take different roles within the team. One student with a severe attention disorder was supported by a classroom assistant and was able to participate effectively in the team's activity. In another GNVQ advanced IT lesson students were shown how they might use 'visual basic' to construct their own web browser. After the lesson, the students continued to work independently, helping each other, until they all had a working web browser, which they then used to visit their favourite websites. Additional support for mathematics students is provided in workshops held in the learning centre. Teachers provide prompt and helpful guidance and the sessions are popular with students.

12 It was not possible to form a judgement about trends in enrolment, retention and achievement because of poor and unreliable record-keeping in both mathematics and computing. Information held by the college's

# Curriculum Areas

management information system was also not reliable. Students' achievements in external examinations appear to be poor for nearly all courses in these academic areas, although students' written and practical work is of an appropriate standard. Much mathematical set work is abstract in character and not rooted in real or realistic examples. In computing courses, there is no evidence of enrichment activities or special support tasks for students working at a different pace from most of the group. Retention rates on most courses are very poor. In classes observed by inspectors, there was an overall attendance rate of 71%, which is low by national standards. This shortcoming was identified as a matter for urgent action in the self-assessment report.

13 Staff are appropriately qualified; some have relevant commercial experience. There are no staff development activities specifically aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. Classroom observations of teachers are still at a very early stage. Other staff development, for example, preparation for Curriculum 2000, is being undertaken.

14 Specialist computing equipment and software matches industrial standards and is sufficient for the number of students on courses. However, accommodation housing these resources is cramped and can be hot and stuffy at times. Some teaching takes place in the learning centre where there are extensive and well-ventilated IT facilities. Mathematics classrooms are spacious and well lit. There are no examples of students' work displayed on the walls of any of the rooms for the two areas. The mathematics and computing sections of the learning centre's book collections are not adequately stocked to support the curriculum. Both sections include a significant proportion of old and out-of-date books.

# Curriculum Areas

## Construction

### Grade 3

15 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3, the national diploma in construction and GNVQ at foundation and advanced levels. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses included in the college's self-assessment report, but judged that insufficient weight had been given to weaknesses in retention and achievement.

#### Key strengths

- the good range of programmes and modes of attendance
- the strong commitment to raising standards
- well-managed provision
- well-developed learning packs
- effective learning support
- good workshops which provide a realistic work environment

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention on most programmes
- a low success rate for the achievement of qualifications
- some overcrowding in workshops
- poorly-lit brickwork area disadvantageous to evening students

16 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the construction division provides a broad range of full-time and part-time technician and craft courses, enhanced by the recent addition of the national diploma in design, and an NVQ level 2 in handcrafted furniture. The partial integration of the new national diploma in design with the national diploma in construction is innovative, although, at the time of the inspection, numbers

on the course were still low. Students are enthusiastic about this new opportunity to broaden their perspective. These initiatives support the college's commitment to widening participation. The improved range of courses has attracted more female students. They are well represented on programmes in handcrafted furniture and painting and decorating. Workshop furniture and equipment have been specially adapted so that they can be used by a student with physical disabilities. Staff work closely with a local school exclusion unit, several of whose pupils are enrolled on construction crafts programmes.

17 Schemes of work ensure the comprehensive coverage of syllabuses. Lessons are well planned. The general standard of teaching is competent, and some good practice was observed. In practical sessions, students made good use of learning packs prepared by their teachers. Furniture students, in particular, benefit from a pack designed to improve their basic craft skills to the point where they use complex skills to make a toolbox. Plastering students prepare and plaster bays and have to overcome the deliberate provision of faults that have been built into the bays. There is ample evidence of a high standard of work by students, some of whom only recently started their course. The development of key skills has been introduced in many programmes, and members of the construction team are successfully teaching IT.

18 Over many years student achievement and retention rates have been poor. Although pass rates on NVQ level 2 programmes have gradually improved to about the national average, only 34% of students who start the course attained the qualification in 1999. Retention on other programmes fluctuates. Although there are signs of a steadier increase in retention on some programmes, the overall situation is unsatisfactory. However, the improvement in both retention and achievement in 1999 is the result of concerted action by all

# Curriculum Areas

members of the division under new leadership. The staff, many of whom have been recruited recently, are working hard to overcome these problems. Course procedures and structures are being revised. Before they are accepted, all students receive a formal interview which is carefully recorded and attend a 'taster' day. Attendance at these events is closely monitored, and appropriate follow-up action for each student is posted in the programme office. The recent integration of more individual support with the curriculum is showing positive results in both attendance and student perceptions of the progress they are making in their work. The self-assessment report identified the weaknesses in rates of attendance, retention and achievement, but inspectors judged that actions planned to address them were already having an impact. For example, the newly introduced national diploma in design has achieved 100% retention between the first and second year of the course.

19 Staff are appropriately qualified; some have degrees and teaching qualifications. All are encouraged to undertake regular updating of their professional and industrial skills. Most workshops are well designed and provide a realistic environment in which students perform their tasks. The recently developed plastering workshop at Ashford provides an excellent resource. The brickwork area on the Folkestone campus has good facilities, but it is poorly lit, which places students on evening programmes at a disadvantage. Housekeeping is poor in some areas, for example the plumbing section, which is untidy. In the painting and decorating area, some old and rickety timber stepladders are still in use. These do not comply with current British standards and are potentially dangerous. Some classrooms and workshops are in need of refurbishment. However, recent building modifications have improved the overall appearance of the accommodation in this area. Access to specialist computing equipment is restricted. Some machines are locked away for much of the time, and others have yet to be put into use.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ construction crafts - all trades	2	Number of starters	77	151	221
		Retention (%)	39	40	51
		Achievement (%)	17	55	68
NVQ construction crafts - all trades	3	Number of starters	12	37	14
		Retention (%)	100	40	88
		Achievement (%)	50	65	88
National diploma and certificate	3	Number of starters	24	22	15
		Retention (%)	55	77	73
		Achievement (%)	94	69	82

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 3

20 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment but considered the report gave insufficient attention to issues of teaching and learning.

#### Key strengths

- some good teaching
- good pass rates on many courses
- effective processes for review of student performance
- a good range of programmes
- the effective use of learning support assistants

#### Weaknesses

- most retention rates consistently low
- unsatisfactory structuring of the tutorial programme
- poor integration of communication skills with programmes of study
- unsatisfactory planning of some lessons
- the involvement of students in the course review process

21 There is a good range of craft and technician engineering courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, which is managed in two divisions. The courses provide the main disciplines of electronics, mechanical engineering, motor vehicle servicing and repair, and motor vehicle body repair. Divisional managers are trying hard to increase participation by providing appropriately varied opportunities to meet the needs of a widening range of students. These opportunities include the assessment of NVQ competences in the workplace and provision of open or distance learning through the use of study packs. Most full-time students have access to work

placement opportunities. Progression to higher levels of study or employment is a strong feature of many courses.

22 All courses are well planned. Most teaching is satisfactory or good. Inspectors observed some that was outstanding. Teachers motivate students to want to learn through their extensive use of well-designed practical activities. Most draw upon the students' experience of their employment which helps to enliven class discussions. Teachers also build upon students' prior knowledge, recap on previous work to reinforce learning and direct specific questions at individual students to assess their understanding. In an outstanding lesson, the teacher used a technique that required students to practise their communication skills and encouraged the development of descriptive language. Students' performance improved during the exercise. A recent college initiative attaches learning support assistants to each division. In a particularly good example of this strategy, the assistant provided support that enabled a student to read and follow machining instructions during a workshop session. The self-assessment report recognises the need to develop this practice more extensively. In some lessons, teachers did not motivate all students to concentrate on the work. Students arriving late were not challenged even when their arrival disrupted the lesson. Some lessons lost momentum when note-taking activities simply duplicated information that had already been given to students. Too many lesson plans focused on what the teacher would be doing rather than what the student should be learning.

23 The two divisions have introduced standard procedures and policies for assessment. These include the setting of performance and assessment criteria, internal verification and moderation, and feedback to students after they had been assessed. However, the policies have not been fully implemented on all the courses. In many cases, written feedback to students about their

# Curriculum Areas

performance in assessments did not encourage nor assist them to improve future work being prepared for assessment. Spelling, grammar and punctuation were rarely corrected and the integration of communication skills with programmes of study is generally poor. The termly review of students' performance and the subsequent personal action plans are positive ways of seeking to improve students' achievements. There is, however, little evidence of a structured and regular tutorial programme.

24 Students' achievements on many courses improved in 1999 and are higher than those normally seen in engineering in the sector. They show a marked improvement on the previous years' results. Retention rates, however, are unsatisfactory and have remained at the same level, 67%, for the whole programme area for the last three years. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that retention is a weakness. Targets for achievement and retention are set and monitored at course team level but these activities are not complemented

by detailed action plans that might lead to improvement. The course review process does not sufficiently involve students, which limits its effectiveness. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

25 Full-time teachers are well qualified. The divisions employ technician instructors who, together with other technicians and the learning centre assistants, provide good support for students and teachers. The college has made substantial improvements to accommodation much of which provides a stimulating working environment which is enhanced by displays of students' work. However, the main workshop area at the Ashford campus provides a poor working environment which does not help students to learn. This weakness in provision is acknowledged in the college's self-assessment. The programme area is well equipped but the machine shop tools and some vehicle body repair equipment are dated. Engineering students make effective use of the learning resource centres which have a good range of engineering books and periodicals even though many of the books are old.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Motor vehicle C&G and NVQs	1	Number of starters	234	197	130
		Retention (%)	61	53	64
		Achievement (%)	81	45	72
Electrical/electronics C&G	1/2	Number of starters	26	36	101
		Retention (%)	77	81	79
		Achievement (%)	65	37	66
Motor vehicle C&G and NVQs	2	Number of starters	54	89	149
		Retention (%)	67	63	59
		Achievement (%)	46	58	47
Mechanical manufacture C&G and NVQs	2/3	Number of starters	31	125	64
		Retention (%)	87	89	81
		Achievement (%)	71	51	70
National certificate and diplomas	3	Number of starters	62	68	96
		Retention (%)	79	65	64
		Achievement (%)	68	44	67

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Studies

### Grade 3

26 Inspectors observed 18 lessons in business and administration studies at the three college campuses and at the premises of collaborative partners. Overall, inspectors agreed with the judgements of the college, but identified additional weaknesses.

#### Key strengths

- the high quality of most teaching
- an appropriately broad range of courses
- the lively participation of students in lessons
- good standards in much of the students' written assignment work
- good retention rates on administration and IT courses
- well-managed partnership provision

#### Weaknesses

- significant numbers of students failing to achieve their target qualifications
- poor and declining retention on the GNVQ intermediate
- until recently poor management within the division of computing, administration and IT
- no work experience for GNVQ students
- insufficient opportunities for updating of teachers' commercial expertise

27 Business studies courses are offered within three of the college's academic divisions. The inspection covered general business studies, administration and business IT within two of these divisions: business, entertainment, sports and tourism; and computing, IT and administration. The divisions provide a good range of courses. There are opportunities for progression to higher courses within the college and to employment. Many courses are planned with flexible hours for attendance to provide

maximum opportunity for part-time students. General business programmes have recently been transferred to the division of business, entertainment, sports and tourism. This division is effectively managed and has established procedures for course management. The division of computing, IT and administration has recently appointed an acting head of division. Prior to this appointment course team meetings did not take place and staff teaching on the same courses, but on different sites, had little opportunity to meet. The college recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report. At the time of the inspection, internal verification in both divisions was well managed. Collaborative provision is well managed by the college and its partners. College staff visit the partners to review the quality of the provision. There are regular meetings with clear agendas and minutes. Targets are agreed and monitored.

28 The college's self-assessment report appropriately identifies the strength of teaching in this area. Most lessons observed by inspectors were good or outstanding. Teachers demonstrate good judgement in varying appropriately the tasks that they set and methods they use. In addition, they direct questions effectively to check students' understanding and progress. Teachers set high standards for their students and expect them to understand the disciplines of business. Overall, the positive atmosphere in lessons encourages learning; students clearly enjoy their lessons. For example, a class of senior secretarial students, of mixed age and gender, relished the opportunity to discuss the characteristics of first and club class air travel. By planning journeys for their future employers, they were able to learn about airport and aircraft facilities, geographical time-zones and the impact of jet lag. Students contributed from a wide variety of experiences and learnt from each other. At one of the partnership organisations, inspectors observed a group of students studying NVQ level 1 wordprocessing and NVQ level 2 using IT.

# Curriculum Areas

The 20 adult students were mainly unemployed, and, for most of them, this was their first experience of formal education since leaving school. They worked at their own pace from work books and were well supported by two teachers who responded promptly to their queries. Students were able to progress with speed and confidence. Administration students have good opportunities for work experience, but GNVQ students do not have similar opportunities.

29 A significant number of students on many courses fail to achieve their target qualifications. This factor was not given sufficient weight in the college's self-assessment report. However, achievements on the GNVQ advanced business course have improved over the last two years and are now above the national benchmark figure for the sector. Student retention rates on most courses are at, or above, national averages. The rates on the GNVQ intermediate business course are poor and have deteriorated

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
RSA computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	8	655	3,228
		Retention (%)	100	95	89
		Achievement (%)	25	32	30
Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations certificate in administrative and secretarial procedures	2	Number of starters	*	50	32
		Retention (%)	*	72	84
		Achievement (%)	*	42	26
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	38	27	11
		Retention (%)	95	67	55
		Achievement (%)	44	50	50
NVQ administration	2/3	Number of starters	198	310	130
		Retention (%)	81	84	76
		Achievement (%)	46	65	44
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	64	85	77
		Retention (%)	66	69	70
		Achievement (%)	65	55	76

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

\*combined not introduced until 1997-98

over the last three years. The majority of students observed during the inspection spoke enthusiastically about their course and worked effectively in class. Much of the written work examined by inspectors was of a good standard. Assignments were often wordprocessed and included the use of spreadsheets and database. Teachers provide detailed comments on assessed work and appropriate guidance on how students might improve.

30 Teachers across the divisions, and within the partnership provision, have appropriate qualifications and backgrounds. Many gain significant strength from their teaching on higher education programmes within the college. However, since the last inspection staff have had little formal opportunity for updating their commercial knowledge and experience, a weakness not identified in the college's self-assessment. Students have good access to locally-based computers, and specialist texts and other resources within the learning centre support their studies.



# Curriculum Areas

## Early Years Care and Education

### *Grade 3*

31 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in early years care and education and two collaborative first-aid lessons. They were in broad agreement with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in the self-assessment report, but judged that some weaknesses were understated.

#### Key strengths

- effective planning
- well-organised work experience
- an appropriate variety of teaching and learning methods
- a good range of courses
- attendance rates well above national averages

#### Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention on NVQ level 2 in childcare and education
- poor achievements on NVQ level 3 in childcare and education
- poor achievements for 1998-99 for national diploma childhood studies
- missed opportunities in the teaching of key skills

32 The college offers a good range of courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 early years and childhood education. These courses provide good opportunities for progression for full-time and part-time students. The section is well managed. Course teams meet formally at regular intervals. Meetings are well minuted and actions from previous meetings are followed up. All courses are regularly reviewed. There is good deployment of staff and other resources. Teachers are well qualified and opportunities are provided for staff to update both their professional and vocational qualifications.

The early years section is adequately resourced, but is located in some poor accommodation.

33 Inspectors agreed that course and lesson planning in the division is a strength of the provision. Schemes of work are comprehensive, and lesson plans are clear and often appropriately detailed. Teachers share aims and objectives with students at the beginning of each lesson. They adapt their teaching methods to the learning needs of their students. In a practical lesson involving the use of sand, compost, pasta and other textures, students learned how young children could be encouraged to develop language and motor skills. Students developed their understanding through role-play and participation in the activities. All students subsequently discussed what they had gained from the exercise. Another example of good teaching was the use of an assessor in the classroom to stimulate small group discussion on the practical applications of underpinning knowledge provided by the teacher. This approach enabled students to improve their understanding of the relevance of their learning to the workplace. Students enjoy their studies and willingly participate in discussions and question and answer sessions. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that there is insufficient integration of key skills with early years education courses. Attendance is good on all courses and, at 82%, is well above the national average for the sector.

34 All full-time students undertake work experience as part of their course. This opportunity is well managed; a teacher is assigned to co-ordinate the process for all students. The co-ordinator and their personal tutors visit students on work placement and the documentation recording these visits is good. Students speak enthusiastically of their experiences in work placements and both they and placement staff feel supported by college staff. Teachers make good use of students' experiences on placement to provide practical examples in the classroom to illustrate

# Curriculum Areas

underpinning knowledge, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. All 'mother and baby' placements are checked to ensure that they meet health and safety requirements and are vetted by college staff to protect both the family and the students.

35 Retention and achievements on National Association of Maternal and Child Welfare courses are good. Retention on other courses has shown some fluctuations over the last three years, particularly in the NVQ level 2 childcare and education course. However, there are recent signs of improvement in the rates. Achievement on the NVQ level 3 in childcare is poor and has been below the national average in the sector for the last three years. Achievement on the national diploma in childhood studies, whilst good in past years, fell significantly in 1999 to 63%. The college attributes this fall to a combination of factors: the enrolment of students who did not meet the standard entry requirements; too many assignments, and consequent late completion. These weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report but inspectors judged they were of greater significance than did the college. Appropriate remedial action has already been implemented.

36 The collaborative partners are long-established providers of first-aid courses and have worked with the college for some years. The management of the provision is well organised; course management is a particular strength. Trainers are appropriately qualified and the teaching is satisfactory. Opportunities are available for college staff to be trained by one of the partners and for the staff of partners to undertake training provided by the college. Partners adhere to the college's quality assurance systems and procedures and are included in the course review system. Rates of retention and achievement are good on all first-aid courses offered by the collaborative partners. Students contribute to class discussion and undertake practical activities with enthusiasm.

# Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in early years care and education, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Certificate human development childcare and family life (National Association of Maternal and Child Welfare)	1	Number of starters	52	30	9
		Retention (%)	83	73	100
		Achievement (%)	82	86	78
First aid at work	1/2	Number of starters	2,240	2,262	2,638
		Retention (%)	99	99	99
		Achievement (%)	99	98	95
NVQ childcare and education work in support of others	2	Number of starters	15	31*	28*
		Retention (%)	88	65	78
		Achievement (%)	67	87	66
Advanced certificate (National Association of Maternal and Child Welfare)	2	Number of starters	48*	29	25
		Retention (%)	94	85	86
		Achievement (%)	68	86	84
NVQ childcare and education group care and education	3	Number of starters	20*	11	26*
		Retention (%)	85	76	78
		Achievement (%)	22	36	43
National diploma caring and childhood studies (nursery nursing)	3	Number of starters	18	21	19
		Retention (%)	69	82	80
		Achievement (%)	83	90	63
Diploma nursery nursing (National Association of Maternal and Child Welfare)	3	Number of starters	8	6	12
		Retention (%)	63	100	92
		Achievement (%)	75	83	92

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

\*combination of one-year and two-year outcomes

# Curriculum Areas

## Art, Design and Media

### Grade 2

37 Inspectors observed 13 lessons on courses leading to GNVQ intermediate in art and design, foundation studies, diploma in art and design, and national diplomas in media and photography. They agreed with the overall findings in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were understated and noted that some weaknesses were being resolved.

#### Key strengths

- good teaching
- the high quality of studios and workshops
- well-developed specialist communication skills
- good divisional management and student/staff communications
- the effective range of courses
- good rates of progression to higher education
- significant links and exchanges with European institutions
- good specialist learning support

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- some poor attendance and punctuality
- some poor and out-of-date equipment

38 The division of creative arts offers a wide range of specialist and general courses in art, design and media that provide progression from GNVQ intermediate to higher national certificate level. In addition, GCE A levels are offered in art and design, media, film studies and photography. The division also offers a higher national certificate in interactive arts. The provision is well managed. There are regular, well-recorded course team meetings and good communications between staff and students and across the different sites.

39 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teaching is a strength. Of the 13 lessons observed, 11 were judged to be good or outstanding. Lessons are well planned. Students experience a wide range of teaching methods and activities, all presented with clear aims and objectives. Activities are well managed and adapted to match students' different learning needs. Staff have developed teaching and learning resources of high quality, which have improved significantly since the last inspection. Students at all levels receive clear briefs for their projects and achieve good standards in observational drawing, in writing and speaking about their work, and in expressing personal views. Specialist staff successfully integrate key skills with project work. Students are encouraged to plan and manage their work effectively. Their recorded self-evaluations are perceptive and constructive. Students' progress is monitored and recorded regularly. Tutorial sessions are used by tutors to check in detail on individual progress. Those students in need of learning support have benefited from the help of an art-trained assistant able to give specialist practical support. Staff share their creative interests and skills with the students in an annual exhibition of staff work. Students benefit from projects to design and make products for the community. Joint working with European partner colleges including visits and exhibitions of students' work, and regular visits to London and regional galleries all help to enhance students' learning. Students at all levels are encouraged to plan and manage their work effectively. Tutors at the regular tutorials record progress and set up action plans. Attendance and punctuality at lessons is uneven. Teachers are tolerant of students who arrive late. However, absences are carefully monitored and followed up.

40 Students' achievements in level 2 examinations have improved overall in the past three years, despite indifferent results in 1998, and reached very good levels in 1999. The one exception was the NVQ level 2 in ceramics

# Curriculum Areas

where the results were better in 1998 than in 1999. Students' achievements in level 3 examinations have also risen overall over the past three years, with a slight fall in 1998 except for the national diploma in photography, in which a 100% pass rate was achieved. GCE A level and GCSE results showed a marked increase in achievement in 1999. There is an expectation that students will progress to higher education and, in the period 1997 to 1999 about 80% have done so. Retention is low on most courses. Staff are aware of the problems over retention and curriculum strategies to improve the retention rate are being implemented, for example, by modifying traditional approaches to work in art and design.

41 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced for the current range of courses, although some have yet to complete the training for assessor and verifier qualifications. They

have a relevant range of specialist expertise and practical knowledge and skills. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that specialist equipment to support the courses was a weakness. At the time of the inspection, new equipment to rectify this weakness was being delivered to the college. Students have some difficulty in gaining sufficient access to library facilities and there are insufficient copies of specified reference books for project work. Action taken to address weaknesses in accommodation identified in the self-assessment report has produced a high-quality teaching and learning environment.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design and media, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate art and design, GCSE art and design, GCSE photography and NVQ ceramics	2	Number of starters	51	46	80
		Retention (%)	74	77	74
		Achievement (%)	65	57	84
GNVQ advanced art and design, national diploma in design (photography), national diploma in media and diploma in foundation studies in art and design	3	Number of starters	56	63	59
		Retention (%)	79	72	55
		Achievement (%)	86	73	90
GCE A levels art and design, film studies, media studies, audio and visual media and photography	3	Number of starters	12	53	46
		Retention (%)	48	71	40
		Achievement (%)	25	47	67
Higher national certificate in interactive arts	4	Number of starters	*	*	4
		Retention (%)	*	*	50
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

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

\*course not offered

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

42 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. A few strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not identified in the report.

#### Key strengths

- impartial and effective advice, guidance and counselling services
- good liaison with local partner schools
- well-managed student support services
- effective induction and tutorial support for students
- good childcare provision
- good personal and financial support for students

#### Weaknesses

- inconsistent admissions procedures and practice
- inadequate social and recreational activities for students
- insufficient provision of careers guidance and advice

43 Prospective students receive impartial advice and guidance through the student centres. Publicity and course information is comprehensive and clear. Links with local schools and the careers service are good; these partnerships continue to develop effectively. The college also organises open days and promotional activities, for example local radio road programmes. All applications are screened by guidance staff and, if appropriate, further advice is given. The college recognises in its self-assessment that admissions procedures are not fully consistent across the college and monitoring arrangements from initial enquiry through to enrolment have been unreliable. Some students have expressed their

dissatisfaction with the process. The college is taking steps to ensure greater consistency in the implementation of its admissions policy.

44 Induction programmes are effective in helping students to settle into the college. Induction arrangements meet the needs of a wide range of students from school-leavers to adult learners. Comprehensive information on college services is provided through student handbooks, leaflets and a diary which cover the college charter, student responsibilities, the complaints procedure and the equal opportunities policy. Students value activities aimed at familiarising them with relevant college services. The college has effective arrangements for students wishing to change their programme of study; regular 'swapshops' enable students to review their needs and then organise course changes for them. This initiative has led to the imaginative 'Springboard' learning programme designed to encourage students back into learning. The programme also serves a dual purpose in meeting some of the college's objectives of widening participation and improving retention rates.

45 The divisions of additional learning and support services are well managed. Of the college's students, 40% are on level 1 courses. All students enrolled on level 1 and 2 courses are screened to assess their needs for additional support in basic literacy and numeracy. Although a significant majority of students are identified as needing additional support, very few students have taken up this opportunity in the past. The college recognises this weakness and has addressed the issue by placing specialist learning support assistants in course teams. Specialist inspectors found many examples of excellent work in support of individual students. These new arrangements are effectively integrated with main learning programmes.

46 Since the last inspection, the college has improved the personal tutorial programme.

# Cross-college Provision

Sound policies and procedures have been established. Personal tutors are enthusiastic about the scheme and are committed to its further development. The tutorial programme includes regular individual progress reviews as well as group work in study skills, stress management, and personal finance. Careers advice and guidance are provided through a service level agreement with the Kent Careers Service. The college recognises that current provision is insufficient and has begun to develop its own in-house staff expertise and provision. Work experience placements are organised centrally and through programme areas. In 1998-99, over 800 students participated in the scheme, a significant improvement since the last inspection.

47 Student centres are a first port of call for a range of information and support services. These include an effective and responsive counselling service provided by appropriately trained counsellors. The service is sensitive to the specific needs of its clients and is increasingly used by all groups within the college. Arrangements for providing direct financial support through the college access fund are generally well managed. However, some students are concerned at the delays in responses to requests for financial assistance and also the reliability of the accompanying advice on benefits and grants. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is excellent nursery provision at the Folkestone centre. An inspection report from the Office for Standards in Education published in July 1998 confirms this judgement. In addition, the college helps students with financial support for registered childminders and approved nurseries.

48 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that its provision of social activity for students is a weakness. At the beginning of the academic year, the college appointed trained and enthusiastic staff. Early indications are that this development will produce positive results. Planned activities include sports days, organised trips and student clubs. The college has developed clear policies

on student complaints and harassment. In addition, there are effective feedback mechanisms through suggestion boxes conveniently located in key positions within the college. Student services, management and staff are diligent in making sure that the above policies are implemented and that prompt and effective action is taken when necessary. Staff across the college express their commitment to, and concern for, disadvantaged groups. The college has responded positively to the learning needs of the asylum seekers and refugees referred by Kent Social Services; these students are mainly offered courses in English as a second language.

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

49 Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college but also noted some additional weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, the college was addressing some of the weakness but the original target dates for some actions had not been met.

#### Key strengths

- good learning resource centres at each site
- significant improvements to the building stock since the last inspection
- a clearly defined and well-managed IT strategy
- welcoming reception areas at each of the three sites

#### Weaknesses

- a lack of data to inform the accommodation strategy
- poor room usage
- decreasing 'drop-in' access to IT resource centres
- poor specialist accommodation in certain areas

# Cross-college Provision

50 The college is situated on sites at Folkestone, Dover and Ashford. The Folkestone site has benefited from a £2.7 million refurbishment programme. Improvements include the complete refurbishment of the Tower Block to provide good teaching accommodation as well as a new learning resource centre, a health and fitness suite and student services and reception areas. Although other accommodation on the site has been decorated and essential maintenance carried out, the standard of provision is not always satisfactory. Significant use is still made of mobile classrooms. These provide a learning environment of poor quality.

51 The buildings at Dover are attractive, well decorated and well maintained. Art and design is housed in a Victorian building which, although not being of the same standard as the rest of the buildings on the site, provides good accommodation. Essential maintenance and decoration have improved the general appearance of both sites at Ashford and a new learning resource centre has been built. Some areas used for construction and motor vehicle courses are cramped and house-keeping is poor. Some laboratories were cluttered and in need of refurbishing. Teaching rooms in the main buildings on all three sites are large, well lit and provide a good learning environment. The internal decoration throughout the college is good. Most corridors have noticeboards that display relevant and up-to-date information in an attractive way. Many classrooms have displays of students' work. Reception areas on each of the three sites are well located and have a welcoming atmosphere. Refectories are attractive and are well used. They serve also as social areas and are overcrowded at peak times. There are no dedicated social areas.

52 There are standards and procedures for maintenance. The work is undertaken by a competent, enthusiastic and flexible in-house team on the basis of a costed and planned maintenance scheme. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the approach to maintenance is a strength in the college. The

health and safety co-ordinator is a member of the built environment division and ensures that regular risk assessments and inspections are carried out. Heads of division are responsible for ensuring that action is taken. This approach has not always been effective: for example, procedures for testing portable electrical appliances have not been consistently implemented. A five-year capital replacement programme has been developed in consultation with division heads but there is no up-to-date asset register.

53 Space utilisation is poor. The college has recognised this weakness in the self-assessment report. New software has been purchased to improve timetabling procedures in order to increase the efficiency of room allocation and usage. The lack of a common timetable structure exacerbates the weakness. The college has been slow in developing its accommodation strategy although one is now being prepared. Options and financial appraisals for the Ashford sites have been formulated. The strategy is still insufficiently detailed and is not adequately informed by objective data such as space utilisation rates and projections of space requirements. Space utilisation has been improved through de-commissioning the Elwick Road site at Ashford and Ladywell at Dover.

54 The learning resource centres at each site are light and airy and provide a good learning environment. They are popular with students. The level of noise was sometimes intrusive to their studies. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the centres are a strength. The IT facilities at each centre are well equipped and well used. However, increased use by teaching groups restricts opportunities for 'drop-in' independent study. Technical support at each centre is good. The college budget of £52,000 a year for books and journals represents about £12 per full-time student equivalent, which is only half the figure recommended by the Library Association. Centre staff are well qualified and provide helpful advice and support to students. The



# Cross-college Provision

catalogue and issuing systems have been computerised and are to be networked across the three sites. Audiovisual aid equipment is readily available either within the classroom or through a booking system. An IT strategy with a five-year investment programme has been developed and is being well managed. The ratio of computers to students is 1:7. The availability of computers specifically for staff use is good. These are not networked and consequently access to the Internet is unsatisfactory. This weakness is being addressed. The college intranet is at a relatively early stage of development. The range of CD-ROMs available across the three sites is relatively small but student use of the Internet is good and compensates for the shortage.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 3

55 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered some strengths to be overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

#### Key strengths

- the recently improved procedures for quality assurance
- a thorough self-assessment process
- a comprehensive internal programme of lesson observations
- effective quality assurance of collaborative provision
- good staff development opportunities

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient impact of quality assurance on rates of student retention and achievement
- the low number of staff appraisals last year
- inadequate arrangements for collecting students' views
- insufficient attention from the academic board to rates of retention and achievement

56 Over the last two years, and building on past practice, the college has developed a comprehensive quality assurance policy covering all aspects of provision. The policy defines the strategies for improvement and these are linked together in a coherent self-assessment cycle. It also identifies corporate, divisional and course team responsibilities. A quality assurance handbook has been issued to all staff. The implementation of the quality policy is monitored by an internal team. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that all staff and governors are firmly committed to raising standards. While it is still too early to measure the impact of these revised arrangements for improvement, there are already indications that they are having a positive effect.

57 The self-assessment process is at the heart of the college's quality assurance system. It is thorough and well structured and all college activities are included. The process is based on a review three times a year of strengths and weaknesses. Most staff are actively involved and judgements are validated by internal inspection. All course teams produce an action plan which is continuously reviewed and updated and constitutes a strength in the college. Course targets for retention and achievement were first introduced last year but analysis of performance against national averages for the sector still has to take place. Some courses are beginning to set targets for individual students. The tri-annual self-assessment has replaced course reviews and informs the divisional self-assessment report. Students' views are gained through questionnaires completed three times a year. These have too few questions on the quality of teaching and learning. Students receive little feedback. In administrative and support areas there is a parallel system of tri-annual reviews. All support areas have comprehensive service level agreements, most of which have been established within the last year. The effectiveness of the process has still to be assessed as it is just approaching the end of its first full year of implementation. The annual

# Cross-college Provision

self-assessment report is usually published in October. The report is approved by governors and externally validated.

58 Inspectors agreed that the self-assessment process has effectively brought together the quality assurance and planning functions. Each divisional action plan is cross-referenced with the strategic plan. Strategic priorities are identified and inform the division's operating plan. The same process is undertaken in support areas. The college recognises as a strategic priority the need to improve student retention and achievement. A number of measures have been introduced: value-added analysis in GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate courses; a strengthened internal verification system; additional student support; and a college-wide focus on improving teaching and learning. The academic board has recently been restructured. It now has a broad membership fully representative of the college and includes six students. The new board meets at least once a term.

59 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the comprehensive programme of lesson observation is a strength. Most teachers are observed once a year. The college's own teacher training division has produced detailed guidance for observers who must attend a training workshop on good practice in teaching. Initially, lesson observation was the responsibility of heads of division but has now been extended to all staff in order to facilitate peer observations and the sharing of good practice. Although an action plan is produced after each observation, the college recognises that monitoring has not been formalised and is inconsistent. Targeted training is recommended if a specific weakness is identified during a lesson observation. The grading of some internal lesson observations is generous. There has been some improvement in teaching and learning since the last inspection. Inspectors judged 11% more lessons to be good or outstanding on this occasion.

60 In the past year, only 40% of staff were appraised. Appraisal, where it takes place, effectively informs staff development needs. Divisional training needs arising out of self-assessment are matched to strategic priorities. This year the college has identified six days for whole-college staff development and has increased the budget from £35,000 to £70,000. A new staff development group has been established. Induction of new staff is good. The college has Investor in People status and will apply for re-accreditation next year.

61 Collaborative provision was inspected on four sites. The college's quality assurance procedures were comprehensive and effective. All partners who contribute to the provision are involved in the college's self-assessment process and lesson observation system. Students' views are collected and analysed. New staff members of the college's partners undergo a thorough induction in the college to ensure consistency of practice. A series of planned and unannounced visits to each partner ensures quality procedures are implemented. The Training Standards Council (TSC) carried out a simultaneous inspection but did not find comprehensive quality assurance arrangements had been extended to the observation of trainees in the workplace.

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## Governance

### Grade 3

62 Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses recorded in the self-assessment report. However, they judged that some strengths were overstated and found an additional significant weakness that had not been identified by the college.

#### Key strengths

- careful monitoring of the college's finances
- effective involvement by governors in strategic planning
- the professional expertise and skills of governors
- good working relationships with the senior staff
- governors' firm commitment to raising standards

#### Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory arrangements for governor induction and training
- incorrect implementation of aspects of the modified instrument and articles
- underdeveloped procedures for monitoring academic performance
- insufficient target-setting and use of benchmarking data
- poor clerking practice

63 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the corporation's monitoring of financial matters is a strength. Experienced business governors have greatly assisted in resolving the college's financial problems. The corporation is appropriately involved in the strategic planning process. There is an annual two-day strategic planning event for corporation members. The programme is well planned. College targets are reviewed and new objectives proposed.

Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the corporation's involvement in strategic planning is a strength.

64 The working relationship between the corporation and the senior staff is very good. They have a shared vision and commitment to the success of the college. There is a clear understanding and observance of the distinction between governance and management. They are supportive of the principal but are challenging when they deem it appropriate to be so. In the interests of the college the range and diversity of the skills of corporation members are put to good effect. The arrangements for inducting and training governors are unsatisfactory. There is no training needs analysis and there are no systematic methods for evaluating the effectiveness of any training undertaken. Consequently, governors' contribution to developing the work of the corporation is not evaluated.

65 The corporation has a strong commitment to raising standards through education and training of high quality. The board's quality self-assessment committee, which was formed 15 months ago, has been very active. Working closely with the college's quality team, the committee monitored the development of the well-designed self-assessment process. The presentation to governors of data on academic performance lacks clarity. This shortcoming has reduced the capacity of the board to establish priorities for consideration of curriculum issues and to set appropriate performance targets. The use of national benchmarks to inform this process has not been developed. These inadequacies have been identified by the corporation and are being addressed. The corporation's own self-assessment lacks rigour. All governors have completed a self-assessment questionnaire within the last two years but the process is not undertaken annually. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The principal is appraised annually by the chair and vice-chair.

# Cross-college Provision

The basis for the appraisal is the extent to which progress has been made in achieving the college's objectives as defined in the operational plan.

66 Corporation meetings are well chaired and encourage contributions from members. The principal produces a detailed monthly news bulletin, which helps to ensure that corporation meetings focus on strategic issues. Governors are committed to improving their contact with staff and students. Photographs of governors are displayed in all reception areas and personal profiles are published. Several governors meet student groups twice a year. The corporation subsequently discusses the issues raised but feedback to students is poor. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report.

67 The search committee considered the impact of the modified instrument and articles and made recommendations to the corporation on a new structure. The decision was taken that the board would comprise seven governors from business, three from the local authority, two from the local community, two staff and three co-options, two student governors and the principal. The first meeting of the corporation after 1 August 1999, when these new arrangements were due to be formalised, was inquorate. Noting the inquoracy, the corporation was advised by the clerk to continue with the meeting despite the clear requirement to the contrary set out in the instrument of government. Further actions of the corporation at this meeting were also not in accordance with either the instrument of government nor the published guidance on transition arrangements. At the time of the inspection the college had begun to take steps to regularise the situation.

68 The corporation has an appropriate range of committees. These committees have defined terms of reference and operate within a framework of approved standing orders. There is some notable innovation. For example, there are three liaison groups, based on Dover,

Folkestone and Ashford which focus on their local communities. Representation is drawn from major public and private concerns. The remit is to align the college more closely with local planning and economic initiatives. Attendance by governors at both committee and corporation meetings has been good. Members of the audit committee have a clear and proper understanding of the role of the committee. However, the committee's procedures during the past year, including those for the appointment of the college's internal auditors, have not complied with the requirements of Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*, nor are they in accord with the financial memorandum. The terms of reference for the finance and general purposes and remuneration committees do not reflect good practice. There have also been numerous instances in the administration of corporation business where due process has not been followed or where decisions of the corporation relating to good practice have not subsequently been implemented.

69 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The governing body substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It does not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

# Cross-college Provision

## Management

### Grade 2

70 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

#### Key strengths

- a strong commitment to change and development
- the effective implementation of a new college structure
- sound financial recovery programme
- well-integrated strategic planning processes
- effective communication across the college
- effective development and review of college policies
- an appropriate range of external partnerships

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient use of measurable targets and performance indicators
- underdeveloped use of market information to inform planning

71 In the past two years, the college has undergone extensive and far-reaching change. Under new leadership, much needed changes in the college have achieved greater organisational and financial stability. The blueprint for change was developed through a new college structure. Some of the main aims in the blueprint were: to improve communications throughout the college; to promote a corporate culture; to encourage staff to become fully involved in the aims of the college; and to devolve responsibility for decision-making. These objectives are being achieved. Staff are well informed and committed to the new culture.

72 Change has been driven by the college's management team, comprising a principalship of three and 18 heads of division. This team is energetic and enthusiastic and displays high levels of commitment to the college. All management decisions are taken through this group which meets on a fortnightly basis. College managers speak highly of the effectiveness of this forum and the value of corporate decision-making. Matters dealt with by the team are predominantly operational. The principalship does not meet formally which means that some aspects of strategic management may not always receive sufficient attention.

73 The strategic planning process is good. The college has recently published a new strategic plan which was developed through extensive consultation with staff. Governors and managers provided an effective framework within which the plan was developed. There is scope for the further development of market research activities in the context of effective planning. Staff back the college mission and appreciate how their own job roles contribute to the achievement of strategic objectives. This strength is recognised in the self-assessment report. Planning and quality assurance cycles are fully integrated. Managers make clear to their staff how this development is achieved in practice.

74 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The draft financial statements for 1998-99 show a significantly improved position compared with previous years. This reflects the impact of the college's restructuring, fiscal restraint and the significant benefits that have accrued from convergence. The three-year financial forecast to 2001-02 refers to the need to maintain the robust financial controls now implemented, thereby consolidating the gains made. The forecast identifies a number of risk factors that could adversely affect the college's financial

# Cross-college Provision

position, but contingency plans have not yet been developed to counteract such risks should they arise. Nevertheless, the new financial stability has given the college confidence to implement other plans.

75 There is insufficient use of targets or performance indicators to measure progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives. This weakness was not mentioned in the self-assessment report. A number of objectives for the efficient use of the college's financial resources are included within the financial forecast, but these are not supported by specific targets. Managers receive regular reports to monitor student numbers and funding units. The monitoring of student attendance, retention and achievement information is not as thorough; it has been hampered by shortcomings in the quality of student data. The college recognises this weakness. The student management information system is currently under review. Good-quality management accounts are produced but are not formally reviewed in detail by either the principalship or the college management team. Divisional management reports are provided approximately every two months and more frequently in areas of concern. The latter are subject to monitoring by the principal. Finance and ISR returns to the FEFC have been consistently late in recent years.

76 A policy review and ratification group chaired by the vice-principal oversees the wide range of college policies. This group works systematically, conducting research as necessary and taking advice from within and outside the college. The group has specific responsibility for the oversight of equal opportunities which are promoted effectively across the college. A manager for issues involving equal opportunities deals with complaints, provides advice and monitors progress. The college has yet to use monitoring data to inform planning. There are comprehensive personnel policies and procedures that are implemented across divisions. Staff resources are carefully deployed

and rigorously monitored. Heads of division are accountable for the efficient use of staff. Each individual staff appointment is approved by the principal. This rigour was a feature of the recent cost cutting exercise and is being sustained. The self-assessment report records this strength.

77 The college is engaged in a wide range of partnerships, including collaborative provision. The college works effectively with its collaborative provision partners, and has established sound practices for joint management. Other partnerships focus on the regeneration or development of the three towns of Dover, Folkestone and Ashford. Helpful market information has been derived from the Kent and Medway Partnership's widening participation project, and is being used to develop new and innovative provision.

## Conclusions

78 The self-assessment report produced for the inspection was a comprehensive and frank appraisal of the college's strengths and weaknesses. It provided much useful information which inspectors used in planning and conducting the inspection. The structure of the report is determined by the management needs of the college and the assessment of provision is based on the college's 14 divisions. In most of these divisions there is provision drawn from a number of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. The college acknowledged that, in some instances, this approach produced inconsistent grades for a programme area where provision was located in different divisions. To assist inspectors, the college provided, where necessary, separate graded reports for those areas inspected. Overall, inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made by the college, even though four of the college's grades were higher than those awarded by inspectors. In these four instances, inspectors identified additional weaknesses or judged that insufficient weight had been ascribed to them. Action plans in the main addressed identified weaknesses. Some planned improvements lacked measurable targets and realistic timescales. Inspectors judged retention to be a weakness in many areas of the college compounded, in some cases, by problems with data on retention and achievement. However, inspectors found that action taken by the college to address these issues was already having an impact at the time of the inspection.

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

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (October 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	16
19-24 years	17
25+ years	66
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (October 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	40
Level 2 (intermediate)	28
Level 3 (advanced)	18
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	12
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (October 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	346	565	16
Agriculture	45	23	1
Construction	274	307	10
Engineering	314	359	12
Business	169	712	15
Hotel and catering	118	85	3
Health and community care	311	688	17
Art and design	211	83	5
Humanities	285	907	20
Basic education	60	21	1
Total	2,133	3,750	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 13% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (October 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	202	40	0	242
Supporting direct learning contact	67	7	0	74
Other support	118	10	0	128
Total	387	57	0	444

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



# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£13,819,000	£14,026,000	£16,177,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£15.43	£14.58	£15.77
Payroll as a proportion of income	71%	65%	53%
Achievement of funding target	101%	91%	99%
Diversity of income	23%	24%	25%
Operating surplus	-£824,000	-£1,335,000	£684,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), regional accounts (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	462	539	491	1,766	817	819
	Retention (%)	83	75	73	92	77	76
	Achievement (%)	41	61	62	86	46	54
2	Number of starters	1,107	1,683	1,466	1,765	2,656	2,709
	Retention (%)	75	70	72	82	82	80
	Achievement (%)	42	45	52	41	35	50
3	Number of starters	1,119	1,093	1,000	1,807	2,428	2,252
	Retention (%)	71	63	63	82	69	68
	Achievement (%)	48	40	48	56	54	57
4 or 5	Number of starters	1	*	9	362	336	450
	Retention (%)	100	*	78	80	85	83
	Achievement (%)	5	*	57	61	55	55
Short courses	Number of starters	517	588	695	2,864	6,438	8,109
	Retention (%)	96	99	97	96	99	98
	Achievement (%)	78	61	83	73	71	78
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	307	581	220	1,525	1,053	900
	Retention (%)	80	80	65	93	87	87
	Achievement (%)	55	23	28	66	38	35

Source: ISR

\*ISR data may not be reliable

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