

Southampton City College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

Southampton City College

South East Region

Inspected February 2000

Southampton City College is a large general further education college located close to the city centre. Inspectors planned the inspection using the self-assessment report for 1998-99. During the inspection an update to the self-assessment report was also used. This identified actions taken to address weaknesses identified in the earlier report. The self-assessment process involved teachers at all levels and non-teaching staff. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although they found additional strengths and weaknesses.

The college provides courses in all 10 FEFC programme areas. Provision in five programme areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Most of the teaching is at least satisfactory but the proportion of outstanding lessons is below the average for the sector. The teaching grade profile is almost identical to that at the last inspection. In the best lessons, the teaching is well planned and makes use of appropriate learning activities. In the less effective lessons the needs of individual students are not given sufficient attention. Achievement rates are generally above the

national average for general further education colleges. There has been a slight upward trend in achievement rates at all levels since 1994-95. Retention rates are generally below the national average and there has been a downward trend over the same period. There are indications that measures taken recently to improve retention are beginning to work. Since the last inspection, the college has faced considerable financial difficulties but the financial position has now improved significantly. The college has made significant improvements to its accommodation since the last inspection. The management structure is clear and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Governors have taken responsibility for developing approaches to monitoring quality and identifying strengths and weaknesses. The college should: improve retention and achievement rates; introduce targets for retention and achievement at course level; improve the quality of curriculum reviews to ensure that all meet the standards of the best; continue to improve the quality assurance system; extend the work of the independent professional tutors; continue to improve the quality of the tutorial programme; and improve the quality of the poorest accommodation.

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

| Curriculum area | Grade | Cross-college provision | Grade |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| Construction | 3 | Support for students | 2 |
| Engineering | 2 | General resources | 3 |
| Business administration | 3 | Quality assurance | 3 |
| Catering | 2 | Governance | 3 |
| Leisure and tourism | 3 | Management | 3 |
| Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and ESOL | 3 | | |
| Basic skills | 2 | | |

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Southampton City College is a large further education college located close to the city centre. It has a purpose-built maritime technology centre which is located about a mile away on the bank of the river Itchen. The college provides courses in all Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas, although provision in agriculture is small. In some programme areas, courses range from foundation level to higher education. Less than half of the college's students come from within the city. As part of its commitment to widening participation the college runs courses in 47 centres, including 20 schools in the city and in a further 26 centres across southern Hampshire and beyond. It also operates a fully equipped information technology (IT) bus.

2 In 1998-99, the college had 11,963 students of whom 2,011 were full time and 9,952 were part time. Over 80% of its students are aged over 19. The college has good links with local schools and plays a major role in providing work-related learning in the national curriculum at key stage 4. Some 500 year 10 and 11 school students participate in the college/schools partnership programme. Another 90 pupils attend college courses on either a full-time or part-time basis. Within a 12-mile radius of the college there are three other general further education colleges, five sixth form colleges and a specialist college for the land-based industries. There is also a university, an institution of higher education and several large private training providers.

3 The city of Southampton has a population of 206,000. It is one of the most economically depressed local authority areas in the south of England. The most depressed areas are clustered around the college. Unemployment in the city has fallen to 5.5%, but this is still higher than the average for Hampshire. The proportion of the local population from minority ethnic backgrounds is 4.9% which is lower than

the national average. In some city wards it is almost 20%. Southampton is a large industrial and commercial centre. Its main employment sectors are business activities, the wholesale and retail trades, and manufacturing industries. The college has good relations with Southampton City Council. It is a partner with the city council, the employment service and private developers, to train 3,000 people for employment in a new shopping centre which opens in the autumn of 2000. The college also has close links with community and other agencies, through which it aims to provide courses to meet the needs of learners from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

4 The college's mission is to 'enhance the economic, social and cultural well-being of Southampton and the area through education and training'. The strategic plan emphasises the following strategic aims:

- 'to provide effective systems for recruitment, guidance and support so as to enable all learners to achieve their full potential
- to establish excellence in all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment
- to enable students to maximise their achievements and to make a major contribution to their personal development
- to seek continuous improvement in the quality of all college services
- to ensure human, physical and financial resources are deployed in the most effective and efficient manner to maximise student achievement
- to widen and increase participation'.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 28 February 2000. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the self-assessment report and considered information from other directorates of the FEFC. The college provided data on students' achievements for 1999. Inspectors checked these data against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Inspectors found the data to be generally accurate. The college's data for 1999 and the individualised student record (ISR) data for 1997 and 1998 were used to compile the tables in the curriculum area reports. Inspectors considered that an analysis of achievement rates for basic skills using ISR data would not give a realistic

indication of students' progress in this curriculum area and a table has not been included in this report. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and two auditors working for a total of 60 days. They observed 89 lessons, examined students' work and scrutinised college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, and other staff and students.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 89 lessons inspected 59% were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% were judged to be less than satisfactory. The proportion of outstanding lessons was half the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programme | Grade | | | | | Totals |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------|----|----|---|---|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| GNVQ | 0 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 20 |
| NVQ | 5 | 21 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 39 |
| Other vocational | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Other* | 3 | 11 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 25 |
| Total (No) | 9 | 44 | 31 | 5 | 0 | 89 |
| Total (%) | 10 | 49 | 35 | 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*

*includes courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ESOL and basic skills provision

Context

7 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 (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Southampton City College | 12.0 | 78 |
| 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

Construction

Grade 3

8 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and technician qualifications in construction and building trades. They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- high retention and achievement rates on level 3 courses
- effective personal reviews and action-planning for full-time students
- well-equipped workshops
- good links with local schools

Weaknesses

- poor achievement and retention rates on some level 1 courses
- insufficient target-setting for retention and achievement by course teams
- some overcrowded workshops
- students' lack of punctuality

9 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it offers a wide range of courses in construction trades. These include national diploma and certificate courses in building and civil engineering, and NVQs to level 3 in all the major construction crafts. It also offers specialist courses in heating and ventilation, and the new accredited certification scheme gas safety qualification. Attendance and assessment have been arranged to enable people to attend at times which suit them. Good links have been developed with local schools. A partnership programme enables pupils to achieve NVQ level 1 units on a 'drop-in' basis. There are currently over 100 pupils on this programme, which has

raised awareness of opportunities in the construction industry in the schools.

10 The construction programme area is generally well managed. There are clear lines of responsibility for course organisation and management. Most course and programme team meetings are effective and result in minutes containing action points. Most teachers regularly review students' progress and set targets for improvement that are reviewed at subsequent meetings. In a minority of courses, teachers monitor retention and achievement but do not set targets.

11 Teaching was good or outstanding in nine of the 13 lessons observed. Lessons are generally well planned. Most practical lessons are well managed. Students are clear about the objectives of the tasks being undertaken. Practical work is carried out safely. Students are encouraged to enter into discussions and to share their experiences of the topics being taught. Computer-generated teaching aids were used in many lessons. Teachers regularly check students' learning by asking carefully directed questions. In one outstanding lesson, groups of students worked on a housing development assignment which brought together theoretical points covered in earlier lessons. At the end of the day, students presented their completed assignment work to the class. Fellow students were asked to assess the quality of work and the presentations of their colleagues. In a minority of lessons, teachers did not ensure that the learning needs and abilities of each student were taken into account. Students were sometimes required to spend too long copying notes from overhead transparencies. Those arriving late for lessons were not asked to explain their lack of punctuality.

12 Achievement rates on national diploma and certificate courses have exceeded 90% for the last three years. Retention on the national diploma course has been good. Achievement rates on the plumbing, and carpentry and joinery courses have also been good. Inspectors

Curriculum Areas

agreed with the college's assessment that retention and achievement rates on GNVQ and NVQ courses at foundation level are poor and well below the national average. Many students gain some units but do not achieve the full qualification. Overall, retention rates on construction craft courses are poor.

13 The college has links with training organisations in other European countries. It has recently completed a European-funded project to develop a professional construction qualification at level 4 that would be accepted in each country. Teachers have attended a conference held in the European Parliament to disseminate the findings of the project report.

14 Teachers are appropriately qualified. Most full-time teachers have assessor qualifications and a smaller number have verifier qualifications. Their industrial knowledge is dated. Part-time teachers bring their knowledge of current industrial practices to the college.

Most are employed in the construction industry and some run their own companies. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the construction workshops are well equipped. The brickwork and heating and ventilation workshops have been developed with assistance from industry partners and are particularly good. Some workshops, however, are overcrowded. The resource centre has an appropriate range of textbooks and computer-based learning materials.

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 building crafts | 1 | Number of starters | 84 | 98 | 127 |
| | | Retention (%) | 73 | 73 | 63 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 15 | 23 | 72 |
| GNVQ foundation | 1 | Number of starters | 15 | 53 | 73 |
| | | Retention (%) | 93 | 60 | 64 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 62 | 22 | 63 |
| NVQ building crafts | 2 | Number of starters | 102 | 69 | 128 |
| | | Retention (%) | 69 | 49 | 44 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 62 | 71 | 48 |
| NVQ building crafts | 3 | Number of starters | 29 | 29 | 27 |
| | | Retention (%) | 76 | 97 | 89 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 87 | 50 | 92 |
| BTEC national diploma and certificates | 3 | Number of starters | 48 | 44 | 57 |
| | | Retention (%) | 58 | 80 | 67 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 87 | 91 | 93 |

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

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

15 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering courses in mechanical and manufacturing engineering and fabrication and welding crafts. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Action plans to address some of the weaknesses have already led to improvements.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- effective partnerships with local employers and training suppliers
- good opportunities for school-leavers
- well-planned practical work
- well-equipped engineering centre of excellence

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses
- falling achievement rates on some courses
- lack of development of key skills on some courses

16 The college offers an appropriate range of courses in this programme area. These include the engineering GNVQ at intermediate and advanced levels, the national certificate in mechanical and production engineering, a GNVQ foundation, and a range of manufacturing and fabrication craft courses. An NVQ level 2 course in engineering is offered, using a range of modes of attendance. It provides a suitable entry to engineering for school-leavers with good prospects of employment. Inspectors agreed with college's self-assessment that the relationships between the college, local employers and training suppliers are close and productive. Employers and training suppliers

arrange employment for some students on the NVQ level 2 course and offer bursaries to others. Successful students are often offered modern apprenticeships at the end of one year. The way the course is managed enables students to continue their studies after obtaining employment by allowing them to attend at times suited to the requirements of employers.

17 The standard of most teaching is good. The best lessons are well planned, although a minority of teachers did not make adequate plans, relying instead on their considerable years of teaching the same subject. Some of these unplanned lessons were dull and uninspiring. In lessons designed to provide underpinning knowledge, teachers often illustrated their teaching with examples drawn from their own industrial experience. Most teaching was matched to individual students' needs. Their understanding was frequently checked and they were encouraged to enter into discussions about the topic. In a lesson that introduced key concepts about electricity, the teacher divided the tasks into small steps and checked that learning had taken place at each stage before moving to the next. Some courses have the development of key skills built into them, but others do not and opportunities were missed to develop these skills in the context of the vocational work. Students made good use of the college's IT facilities.

18 Retention and achievement rates on many courses are above the national average but on some courses both have declined over the last three years. The achievements of GNVQ intermediate students are well above national averages, as are the aggregated achievements of a range of level 3 craft students. At level 2, the achievements of craft students are above the national average, but in 1999, the proportion of these students completing their courses declined sharply. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that achievement and retention rates on the national certificate in mechanical and production engineering are below the

Curriculum Areas

national average, and that achievement rates on the national certificate and the NVQ engineering foundation course are also low. Students' NVQ portfolios are generally good. Evidence is collected systematically to cover the requirements for the assessment of underpinning knowledge. There are well-planned assignments for the national certificate course. These incorporate common skills. The work produced was of a good standard. Teachers provided written comments on the quality of the work, but gave little guidance about how it might be improved.

19 Teachers are well qualified and all have appropriate industrial experience. They also have the necessary assessor and verifier awards. Workshop facilities are good, and provide an airy and safe environment. The college has good machine workshops. The large workshop is well equipped with machine and hand tools. The smaller workshop has a good range of computer numerical control lathes and milling machines. As a result of a successful collaborative project with a group of colleges, the college has recently installed an engineering

'centre of excellence'. This well-equipped centre contains a selection of advanced machine tools and measuring equipment. Teachers have yet to update their own knowledge of this equipment before they can use it effectively in their teaching.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| GNVQ | 2 | Number of starters | 50 | 42 | 42 |
| | | Retention (%) | 98 | 93 | 86 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 80 | 79 | 68 |
| C&G mechanical engineering crafts | 2 | Number of starters | 69 | 71 | 25 |
| | | Retention (%) | 78 | 86 | 68 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 75 | 56 | 71 |
| BTEC national certificate | 3 | Number of starters | 25 | 24 | 27 |
| | | Retention (%) | 92 | 79 | 67 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 82 | 67 | 64 |
| C&G mechanical engineering crafts | 3 | Number of starters | 64 | 57 | 69 |
| | | Retention (%) | 95 | 94 | 86 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 78 | 68 | 65 |

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Administration

Grade 3

20 Inspectors observed 18 lessons covering NVQ levels 1, 2, and 3 in business administration. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good achievement rates at NVQ levels 2 and 3
- success in widening participation in business administration courses
- good communication between the college and outreach centres
- college IT bus that provides additional resources to the outreach centres
- support for students with learning difficulties

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates on NVQ level 1 at some centres
- lack of work experience at some centres
- insufficient development of basic skills at some centres
- poor resources in some centres
- ineffective internal verification

21 The college offers courses leading to NVQ levels 1, 2, and 3 in business administration. The courses are offered at the main site and at 26 other centres in Southampton, Portsmouth and Bristol and Plymouth. Courses are provided in local churches, community centres, leisure and sports centres, schools and scout halls. These courses have improved access to education and training for many people. Links with two colleges in Bristol enable students to achieve an additional qualification in computer literacy. There are good links with secondary

schools and pupil referral units. Students who have been excluded from school have successfully completed an NVQ and some have returned to college to undertake further study. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report.

22 The courses are well managed. Schemes of work, course documentation and assignment briefs have all been standardised following the identification of weaknesses in an earlier self-assessment. A programme of regular meetings is held between teachers at the college and those at its outreach centres. Video-conferencing has improved communication. Meetings are well recorded. Course quality files are kept at the college and at each outreach centre. Course reviews are carried out and student satisfaction is monitored at each centre. Joint action plans are produced with deadlines which are met. There is a policy for internal verification but it is not being implemented at all centres. This was not identified as a weakness by the college, although external verifiers have identified weaknesses in the process.

23 Two-thirds of the teaching observed was good or better. Each student has their own action plan and works on their own with help from teachers. Appropriate advice is given to students to enable them to assemble and organise evidence for their NVQ portfolios. At the college, and at some of the other centres, teachers ensure that all students achieve a good balance of underpinning knowledge, assignments and work experience. All students working towards the NVQ level 3 have jobs at an appropriate level. At some centres students are not offered work experience and this has led to an over-reliance on assignment work for evidence in their portfolios. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Where students had work experience and access to IT facilities, portfolios were of a good standard. Students' work is well marked. Their progress is reviewed regularly and they are encouraged to monitor their own work. Support

Curriculum Areas

for students with learning difficulties is good. Profoundly deaf students were observed receiving help from a support worker using sign language. Inconsistent development of basic skills and provision of learning support in some centres was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment, and inspectors agreed.

24 Achievement and retention rates for NVQ levels 2 and 3 are above the national average but for NVQ level 1, which has the largest number of students, they are poor in some of the centres. This is recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Procedures have been put in place to monitor attendance and to contact students who do not attend in an attempt to improve retention rates. At some of the centres, students are telephoned on the day they are absent to seek the reasons for absence.

25 Teachers are well qualified and hold appropriate assessor and verifier awards. At the college and at some of the other centres there is a good range of equipment and software. At some centres, students use the offices to gain work experience. Resources at some other centres are poor. For example, some have only one or two computers and typewriters with memory facilities. Students in

Bristol can attend the local college to use their facilities. The college IT bus visits centres in Southampton and Portsmouth to provide additional computing and other resources. This is proving popular and has been identified by the college as a strength.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|-----------------------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| NVQ | 1 | Number of starters | 406 | 574 | 355 |
| | | Retention (%) | 85 | 74 | 63 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 50 | 54 | 76 |
| NVQ and politics | 2 | Number of starters | 170 | 90 | 158 |
| | | Retention (%) | 80 | 91 | 77 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 61 | 78 | 78 |
| NVQ | 3 | Number of starters | 39 | 31 | 24 |
| | | Retention (%) | 92 | 58 | 92 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 75 | 100 | 95 |

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

Curriculum Areas

Catering

Grade 2

26 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering hospitality and catering courses. Inspectors agreed with most judgements identified in the college's self-assessment report, but found additional strengths and a weakness which had been understated.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- realistic work environment
- wide range of hospitality and catering courses
- good specialist resources
- wide range of specialist visits and activities for students
- effective course organisation and management

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses
- little use of specific catering IT software

27 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that it provides a wide range of catering courses. These include a GNVQ advanced course in hospitality and catering, NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in food preparation and cooking, food and drink service, and level 2 in sugar craft, and specialist bakery courses. The range of courses provides students with opportunities for progression. A significant proportion achieve a level 3 qualification and find relevant employment. All full-time students achieve food hygiene certificates during their induction period, before they are allowed into the kitchens. They are also able to study for wine and spirit qualifications. Students are encouraged to participate in competitions and some have achieved notable national successes. They also take part in valuable study trips to Europe. The programme area has developed

partnerships with local schools and this year more than 20 groups of school students are attending a course at the college.

28 Nine out of the 13 lessons observed were judged to be good. Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that teaching is effectively planned. Teachers have good lesson plans with clear aims and objectives. Practical teaching is particularly good. Most practical lessons provide opportunities for students to develop and practise new skills. Students on courses at different levels are frequently taught in the same practical lesson. Students are given tasks appropriate to their abilities and level. In one such practical lesson, students were making pastry and confectionery items for sale and to use in the college's restaurant. The teacher managed the lesson well. Students frequently helped each other and the more advanced students gained supervisory experience. In some lessons, learning would have been improved if the teacher had made better use of technical demonstrations rather than leaving students to work on their own.

29 All students are tested at the beginning of their course to determine their learning support needs. Appropriate support is provided for the students who need it. Specialist teachers from the college's learning support team regularly work alongside catering teachers. The college did not identify this strength in its self-assessment.

30 Achievement rates on the GNVQ advanced course in hospitality and catering rose to 80% last year from 50% the previous year. Results on the food hygiene certificate are good. Achievement rates on the NVQ level 2 food and drink service, and food preparation and cooking were above the national average last year but retention on the food preparation and cooking course has been below the national average for three years. Retention on the bakery course has also been poor but all those who complete the course achieve the qualification. Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment that retention

Curriculum Areas

and achievement on part-time courses is excellent. A foundation level bakery course has recently been introduced. This will prepare students who wish to progress to the NVQ level 2 in bakery and it is hoped that it will improve retention on this course. Students' NVQ portfolios are generally well produced and supported by appropriate documentation. Students' work is generally well presented. Their assignments show good use of computing skills. Teachers' marking of written work is good and usually includes suggestions to help students improve.

31 Catering teachers are appropriately qualified and most have vocational assessor awards. The accommodation is of a good standard. The kitchens are spacious and have

sufficient equipment, although some of this is old, particularly in the bakery rooms. The restaurant has recently been refurbished to a high standard. The library is well stocked with a good range of recent books and journals. Teachers and students make little use of catering specific software in their work.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| NVQ food preparation and cooking | 1 | Number of starters | * | 46 | 38 |
| | | Retention (%) | * | 71 | 76 |
| | | Achievement (%) | * | 88 | 69 |
| NVQ food preparation and cooking | 2 | Number of starters | 82 | 121 | 81 |
| | | Retention (%) | 55 | 52 | 57 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 69 | 75 | 88 |
| NVQ food and drink service | 2 | Number of starters | 24 | 29 | 43 |
| | | Retention (%) | 96 | 83 | 77 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 73 | 59 | 85 |
| NVQ craft baking | 2 | Number of starters | 17 | 19 | 22 |
| | | Retention (%) | 76 | 47 | 47 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 50 | 100 | 100 |
| NVQ food preparation and cooking | 3 | Number of starters | 3 | 15 | 21 |
| | | Retention (%) | 66 | 53 | 71 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 50 | 86 | 87 |
| GNVQ hospitality and catering | 3 | Number of starters | 19 | 22 | 15 |
| | | Retention (%) | 47 | 48 | 69 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 100 | 50 | 80 |

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

*course did not run

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

32 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in leisure and tourism. They agreed with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report but found that weaknesses in achievement rates were omitted and those relating to teaching and learning were understated.

Key strengths

- wide range of provision
- good support for individual students
- good pre-course guidance and induction

Weaknesses

- standards of teaching below average for the programme area
- poor pass rates on GNVQ courses
- unsatisfactory achievement rates on short courses
- insufficient feedback to students on the quality of their work

33 The college offers a wide range of leisure and tourism courses including GNVQ at advanced and intermediate levels. The advanced level course is offered for both full-time and part-time attendance. Other part-time courses lead to specialist travel industry qualifications. A variety of sports coaching and swimming awards is also offered. The full-time leisure and tourism team is small, well organised and has regular, formal team meetings, but progress on action points is not always followed up at the next meeting. Course reviews lack statistical rigour and students' performance is not measured against targets or national averages.

34 Inspectors judged most teaching to be satisfactory or good but two of the 12 lessons were unsatisfactory. The good teaching included some well-structured lessons, regular checking of students' understanding,

consideration of the learning needs of all students, and good use of the teachers' and the students' experience to stimulate discussion. In one lesson examining the appeal of different European countries to tourists, the teacher used personal experiences of working in the travel industry to bring the topic alive. Students' travel experiences and information from the media were also used successfully. Where appropriate visits to European countries and local visitor attractions are used to broaden the teaching and to provide valuable experience for students. Tutors regularly check each student's progress in tutorials. The unsatisfactory lessons were inadequately prepared and did not sustain the interest of students. In many lessons, students arrived late and this poor punctuality was not always authoritatively challenged.

35 The GNVQ assignment briefs are all vocationally relevant. The assignments for each half term are helpfully bound together in an assessment booklet that is given to students. Although key skills are indicated on assignment briefs, they are not marked or monitored until the spring term of the students' final year. Teachers initially mark and grade only the vocational content of the assignment; the key skills grades are awarded retrospectively. Students submit one action plan to cover all the assignments in the booklet. At the end of each assessment block, a grade for action-planning is awarded to each assignment. While this reduces the amount of assessment for students, it limits their ability to achieve the higher grades. In many cases, there are insufficient comments on students' written work to help them to improve. Errors in spelling and grammar are not always corrected. Students' work is well presented, but they make little use of IT. There is systematic internal verification but verifiers' comments tend to focus on the students' work rather than the quality of the assessors' judgements.

36 Retention on the GNVQ intermediate course in leisure and tourism has been above the

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national average for the last three years but the achievement rate fell significantly last year. It had been above the national average for the two previous years. The retention rate on the GNVQ advanced course in leisure and tourism also fell last year, due in part to a football club withdrawing its apprentices for reasons unrelated to the college. The achievement rate on the GNVQ advanced course has been below the national average for the last three years, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Retention and achievement rates on the short courses are also below the national average. A number of strategies have recently been introduced to improve retention rates. These include more rigorous absence monitoring on full-time courses and sending regular progress reports to parents. Early indications are that the strategies are succeeding.

37 All teachers are appropriately qualified, have relevant industrial experience and hold relevant assessor and verifier awards. Classroom accommodation for leisure and

tourism students is poor and there is no realistic working environment in the college. This limits the quality of students' practical experience, particularly as work experience is optional and only taken up by some students. Students have access to a sports hall and a small fitness suite. The range and quality of leisure and tourism periodicals, books and videos is good.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| Bronze medallion (swimming) | 1 | Number of starters | 26 | 13 | 13 |
| | | Retention (%) | 96 | 77 | 100 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 63 | 20 | 27 |
| GNVQ leisure and tourism | 2 | Number of starters | 15 | 8 | 20 |
| | | Retention (%) | 87 | 100 | 80 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 100 | 100 | 56 |
| National pool lifeguard | 2 | Number of starters | 14 | 7 | 17 |
| | | Retention (%) | 79 | 100 | 88 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 73 | 57 | 53 |
| GNVQ leisure and tourism | 3 | Number of starters | 58 | 70 | 64 |
| | | Retention (%) | 71 | 76 | 58 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 72 | 59 | 61 |

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

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities and ESOL

Grade 3

38 Inspectors observed 12 lessons including full-time and part-time courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

Key strengths

- a supportive learning environment
- successful development of young people with behavioural difficulties
- good progress by full-time ESOL students
- good practical skills teaching
- effective use of learning support staff

Weaknesses

- inadequate initial assessment
- insufficient attention to students' individual learning needs
- too few opportunities for students to learn on their own
- some ineffective ESOL teaching for students with diverse needs
- limited vocational study opportunities for younger students with learning difficulties

39 The college provides a range of courses for adult learners who have English as their second language. Courses range from beginners to advanced and provide opportunities for students to progress from one level to another at any time during the year. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that they have developed good links with community groups and other

organisations that have enabled the college to attract an increasing number of students. The college works closely with social services to provide courses for adults with learning difficulties. There is a specially designed course for students with learning difficulties who also have emotional and behavioural difficulties, some of whom have been excluded from other colleges. Teachers work well together in teams and meet regularly. The work is managed with the 'inclusive learning department'.

40 The initial assessment of most ESOL students is not sufficiently detailed to ensure that individual learning needs are met. The standard of teaching and learning varies from outstanding to unsatisfactory. Fewer than half of the lessons observed were judged to be good or outstanding. The college did not identify any poor teaching in its self-assessment. In the best lessons, teachers created a friendly and supportive environment where students were given confidence to learn. These lessons were well planned, sustained students' interest, and enabled them to build on previous learning.

41 In many ESOL lessons, the teaching of grammar and spoken language was well linked. However, in some lessons all students worked at the same pace on the same task, despite their different abilities and needs. As a result, some students repeated tasks they could already do well while others had insufficient time to absorb material that was new to them. Students were given few opportunities to work on their own. Most students on full-time ESOL courses make good progress. Retention rates are good. Last year 12 out of 14 students achieved a qualification at an appropriate level. Some part-time students attend lessons for up to three years without achieving an accredited award. Many ESOL students' portfolios are poorly presented.

42 Teachers manage students with emotional and behavioural difficulties well. Profiles of achievements show that they make good progress in achieving independent living skills.

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Students are helped to make choices about further study and some have progressed to other courses. They regularly visit local companies to find out more about work opportunities. However, there are too few opportunities for vocational study and few students participate in work experience. In some lessons for adults with learning difficulties, learning was not well linked to their vocational activities. When learning took place in a practical context, for example in art, cookery and the use of computers, students could demonstrate learnt skills and were proud of their achievements. The work of students with learning difficulties is well presented but includes little that they have produced independently. Many teachers do not systematically evaluate and record what each student has learned, making it difficult for the teams to assess the effectiveness of their teaching.

43 The accommodation used by ESOL groups, and by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory. There has been an improvement in the accommodation for ESOL this year. Students make good use of the general college resources such as the library and the IT resource centre. Learning support assistants are used well in the classrooms. Most ESOL teachers are appropriately qualified. Teachers on specialist courses for students with learning difficulties have teaching qualifications but not specialist qualifications. The high number of part-time teachers makes curriculum development difficult. The team leaders have identified areas of weaknesses but their action plans are not well developed.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

44 Inspectors observed 11 basic skills courses, learning support sessions and programmes in literacy and numeracy. The college's self-assessment concentrated on basic skills and learning support. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective individual learning plans
- good teaching
- good opportunities to gain accredited qualifications
- well-planned basic skills courses
- committed, enthusiastic and well-managed volunteer team

Weaknesses

- lack of college-wide planning of basic skills provision
- limited amount of literacy and numeracy provision for mainstream students
- poor attendance at some lessons

45 Basic skills provision is extensive. The college offers basic skills as a discrete course, through learning support and through courses offered to students following level 1 vocational programmes. Provision is made at the main site and at 47 community venues. The basic skills team also provide pre general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) literacy and numeracy tuition for students who are following college programmes at level 1.

46 The college has good links in the community and with local agencies. Recently introduced family literacy programmes are popular. The college is involved, through local

partnerships, in the joint planning of basic skills provision throughout Southampton. Courses offered at local primary schools have been particularly successful in recruiting students who have subsequently progressed to college programmes.

47 The planning of discrete basic skills courses and learning support is effective. There are clear processes in both areas for curriculum management and programme reviews. However, there are no systems in place for planning basic skills provision across the college. Basic skills provision for students following mainstream programmes at level 1 is limited to voluntary attendance at pre-GCSE courses. The college has a strategy to increase provision at level 1 but there is no complementary strategy to introduce basic skills into the curriculum of level 1 programmes, despite the fact that college screening for basic skills has identified that most students at this level need support. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

48 All full-time and substantive part-time students take literacy and numeracy tests during induction. Students identified through the screening are offered support on either a one-to-one, small group or whole-class basis. Whole-group support is provided where significant basic skill needs have been identified. Students who are offered support but decline help are monitored to check progress on their main course. The college evaluates the effectiveness of its basic skills support by questionnaires, and monitors the retention rates of those students taking up support against those who do not. It concludes that the support is successful.

49 A significant strength of the basic skills provision is that each student has an individual learning plan. These are used to record the work done, set objectives, detail accreditation routes and record progress. Before students start a course, the programme leader discusses their aspirations with them and plans a progression route. At the first lesson, the

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teacher undertakes an initial assessment with each student to determine their short-term objectives. Materials and assignments are decided and students are expected to complete tasks in their own time between lessons. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the use of individual learning plans is a strength.

50 Teaching is well planned and almost three-quarters of lessons observed were good or outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers provided each student with an appropriate range of tasks. For example, in a basic mathematics lesson, students worked to individual programmes but also helped each other. They used appropriate computer software and worked at their own pace. The teacher effectively managed the students' learning, provided good, clear explanations and made sure that each task was sufficiently challenging.

51 Volunteer tutors, who are trained by the college, assist teachers and make a valuable contribution to students' learning. Most of the lessons observed had a volunteer tutor. The college did not identify the use of these tutors as a strength in its self-assessment. In a number of lessons, attendance is poor but most absent students had contacted the teacher and given a reason for their absence. The college has a good system to follow up non-attending students.

52 Although all students follow a programme leading to an accredited award, they are not registered for the qualification until they have been assessed as being able to achieve the award. Inspectors considered that an analysis of achievement rates using ISR data would not give a realistic indication of students' progress in this curriculum area and a table has not been included in this report. At the time of inspection, 345 students from a variety of programmes were receiving additional tuition and support, a 17% increase on last year.

53 Basic skills resources are satisfactory. The discrete basic skills courses are located in the college's new resource centre. Facilities at the community venues are adequate. In one venue, the teaching space used is off a busy corridor and this caused some disruption to the work of the class. All college-based and some community-based venues have computers in the teaching rooms and there is a good range of learning materials available in the resource centre. There is limited availability of appropriate software, particularly for literacy. Basic skills teachers are well qualified.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

54 Inspectors judged that the self-assessment process was thorough although some features identified as strengths are standard practice. Progress had been made since the self-assessment and some of the weaknesses had been addressed while others had emerged.

Key strengths

- effective specialist tutors
- good arrangements for providing careers, guidance, welfare and financial advice
- good arrangements for identifying learning support needs
- effective delivery of learning support
- good childcare arrangements

Weaknesses

- inadequate induction for some full-time and most part-time students
- poor social and recreational facilities
- inconsistent tutorial support for part-time students

55 The college has good arrangements for promoting its range of courses to schools and community organisations. Feedback from schools indicates that the college is well regarded by them. Its comprehensive range of link and 'taster' courses is particularly valued. Subject specialists interview most applicants for full-time courses. College guidance staff interview applicants who are uncertain about their choice of course. Arrangements for the selection and admission of part-time students are less formal, particularly for students starting courses at times other than the start of the academic year. The college's self-assessment report recognises this weakness and its possible

contribution to low retention rates. The college is currently reviewing arrangements for the admission of both full-time and part-time students as part of its plans to improve retention.

56 The information and guidance team is based in welcoming and accessible accommodation at the front of the college main building. Guidance materials have been produced for use on induction programmes. The time spent by full-time students on induction varies widely. Some attend a two-week introduction course prior to the start of the autumn term whilst others have two half-days, including the opportunity to attend the induction fair. During their induction, students are given the college handbook, which contains the charter. All full-time and many part-time students do a basic skills screening test during their induction; 2,300 students completed the test in September 1999. The tests are marked by learning support specialists who provide rapid feedback to teachers as well as making speedy arrangements to provide support.

57 Learning support is provided in a number of ways; as part of a course, as small group work and as one-to-one tuition. Learning support staff regularly review students' progress and provide a report to course teachers every six weeks. In 1998-99, 120 students received learning support and the retention of these students was 15% better than the figure for the college as a whole. The college has not yet analysed the impact of learning support on the achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

58 Until recently, the college has delivered its tutorial programme through the subject and course teachers, but it has now recognised that inadequate tutorial practices have contributed to poor retention. A full-time specialist tutor was recruited in 1998 and, following the success of this pilot, a team of five specialist tutors was

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recruited in September 1999. The tutors provide a service for about half the full-time students. They are each responsible for about 150 students, for whom they provide group tutorials, individual student and some key skills development. They have also developed a wide range of appropriate tutorial and student progress review materials that are used by tutors across the college. Students are particularly enthusiastic about these tutors' independence and their advocacy on behalf of students with complaints or problems. Students respond well to attendance reminder postcards and other methods used to encourage good attendance. The quality of tutorial support for other full-time and part-time students is variable. Evening students receive little tutorial support. This weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

59 A team of specialist staff provides careers, work experience, welfare and financial advice to students. Staff providing these services are accessible, responsive and highly valued by the students who use them. They work closely and effectively with tutors. The city of Southampton is a pilot area for the distribution of educational maintenance allowances and approximately 15% of the full-time students are eligible to claim this allowance. The college has developed appropriate and sensitive financial support arrangements for the majority of its other students.

60 The college has an attractive and well-designed 81-place nursery on the main college site. Currently 164 children attend the nursery. In order to maximise its utilisation, childcare is provided only at times when the parent is attending timetabled lessons. Students with children attending the nursery consequently find it difficult to use the college library. Childcare is also available at most of the outreach centres used by the college.

61 The college organises a range of recreational activities but these are not well promoted and few students participate. There

are no central communal social facilities. The student union is not effective in organising social activities. This was not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

General Resources

Grade 3

62 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- significant improvements to accommodation since the last inspection
- good-quality resource centre
- good IT facilities

Weaknesses

- some poor accommodation
- poor access for people with restricted mobility to many parts of the college
- a lack of subject identity in many areas of the college

63 The college occupies two main sites in an area of Southampton that has been designated as an area for regeneration and is in receipt of a 'single regeneration budget' grant. The main site consists of the original poor law workhouse built in 1840, a collection of buildings that date from the 1970s, and a new resource centre and construction block. The second site, close to the first, is a former school that was built in the 1930s. There is a motor vehicle workshop a short distance from the main site and a purpose-built maritime technology centre about a mile away on the bank of the river Itchen. The college leases two additional buildings in the city and makes use of 73 other centres in the city and elsewhere. Most of these centres are schools or community centres.

64 Significant improvements have been made to the accommodation since the last inspection.

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A new resource centre and a greatly improved IT facility have been built. Some poor temporary teaching accommodation has been removed and a modern construction block built. The reception area has been developed to provide a welcoming entrance to the college. The interiors of classrooms have been improved. The college has expanded its nursery provision as a result of single regeneration budget funding. The nursery provides a bright, spacious and friendly environment and is equipped to a high standard.

65 Although the college has made good progress with the rationalisation and improvement of its buildings it still has some poor accommodation. The accommodation for leisure and tourism and some construction courses is particularly poor. The former school building is showing signs of age and its drab interior does not provide an environment that is conducive to learning. Throughout the college there is little display of students' work. This results in a bland environment that has little subject identity. One of the leased sites in the city consists of a series of disparate buildings. The classrooms that have been converted from science laboratories are particularly uninspiring.

66 The college has a satisfactory accommodation strategy. It is linked to its curriculum requirements and contains plans to improve the unsatisfactory learning environment. The strategy takes into account the impact of the single regeneration budget funding on the development potential of the main sites. The college has a planned maintenance schedule based on a detailed condition survey. This is reviewed annually and work is planned on the basis of an annual allocation of £100,000.

67 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the new resource centre provides a high-quality learning environment. The centre is well funded. It has a good range of books, CD-ROMs and periodicals to meet the needs of students in all curriculum areas. At

present each curriculum area has the same allocation to purchase resources for the centre. Centre staff have informal links with staff in some, but not all, curriculum areas to determine their resource requirements. The new centre is well used by students and teachers who expressed satisfaction with the layout of the materials. An electronic cataloguing system has been installed and has greatly improved the service provided. The centre staff are well qualified and provide a helpful service.

68 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the provision of IT equipment is a strength. The college has recently improved the number and quality of its computers and now has a very good ratio of one high specification computer to every five students. All computers are networked and most provide access to the Internet. There are good computing facilities for independent study in the resources centre and IT workshop and these are well used. Staff also have good access to computers in their workrooms. Some of the college centres are also well equipped with modern IT equipment. The college has an IT bus equipped with 11 computers and other office equipment that travels between the centres in Southampton and Portsmouth to supplement the resources at each centre.

69 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that access to its buildings for people with restricted mobility is poor. In a recently commissioned survey, it found that approximately 25% of all accommodation is inaccessible to users of wheelchairs and a further 20% is accessible only with difficulty. One of the centres leased by the college is completely inaccessible to people with mobility difficulties.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

70 Inspectors agreed with most strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-established quality assurance system
- effective self-assessment
- collaborative working between the college and the governors' quality groups
- effective synchronisation of quality assurance arrangements with the planning cycle

Weaknesses

- ineffective system to measure retention rates
- lack of course level target-setting
- some insufficiently critical curriculum reviews

71 The college has a well-established quality assurance system. A timetabled programme ensures that its quality assurance arrangements are integrated with the strategic planning cycle. The college's fifth self-assessment report is well written and realistic and appropriately validated. The quality system, however, has not been effective in identifying and addressing some weaknesses. For example, whilst achievement rates have risen, retention rates have remained below the national average.

72 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the quality assurance system is well understood by staff. The system is based on a requirement that curriculum and service teams complete documented reviews at set times in the year. Completing reviews is a time-consuming process which the college is now

seeking to streamline. Most curriculum and service reviews are well written and evaluative but some curriculum reports are insufficiently critical.

73 The validation and audit group, which reports to the academic board, is responsible for validating quality reviews, co-ordinating the work of the lesson observation team and receiving new course proposals. The group, led by the quality manager, has membership from all areas of the college and is enthusiastic and increasingly effective. Programme area managers agree team reviews with divisional directors, who are responsible for constructing the relevant sections of the self-assessment report. The process used for validating the self-assessment which involves college staff, governors and external consultants, is good. Inspectors agreed with the college's analysis of its strengths and weaknesses although additional points emerged during the inspection. The corporation and senior managers are committed to improving the college's performance management systems and are currently reviewing its quality procedures. It is too early to comment on the effectiveness of these initiatives.

74 The performance monitoring committee of the corporation reviews the outputs from the college's quality systems. The committee regularly asks for, and analyses, performance data. The group advises the corporation on issues relating to quality and performance target-setting. The link between the committee and the validation and audit group is strong and effective. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the committee is having a major influence on raising the profile of quality assurance in the college.

75 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the quality assurance system lacks detailed target-setting. As part of the strategic planning process, the corporation sets college targets for retention and achievement. Individual course targets are aggregated to

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determine an overall college figure. Until recently the course data used to monitor strategic targets, were inaccurate. This led to the belief that most courses were performing at or above the national average. The college recently identified that its student data were not accurate and have resubmitted the last two years' ISRs to the FEFC. The college has been slow to develop cross-college service level agreements. Drafts containing clear performance targets have been written but they are not yet in force.

76 Courses not achieving college targets are deemed to be failing and action plans are required to bring about improvement. The monitoring of action plans is improving and there are examples of improvement strategies that have worked. For example, the introduction of professional tutors has led to improvement of in-year retention rates. In another example, teaching and learning strategies on an underachieving GNVQ advanced course were reviewed and led to improvements in retention and achievement.

77 Students' views are collected through questionnaires. Course teams are required to analyse the results and comment in their course reviews. Full-time students' views are surveyed three times a year. Students are given feedback on the outcomes of the surveys in their tutorials but this is not always effective. A summary of the student charter is given to all students at induction. The charter is clearly written, contains measurable targets and has recently been reviewed. Students are aware of the complaints procedure. The number and type of complaints are monitored and the corporation is given regular reports of these.

78 The college operates a lesson observation scheme. Only teachers below the level of programme area manager who have been trained undertake lesson observations. Last session 172 observations were conducted but some were not sufficiently critical. The results of the observations are confidential and are not

used in teachers' annual appraisals. Staff development is linked to the outcomes of appraisal and the strategic needs of the college. The staff development budget, which pays course fees and travel, is modest at £56,000 or about 0.6% of the staffing budget. The college recognises that procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of staff development are underdeveloped. The college was re-accredited for the Investor in People award in November 1999.

Governance

Grade 3

79 Inspectors agreed with most strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified an additional weakness. Some weaknesses have been addressed but it is too early to evaluate the outcomes.

Key strengths

- effective performance monitoring committee
- good relationships between governors and senior staff
- rigorous self-assessment

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement by governors in strategic and financial planning
- poor attendance at corporation meetings
- underdeveloped appraisal criteria for senior managers and the clerk to the corporation

80 Governors have established a good working relationship with the principal and senior managers. The distinction between governance and management is understood. Governors have appropriate experience. The mission and character of the college were reviewed following the appointment of the principal and are

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reviewed annually. Governors are linked to divisions but the effectiveness of the links varies and guidance to clarify this aspect of their role has been prepared. The strategic and operational plans are reviewed annually. The implementation of the operational plan is reviewed mid-year. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that governors are insufficiently involved in the early stages of strategic planning and do not contribute sufficiently to strategic review and analysis.

81 The corporation has agreed a determined membership of 19 in line with the statutory modifications to the instrument of government. The current membership includes 11 business and two co-opted governors, two staff governors, and the principal. The corporation is seeking to appoint governors in the local authority, local community and student categories. The corporation operates appropriate procedures for the recruitment of new governors. However, the search committee has not reviewed the contribution of individual governors when they have been considered for reappointment.

82 The performance monitoring committee of the corporation is mainly concerned with improving quality. It has been proactive in developing approaches for monitoring quality and identifying areas of strength and weakness. The activities of the committee are not yet sufficiently integrated with planning and quality improvement procedures.

83 The clerking arrangements are generally good. A local legal firm provides the clerking service, which ensures the clerk's independence. The agendas and supporting papers for corporation and committee meetings provide a good basis for decision-making. Minutes clearly record decisions made. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a poor level of attendance at corporation meetings by some governors. This was identified in the last inspection report. The average level of attendance at corporation meetings by

governors was 58% last year, with eight governors attending less than half of the corporation meetings. The corporation has now set an attendance target of 80% and there has been some improvement in the last six months.

84 The corporation has a clear committee structure. Each committee's terms of reference identify their responsibilities and relationship to the corporation. The corporation has standing orders to guide the conduct of its business, and a code of conduct, which incorporates the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. There is a register of interests, covering both governors and senior managers, which is updated annually. The corporation has taken measures to raise awareness of its activities. The latest annual meeting was well attended and information on corporation matters and individual governors is given in the college's monthly newsletter.

85 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. The support of the governors was essential in securing improvement to the college's financial position since the last inspection. However, the corporation did not properly discharge its responsibility under the articles of government for approval of the college's annual budget for 1999-2000. At the July 1999 meeting, the corporation agreed overall achievement targets for FEFC units, college income, and the surplus to be achieved, but delegated setting the detailed estimates of income and expenditure to the principal. The latest three-year financial forecast was tabled at the same meeting, adversely affecting governors' ability to give it adequate consideration before submission to the FEFC.

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86 Governors give careful consideration to management accounts at meetings of the finance and resources committee. The corporation has not set key financial performance indicators, such as a solvency target, to assist its monitoring of the college's financial performance. The audit committee operates in accordance with its terms of reference. The committee has been innovative, having asked the college's external and internal auditors to carry out a self-assessment of their own performance. The committee has not yet developed a clear mechanism for monitoring the implementation of internal audit recommendations.

87 The performance of the principal and senior postholders is appraised annually. Targets are set and their achievement is linked to performance payments. The criteria for these payments are based on the achievement of financial targets and not on improvements to the retention and achievement rates. The corporation has not established arrangements for reviewing the clerk's performance, including setting suitable performance indicators. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment.

Management

Grade 3

88 The inspection team agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned and well-executed college restructuring
- effective strategic and operational planning
- improved financial position and efficiency gains

- extensive external links and partnerships

Weaknesses

- poor quality of some data returns
- poor use of financial data at the divisional level
- limited scope and consistency of management accounts
- insufficient market research

89 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that its management has improved since the last inspection. In 1995-96, the college failed to meet its FEFC unit target and faced considerable financial difficulties. The college's financial position has now improved. It met its funding target in 1997 and 1998, and had a marginal deficit in 1999.

90 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Management action has recovered the college's financial position, systematically turning a deficit in 1995-96, into a modest surplus in 1996-97. The surplus estimated in the 1999-2000 budget and in the college's three-year financial forecast is designed to consolidate these achievements. Since the last inspection, the college has successfully managed the reduction of its average level of funding to £18.34 per unit in 1998-99. Staff costs as a percentage of income have also been reduced from 78% in 1995-96 to 68% in 1998-1999. The college's net liabilities at the end of 1998-99 were £121,000, indicating a need for continuing vigilance over solvency.

91 The principal reorganised the management structure shortly after his appointment in 1997. Its planning, consultation and implementation were exemplary. The first stage of the review resulted in the present structure. The directorate consists of the principal and six directors, three each for service and curriculum

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areas. Service and programme area managers report to the directorate. The second stage of the review introduced new terms of employment for teachers. Consultation with staff resulted in changes to the original proposals. The review, completed in early 1999, led to efficiency gains with no compulsory redundancies. The college will review the effectiveness of the structure at the end of this year although some small changes have already been made.

92 The management structure and the roles and responsibilities within it are clear and understood by staff. Staff speak highly of the support they receive from their line managers. The directorate recognises that some staff feel undervalued, believing they have little opportunity to influence college-wide decisions. There is a regular, planned programme of meetings. The directorate meets formally every two weeks. A directorate briefing of divisional managers and divisional meetings also takes place fortnightly. Recently, divisional managers have started to meet regularly to address cross-college issues. This has been useful in seeking to develop consistent management practice. The minutes of directorate meetings clearly show decisions and actions but other minutes vary in quality. Managers benefit from a well-organised college programme of staff development identified through a training needs analysis.

93 The well-qualified and experienced finance team produces monthly management accounts, but the commentaries provided are not clear. Budgets are devolved to divisional managers. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a need for more training for divisional managers to enable them to use the financial information effectively as an aid to management. The college has recently revised its financial regulations to take into account best practice in the sector, as well as college developments. Financial procedures to guide staff have not yet been revised to account for the delegation of budgets, although this is planned.

94 The director of business development leads strategic planning and inspectors agreed with the college assessment that strategic planning is effective. The roles of managers and staff in planning are clear. Programme and service area plans contribute to divisional and then college plans. Operational plans are detailed and contain quantifiable targets. These are all subject to a thorough mid-year review. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that its market research is inadequate and does not contribute sufficiently to college planning. The college has extensive and fruitful links within its local and wider community. It is a key member of the Southampton City Lifelong Learning Partnership, works closely with the local education authority (LEA), has many contracts with local companies and enjoys close working relationships at all levels of education.

95 Management information systems have improved since the last inspection. However, at the time of this inspection the college was in receipt of funding from strand 1 of the standards fund, in part to address the continuing issue of the poor timeliness and quality of some data returns. This includes data about students' achievements and retention. Managers now have good access to on-line student data.

96 The college is reviewing all its key policies. The health and safety policy has been reviewed and is well implemented. The full-time health and safety adviser works with divisional advisers to carry out a planned programme of inspections. Progress with risk assessments was initially slow, but has now improved. The equal opportunities policy was being reviewed at the time of the inspection. Staff were knowledgeable about the policy and the procedures for reporting and dealing with equal opportunities issues.

Cross-college Provision

Conclusions

97 The college produced its fifth self-assessment report for the inspection. It also produced two updates to show the progress made in addressing the weaknesses since the report was produced. The report provided a sound basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, although they judged some strengths had been overstated and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors considered one curriculum area and one cross-college area to be a grade higher than that awarded by the college and that one curriculum area had been overgraded.

98 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 (November 1999)

| <i>Age</i> | <i>%</i> |
|-------------|----------|
| Under 16 | 2 |
| 16-18 years | 25 |
| 19-24 years | 18 |
| 25+ years | 54 |
| Not known | 1 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

| <i>Level of study</i> | <i>%</i> |
|------------------------|----------|
| Level 1 (foundation) | 33 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 30 |
| Level 3 (advanced) | 23 |
| Level 4/5 (higher) | 3 |
| Non-schedule 2 | 11 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: college data

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

| <i>Programme area</i> | <i>Full time</i> | <i>Part time</i> | <i>Total provision %</i> |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Science | 165 | 688 | 11 |
| Agriculture | 12 | 2 | 0 |
| Construction | 112 | 322 | 5 |
| Engineering | 217 | 642 | 11 |
| Business | 459 | 913 | 17 |
| Hotel and catering | 149 | 331 | 6 |
| Health and community care | 306 | 1,159 | 18 |
| Art and design | 243 | 518 | 9 |
| Humanities | 148 | 1,273 | 18 |
| Basic education | 46 | 386 | 5 |
| Total | 1,857 | 6,234 | 100 |

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 27% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

| | <i>Perm- anent</i> | <i>Fixed term</i> | <i>Casual</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Direct learning contact | 168 | 40 | 0 | 208 |
| Supporting direct learning contact | 56 | 0 | 0 | 56 |
| Other support | 139 | 0 | 7 | 146 |
| Total | 363 | 40 | 7 | 410 |

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Income | £13,160,000 | £13,107,000 | £13,486,000 |
| Average level of funding (ALF) | £20.03 | £19.41 | £18.34 |
| Payroll as a proportion of income | 70% | 68% | 68% |
| Achievement of funding target | 105% | 100% | 100% |
| Diversity of income | 19% | 24% | 26% |
| Operating surplus | -£976,000 | £400,000 | £54,000 |

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 – college (1997), Performance Indicators 1997-98 (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 | 398 | 223 | 359 | 943 | 1,149 | 1,060 |
| | Retention (%) | 79 | 71 | 76 | 74 | 74 | 75 |
| | Achievement (%) | 59 | 42 | 52 | 55 | 61 | 61 |
| 2 | Number of starters | 1,238 | 1,317 | 954 | 1,552 | 1,290 | 1,454 |
| | Retention (%) | 73 | 72 | 73 | 74 | 69 | 70 |
| | Achievement (%) | 52 | 61 | 66 | 60 | 65 | 73 |
| 3 | Number of starters | 909 | 996 | 809 | 1,906 | 1,785 | 1,497 |
| | Retention (%) | 78 | 73 | 68 | 76 | 79 | 75 |
| | Achievement (%) | 53 | 69 | 63 | 55 | 63 | 65 |
| 4 or 5 | Number of starters | 2 | 5 | 8 | 102 | 165 | 202 |
| | Retention (%) | 50 | 100 | 88 | 73 | 85 | 77 |
| | Achievement (%) | 100 | 33 | 80 | 60 | 44 | 68 |
| Short courses | Number of starters | 442 | 1,187 | 831 | 5,633 | 9,535 | 8,230 |
| | Retention (%) | 87 | 96 | 91 | 91 | 95 | 95 |
| | Achievement (%) | 80 | 87 | 79 | 85 | 87 | 88 |
| Unknown/unclassified | Number of starters | 570 | 512 | 252 | 1,383 | 1,412 | 1,335 |
| | Retention (%) | 85 | 85 | 67 | 78 | 78 | 83 |
| | Achievement (%) | 66 | 77 | 67 | 67 | 74 | 88 |

Source: ISR

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