Southgate College

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.

Contents

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses

- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses

- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses

- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths

- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	–

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

Southgate College
Greater London Region

Inspected October 1998

Southgate College is a general further education college situated in the north London borough of Enfield. The college produced a clearly written, comprehensive and evaluative self-assessment report. The self-assessment process involved staff at all levels in the college and was informed by evidence drawn from the college's quality assurance procedures. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. They identified a few additional weaknesses, and considered that some of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report were not given sufficient prominence.

The college offers a range of courses covering nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in five programme areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college benefits from the very close links governors have with the college and from their involvement in strategic planning. The college's strategic aims are realistic and generally achieved. Its managers are supported by high-quality management information. The college's quality assurance procedures are leading to an overall improvement in students' achievements and retention rates. There is an effective tutorial system for full-time students. Many part-time courses are arranged at times suited to students. In some subjects, teaching and students' achievements are good. The college has addressed some of the resource issues identified in the previous inspection, and is now able to provide students with improved access to computers through its new learning support centre. The college should improve: the quality of teaching and learning; students' achievements in a number of areas, and retention, attendance and punctuality overall; the appearance of some parts of the college; the induction and tutorial provision for part-time students; the rigour of course reviews; and the processes whereby course and school managers set targets and monitor performance.

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

.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	2
Hospitality and catering	2	Quality assurance	2
Art, design and performing arts	2	Governance	1
ESOL and provision for students with learning difficulties	2	Management	2

The College and its Mission

1   Southgate College is a general further education college situated in the north London borough of Enfield. It is a single site college, easily accessible by various public transport links. The college is one of seven in the north London boroughs of Barnet, Enfield and Haringey. While there is some competitiveness between the colleges, competition is more significant between colleges and schools. The North London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) covers all three boroughs.

2   In 1997-98, the college enrolled 16,297 students on courses at the college and on courses offered by partners. Some 17% of the work funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) was delivered through its partners. Courses in nine of the 10 FEFC programme areas are offered by the college. Over 60% of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is far higher than the percentage of people from minority ethnic groups living in the immediate vicinity of the college. Of the full-time students 57% were male and 43% were female.

3   The college has 304 full-time equivalent staff. Of the 251 permanent staff, 134 are teachers. Staffing costs as a percentage of total expenditure have reduced progressively since incorporation and in 1997-98 were estimated to be 69%. The college has grown steadily since 1993 and has been particularly successful in attracting greater numbers of mature students from beyond the surrounding area. The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group of colleges which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. Students often travel to the college from more distant boroughs, where levels of social deprivation are considerably higher than in Enfield. Much of the employment in north London comes from organisations with less than 25 employees. Many of the larger employers, particularly in the field of engineering, have moved out of the region. This has led to a significant drop in the demand for courses. The college has responded by offering new courses in art and design, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), English as a foreign language (EFL), and health and social care. Provision for students with learning difficulties has expanded and the number of courses providing access to further and higher education has increased.

4   Southgate College is organised currently in three faculties: arts and leisure studies; humanities and business studies; and science and technology. A dean manages each faculty. Faculties are subdivided into schools, each responsible for a particular curriculum area. The student support function is managed by a fourth dean. As well as the deans, the college's management committee includes the principal and the two vice-principals, one of whom also acts as clerk to the corporation.

5   The college's mission statement is as follows:

> 'To maintain Southgate College as a centre of excellence in education and training by providing the best possible opportunities for all who wish to benefit, whatever their age and abilities.
> To foster Southgate as a caring college by providing appropriate guidance and counselling so all may succeed at Southgate.
> To stimulate the economic, intellectual, cultural and social life of the community.'

6   The mission statement is supported by four strategic objectives. The college has committed itself to: 'pursue actively all elements of the Southgate College mission statement through staged improvements in access, process and content phases of the curriculum offer; continue to develop a high-quality and cost-effective education and training service to the community served by Southgate College; implement, wherever possible, the key findings of the FEFC's widening participation committee report, *Learning Works*; and to maintain the financial viability of Southgate College and its ability to operate as an independent body through the Southgate College governing corporation'.

Context

The Inspection

7   The college was inspected in October 1998. The college inspector and reporting inspector had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements in 1995-96 and 1996-97 were derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1997-98 were provided by the college before the inspection. These data were checked against class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified about three months before the inspection of those aspects of provision that were to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors working for a total of 42 days, and an auditor working for four days. Inspectors observed 72 lessons, examined students' work and a variety of documentation, and held meetings with governors, managers, students and staff.

8   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 58% were rated good or outstanding and 7% less than satisfactory. This compares with figures of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons observed during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	5	2	1	0	8
GCSE	1	1	1	0	0	3
GNVQ	1	9	7	0	0	17
NVQ	0	2	3	2	0	7
Other vocational	0	16	10	0	0	26
Other	0	7	3	2	0	11
Total (No)	2	40	25	5	0	72
Total (%)	3	55	35	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report

Context

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Southgate College	11.5	74
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

10   Inspectors observed 17 lessons covering courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). Courses leading to other vocational awards and those providing access to higher education in computing and information technology (IT) were also inspected. The courses were located at the college's Southgate site and at two other centres in London which offer provision in collaboration with the college. Inspectors agreed with the college's comprehensive self-assessment of this area.

Key strengths
- good range of courses
- effective course management leading to improvements in the provision
- well-prepared lessons
- good pass rates on full-time vocational and access to higher education courses
- effective use of good-quality learning materials
- good progress by students in developing their practical IT skills

Weaknesses
- low retention rates on most courses
- poor pass rates on some courses
- lack of punctuality by students
- teaching that failed to meet the learning needs of all students
- lessons adversely affected by problems with computer systems

11   Inspectors agreed with the college that the wide range of computing and IT courses is a

strength. Courses are available from foundation to advanced level and offer students good opportunities for progression. The collaborative provision is arranged to meet the requirements of adult students who are unable to attend at set times. Courses are well planned and well managed. Managers and teachers are dealing effectively with the major issues identified through the quality assurance and self-assessment processes. Courses have been redesigned and the course documentation improved. Attractive and informative handbooks give students essential information about their course, the demands they will face and the assignments they will be expected to complete.

12   The college recognises the strengths in teaching and learning. Inspectors found many examples of well-prepared lessons and that most teaching is good. Teachers make effective use of high-quality teaching materials, and enable their students to make good progress in developing their IT skills. In the collaborative provision, students work at their own pace using carefully designed self-study materials. Students' attendance and progress on these courses is carefully monitored and recorded. Teachers have good relationships with their students. In lessons observed by inspectors at the Southgate site, students were keen to answer questions and engage in discussions during lessons. Teachers draw effectively on their own and the students' knowledge and experience of using IT systems. However, they do not always cater sufficiently for the different levels of expertise and ability of students. Many classes are disrupted by students who arrive late.

13   Students' work is well presented and they make effective use of IT. The standard of students' written work is of an appropriate level. Although pass rates are good on full-time vocational and access to higher education courses, they are poor on GCE A level, GCSE and some part-time vocational courses. The pass rates on City and Guilds of London Institute

Curriculum Areas

(C&G) 7261 IT courses, offered collaboratively, are improving. Most students who complete the access to higher education course progress to higher education. The college acknowledges that retention rates are poor on many courses. Action has been taken to improve students' retention and achievements. Most of the students who completed the first year of the new modular GCE A level course achieved a pass in three of the four modules.

14   Inspectors agreed with the college that teachers are well qualified; most have acquired substantial industrial and commercial experience at some stage in their careers.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in computing and information technology, 1996 to 1998

Generally, the computer hardware and software and the learning resources are adequate for the courses offered. However, at the Southgate site, insufficient workstations and technical difficulties disrupted a few lessons. Students are able to use the college's computers to work on their assignments outside of timetabled lessons. Teachers did not make effective use of teaching aids to demonstrate aspects of computer software to large groups of students. Some classrooms and computer workshops are too small for the number of students timetabled to occupy them.

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G 7261	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	272 78 25	499 85 42	418 72 66
GCSE IT	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	62 58 8	44 91 7	28 50 16
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	41 68 57	46 54 88
National diploma computer studies	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	52 62 88	35 54 100	28 50 71
Access to higher education IT	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	20 85 82	22 68 67	20 70 86
GCE A level computer studies	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	23 43 20	17 76 15	16 44 50

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*course not running

Engineering

Grade 3

15   Inspectors observed 12 lessons across a broad range of engineering courses. The self-assessment report identified many strengths and weaknesses which were confirmed by the inspection. However, inspectors identified some additional weaknesses and found that some weaknesses in the report were understated.

Key strengths

- some effective teaching and learning
- good pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate and national diploma courses
- part-time courses arranged to allow a variety of attendance patterns
- effective recording and monitoring of students' progress

Weaknesses

- a few examples of less than satisfactory teaching
- poor retention and pass rates on the higher national certificate in motor vehicle engineering
- generally low attendance
- lack of effective action-planning by course teams

16   The college offers a broad range of engineering courses which meet the needs of students and local employers. Demand for some part-time level 3 provision has declined recently, reflecting changes in local employment patterns. A number of part-time courses are arranged at times to suit the needs of students. Some aspects of course management are good. The recording and monitoring of students' progress is effective, providing students with an up-to-date picture of their performance and achievement. Meetings of course teams are minuted and issues for improvement are identified. However, action to address the issues rarely takes place. Some course files are poorly maintained and annual course reviews do not always identify actions to improve retention and pass rates. The self-assessment report fails to identify these weaknesses. There is effective course induction for full-time students; part-time students do not have a formal induction programme. Specialist key skills teachers work effectively with engineering teachers to help students develop their communication, numerical and IT skills.

17   The quality of teaching in most lessons is satisfactory or good. In the better lessons, handouts, worksheets and assignment materials are well planned and presented, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students on a foundation course benefited from the teacher's careful review of the previous week's work and their involvement in relevant discussions on the lesson topic. In many of the electronic engineering lessons observed, students were enthusiastic about their tasks. Well-structured practical exercises enable students to consolidate their understanding of theoretical concepts. Teachers provide support to students as they work individually or in small groups to complete given tasks. In the few less satisfactory lessons observed, lesson planning was inadequate. Students were required to copy out notes from the projector screen and they became inattentive. In these lessons, little effective learning took place. Assignment objectives and assessment criteria are, in most instances, clearly identified. The standard of students' written and practical work is generally good. Teachers often provide useful written comments on students' work.

18   Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate and BTEC national diploma courses have improved significantly, and good results were achieved in 1997-98. However, the pass and retention rates on the BTEC higher national certificate in motor vehicle engineering are poor, a weakness

recognised in the self-assessment report. In a few instances, course managers have taken action to address poor retention by introducing courses that they consider to be better suited to the needs of their students. It is too early to say how effective these measures have been. Students' attendance is generally low.

19   There is a sufficiently wide range of engineering equipment to meet the requirements of the engineering courses. The motor vehicle workshops are well equipped but are cramped in one area where vehicles are stored. Some classroom and laboratory areas are dull and uninspiring. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The library has a diverse range of engineering books, with multiple copies of some titles. Students also have access to material held on CD-ROMs and video cassettes.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in engineering, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G 2240 electronics servicing part 1	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	45 71 59	46 83 47	38 61 39
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	32 69 50	32 69 59	18 72 92
National diploma motor vehicle	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	34 50 65	31 65 84	27 63 88
GNVQ advanced engineering	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	25 56 83	24 63 53
Higher national certificate motor vehicle	4	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	9 44 50	18 78 21	22 36 13

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 2

20   Inspectors observed 10 lessons in hospitality and catering. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and all staff were involved in its development. Inspectors agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, although they found some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths
- well-managed teaching programmes
- some effective teaching practices
- good pass rates on most courses
- students encouraged to organise their own learning effectively
- extensive and productive links with industry
- good range of additional qualifications available

Weaknesses
- insufficient variety in a few lessons
- poor retention on a few courses
- inadequate library materials
- inadequate changing and storage facilities

21   A good range of full-time and part-time hospitality and catering courses leads to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) levels 1 to 3, and GNVQs at intermediate and advanced levels. As recognised in the self-assessment report, the range of part-time courses is provided at times that meet the needs of individual students. There is an effective course induction programme, enabling students to become fully aware of the work expected of them. Teachers advise students on how to manage their time effectively, helping them to become responsible for their own learning.

Students have the opportunity to gain additional qualifications which enhance their employment prospects. Courses are well managed, and regular team meetings monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the progress of students. Course handbooks provide useful information for students. The school has well-established and comprehensive links with industry. Students are able to benefit from an extensive and relevant work placement programme. The school provides good support for students with learning difficulties.

22   Most lessons are well planned. Teachers explain clearly the aims and objectives of lessons to students. Lesson topics often reflect practices in the catering industry and the previous experiences of students. In one lesson, students were working successfully as a group identifying the methods of communication used in a large organisation. They were then required to illustrate any barriers to communication. The students made effective use of their own experiences in developing a better understanding of important concepts. In some lessons, the range of activities used was too narrow. In a few lessons, teachers failed to catch students' interest or to check on their understanding. Teachers have devised assignments which relate to the catering industry and which develop clearly identified key skills. A few assignments are insufficiently challenging. Course teams maintain good records, enabling them to monitor the progress of students accurately. The developing tutorial programme increasingly supports the learning process. The self-assessment report identified this as a significant strength. Course reviews are generally comprehensive and take account of the views of students.

23   The pass rates on many courses are good, notably on those leading to NVQ level 2, national certificate and GNVQs in hospitality and catering. A high proportion of students on GNVQ courses achieve merit and distinction grades. The retention rates on some part-time

courses are poor, a weakness which was understated in the self-assessment report. The process of setting targets for recruitment, retention and students' achievements is underdeveloped. There is rigorous monitoring of students' attendance by teachers. Some students make good use of IT in their assignment work and students are encouraged to develop this skill. Some awards for students' achievements are sponsored by local companies. Many students progress from their course into higher education or employment.

24   Staff have appropriate qualifications and familiarise themselves with the requirements of awarding bodies. There are few opportunities for teachers to update their industrial experience. The range of catering and hospitality equipment is good, although a few items are in need of replacement. Students have adequate access to computers. As recognised in the self-assessment report, the changing and storage facilities used by students are unsatisfactory. Library reference materials do not fully reflect current industrial developments and the periodical stock is limited.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in hospitality and catering, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ hospitality and catering (food preparation and cooking)	1	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	12 100 100	47 72 97
GNVQ intermediate hospitaliity and catering	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	10 80 75
NVQ hospitality and catering (food preparation and cooking)	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	20 90 100	47 45 95	68 88 95
Wine and Spirit Education Trust certificate	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	16 100 56	18 50 44
GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	20 75 100	21 52 45
NVQ hospitality and catering (kitchen and larders)	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	14 86 0	11 91 63	7 86 100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*course not running

Art, Design and Performing Arts

Grade 2

25   Inspectors observed 21 lessons covering courses in art and design, and the performing arts. The college's self-assessment report identified most of the strengths but gave insufficient emphasis to weaknesses in some aspects of teaching and learning, students' achievements and specialist resources.

Key strengths

- extensive range of well-managed courses
- well-planned courses and lessons
- good teaching and effective learning
- good pass rates on some art and design courses
- high quality of drawing and exploratory work in art and design
- effective support to help performing arts students learn on their own
- valuable opportunities for rehearsal and performance

Weaknesses

- some low pass and retention rates
- poor attendance
- insufficient use of computers in art and design
- some poorly maintained accommodation and equipment

26   The college provides a good range of established courses in this programme area, including GCSE and GCE A level art and design and performing arts courses, intermediate and advanced GNVQs in art and design, and a number of BTEC national diplomas. Full-time courses are complemented by an extensive range of part-time courses. There are ample

opportunities for students to progress within the college.

27   Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the programme area is well managed. Heads of school, course managers, teachers and support staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Communications across the programme area are good. Course teams meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning, students' progress and achievements, curriculum issues and course development. Minutes of meetings are maintained. However, deadlines for action and those responsible for ensuring that action is taken are not always identified. The content of courses generally reflects the different demands of students and employers. However, the curriculum does not cater sufficiently for the few students who have chosen to specialise in interior design. The work of music students is enhanced by free individual tuition in their chosen instrument. The college offers valuable rehearsal and performance opportunities for students through music classes organised for the wider community.

28   The quality of teaching in art, design and the performing arts is good. There are examples of outstanding teaching on the BTEC national diplomas, the foundation course and GCSE art. In one lesson observed, students were drawing a washing line hung across the studio. They had brought in items of clothing and had to draw a difficult range of materials, textures, patterns and colours. In a lively GCSE lesson, highly motivated students were working on basic exercises in colour and making good progress. Art and design project briefs are well designed; they include clear aims and objectives, staged tasks, well-defined assessment criteria and deadlines for completion. In the best examples, key skills to be used are identified and integrated with the project. In a few cases, the aims and objectives of projects are too broad for students on lower level courses, and the

terminology is difficult for them to understand. Many lessons in the performing arts showed a productive balance between students learning on their own and being guided by the teacher. This helped the students to work independently and creatively. In a few performing arts lessons, lapses in students' concentration slowed their progress. The self-assessment report overemphasises the strengths of teaching and learning. It pays insufficient attention to how projects are designed and delivered.

29 Students' achievements are noted by the college as a significant strength. This claim is valid for some courses where pass rates are above the national average for further education colleges. However, GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate pass rates are below the national average. Retention rates on these courses are

also low at around 50%. Pass rates for the small number of performing arts students are close to the national average.

30 Studios and workshops are satisfactory. The accommodation and equipment include general drawing studios, photographic resources, rehearsal and performance spaces and classrooms. Some accommodation, furniture and equipment is in need of maintenance and refurbishment. A small specialist computer suite provides a few workstations for graphic design students. However, students make insufficient use of the specialist computing facilities which are available. Teachers are well qualified and experienced in an appropriate range of disciplines. Some teachers need support in developing their computer-aided design skills.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art, design and performing arts, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE art and design	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	41 61 64	32 81 69	44 77 63
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	26 73 37	30 70 42	27 52 43
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	22 64 100	15 53 88	18 71 75
National diploma foundation studies	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	35 83 100	30 80 96	25 84 94
National diploma graphic design	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	10 80 100	19 68 77	10 80 100
GCE A level art and design	3	Expected completions Retention (%) Achievement (%)	41 49 32	40 70 36	32 53 35

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

ESOL and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties

Grade 2

31   Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering courses for students with learning difficulties and ESOL provision. Inspectors agreed generally with the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in ESOL, but gave more weight to weaknesses identified in the provision for students with learning difficulties.

Key strengths

- skilful ESOL teaching
- some effective teaching of students with learning difficulties
- students' achievements in ESOL
- progression by ESOL students and most full-time students with learning difficulties to higher level courses
- effective structure and management of the complex ESOL provision

Weaknesses

- some inappropriate teaching methods and qualifications
- lessons which do not always meet the diverse needs of ESOL students

32   Separate provision is made for over 500 ESOL students and about 150 students with learning difficulties. The structure and management of the courses have been developed to meet the complex requirements of the student groups. The extensive ESOL provision enables students to attend college at times which suit them. They can progress from beginners to advanced level through a series of carefully graduated courses. The newly developed and increasingly successful '50:50' courses enable students to study for GNVQs while receiving support to develop their spoken and written English.

33   The teaching of ESOL is good, as the self-assessment report notes. Enthusiastic and energetic teachers plan their courses and lessons carefully. They use a range of different activities to enable students to gain new skills in speaking, understanding, reading and writing English. In a lesson for students with little English, ordinal numbers were introduced and practised, and then used in other parts of the lesson which focused on different skills. Correct pronunciation and intonation are emphasised, so that students develop an ear for the rhythm of spoken English. In some of the lessons observed, good use was made of audio tapes to give students experience of different voices, accents and speech patterns. Specific literacy classes are provided for students whose reading and writing skills in English do not match their understanding and use of the spoken language. The learning activities in some lessons did not always meet the needs of the diverse range of students who have a variety of educational backgrounds, abilities and experiences. This weakness was not identified by the college self-assessment.

34   The quality of teaching is more variable in the classes for students with learning difficulties. In the best classes observed, students worked hard to complete appropriate activities, and were fully involved in tasks or discussions. Students on a bridging course were observed in a science lesson gathering information from food packaging on the calorie, fat and carbohydrate content of the food and presenting their findings in a table. The students worked well, even though several had difficulty concentrating and speaking to other members of the group. Students with very severe learning difficulties were observed preparing beans on toast and an instant pudding with the aim of learning simple everyday skills. However, the qualification for which they were working was not appropriate for their level of ability. Some

teaching methods are less successful and the aim of the activity which students undertake is less clear. On some courses, the content does not fully meet the aims, in particular those which aim to prepare students for work or for adult life in the community. Some students are insufficiently challenged by their lessons, and some receive an inappropriately high level of support which interferes with their learning. Some are hampered by written material which they cannot read or understand. The self-assessment report identified these weaknesses, but gave them insufficient prominence.

35   Those ESOL students who attend regularly and complete their courses improve their skills in English and attain their primary learning goals. Progress is clearly evident in their written work. Many students go on to higher level courses within the college and others obtain jobs. Although students on all courses above beginners level are encouraged to obtain Wordpower qualifications and to take Pitman ESOL tests, there is no requirement for them to do so. The success rates for ESOL students who choose to take qualifications are good. The college is aware that additional work is needed to improve retention rates which have improved but are still below the 80% target set within the faculty. This was identified in the self-assessment report.

36   Most students from the bridging course and the 'skills for work' course who have greater learning difficulties are successful in progressing to mainstream courses within the college. Students on the horticultural skills course learn appropriate skills through extensive practical work, and adult part-time students on cookery courses learn useful skills for more independent living. Some students are supported successfully on discrete programmes in the college's inclusive learning support centre.

37   Staff teaching English to speakers of other languages are well qualified and have appropriate experience. Not all those teaching

students with learning difficulties are as well qualified in their area of work. Additional staff development is needed to enable staff to work more effectively with those students who have severe, complex and challenging learning difficulties. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report. Several former ESOL students and one former student with learning difficulties are now employed successfully by the college. Students taking vocational subjects benefit from lessons in specialist accommodation using the right equipment. The base room for ESOL students has appropriate equipment and resources. Some of the general classrooms used by both ESOL students and by students with learning difficulties are bare, poorly maintained and untidy.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

38   Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Some strengths received undue emphasis. The college has already taken steps to remedy some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

• accurate, impartial information available to students

• well-planned and organised induction programme for full-time students

• systematic assessment of full-time students' learning needs

• effective tutorial support for full-time students

• comprehensive support for students on personal issues

Weaknesses

• inadequate support for part-time students

• insufficient co-ordination of careers advice and guidance

39   As identified in the self-assessment report, the college provides accurate and impartial information and guidance on courses. Prospectuses and course leaflets are clear and informative. Enquiries about courses are dealt with promptly and courteously, and there are realistic service standards which are regularly reviewed and monitored. The college's new reception area is bright, attractive and readily accessible. The effectiveness of the system for dealing with enquiries and interviews has been increased as a result of the recent merger of the admissions unit with the registry.

40   Inspectors support the college's view that all full-time students benefit from a well-planned and efficiently organised four-day induction programme. The programme allows students to complete their learning agreements and work on records of achievement. Students receive comprehensive advice on their rights and responsibilities as well as a clear introduction to their course and to cross-college services. There are well-documented procedures for students who wish to change their course during the induction period. Staff and students complete questionnaires following the induction week and a thorough review is undertaken which informs future events. A modified induction programme is offered to full-time students who enrol after the first week of term.

41   An effective tutorial support system is provided for all full-time students. This is efficiently organised by the tutor support manager. Students are allotted a personal tutor who provides guidance, information and support, individually and in groups. Each tutorial group meets for a timetabled session of at least one hour each week. Inspectors observed eight group tutorials across a range of the college's provision and found these generally to be well planned. Students benefited from the sessions. Tutors have considerable discretion in determining the content of tutorial programmes according to the needs of their students, but all tutorial programmes have a common core of activities. In addition to group tutorials, students meet regularly with their personal tutor who provides information and advice on an individual basis.

42   All full-time students are assessed when they enrol, in order to identify their additional learning needs. This normally happens during their first week at the college but may occur earlier if a student indicates on the application form that he or she has a learning difficulty and/or disability. Students with specific learning needs are referred to the college's inclusive learning support centre, where they are assessed in more detail before an individual support programme is prepared. There are regular and comprehensive reviews of the

additional learning support programmes. All students are encouraged to use the drop-in facilities at the inclusive learning support centre if they are experiencing difficulties with particular aspects of their course. Specialist help is available for students with visual or hearing impairments.

43 The self-assessment report recognises that some aspects of the college careers service require better co-ordination. A limited amount of careers information is available in the library, in written form and on CD-ROMs. Some specialist advice is provided by subject teachers, particularly on vocational courses. There is a service agreement with the local careers service, although this is primarily intended for 16 to 19 year old students. Initiatives are currently under way to improve the level of careers advice for students of all ages. In addition, improvements to careers guidance facilities in the library are planned.

44 Students have access to a comprehensive range of services providing support on personal, welfare and counselling issues, a point recognised in the self-assessment report. Qualified nurses provide an effective health service, and a doctor is on site for half a day each week. A nursery with 19 places is available for staff and students, and the college provides information about childcare facilities outside the college. Some prospective students consider that they are unable to attend courses because they cannot afford the cost of childcare services. A full-time youth worker works with the sabbatical president of the students' union to provide a wide range of social, sporting and other activities.

45 The college recognises that the level of support available to part-time students is inadequate. There is no formalised cross-college induction programme, no identified tutorial time and insufficient information available to part-time students about college services and activities.

General Resources

Grade 2

46   Inspectors broadly confirmed the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report, but identified a few additional weaknesses relating to the college's accommodation.

Key strengths
- responsive estates management
- mainly good working environment
- attractive new building housing reception area, admissions facilities, registry and a learning resources centre
- effective management of IT
- effective and well-managed security

Weaknesses
- some unsatisfactory aspects of college accommodation

47   The premises are managed effectively. Accommodation is adapted quickly to match changes in provision. Many parts of the college provide a good working environment for students and staff. Access for students with disabilities is good in most parts of the premises but the self-assessment report identifies difficulties in older buildings. Students with restricted mobility cannot use the upper floor of the library where most of the books are located, although the college is addressing this issue.

48   An attractive new building now houses the admissions facility, registry and learning resources centre. The ground floor reception area of the new building is spacious and well equipped and includes admissions and registration facilities. The learning resource centre was heavily used by students as soon as it opened, although at the time of the inspection it was not fully resourced. It has substantially increased the number of study places for students and improved access to IT, thereby

addressing significant weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

49   Inspectors found some aspects of the college's accommodation less satisfactory than the self-assessment report indicated. Several areas were unattractive and bare; some were untidy and poorly maintained. The entrance area between the library and gymnasium is unattractive and unwelcoming. Although students have a common room, few use it.

50   The self-assessment report rightly identified as a strength the college's provision of a safe environment through unobtrusive but effective security. Closed-circuit television monitoring and patrols by security staff contribute to the secure atmosphere in the college. Most accommodation issues are dealt with as they occur by the estates manager and the other senior managers. The accommodation working party is playing an increasingly prominent role in improving the college's accommodation.

51   The college's computer networks are well managed. Skilled technicians contribute considerably to managing and developing the systems. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the availability of computers for students has improved. There is currently one computer for every eight full-time equivalent students compared with a ratio of 1:12 at the last inspection. The development of computer systems is carefully planned and researched. In the new learning resources centre, the network is being developed to ensure that the latest technology can be incorporated as soon as it becomes available. Students are encouraged to use all the software available, rather than a limited range of wordprocessing packages. There is widely available access to the internet, and the college has developed its own website to encourage enquiries about courses and services.

52   Many curriculum areas have built up good specialist ranges of library books and resources. Library staff have improved liaison with staff

across the college. They have removed some, but not all, redundant bookstock, which in a few subject areas is particularly dated.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

53   The quality assurance section of the self-assessment report is comprehensive and self-critical. The inspection broadly confirmed the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, but found a few strengths to be overstated.

Key strengths

- well-established quality assurance procedures in most curriculum areas
- effective quality assurance in service areas, leading to improvements
- clear links between appraisal, staff development and quality assurance
- good quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision
- governors' involvement in quality assurance and self-assessment
- effective self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory faculty reviews
- failure to make full use of computerised management information
- limited impact of course review process in some areas

54   The college has quality assurance procedures covering all aspects of its work, and in most curriculum areas these are well established. Improvements in retention and students' achievements for the college as a whole are confirmed by FEFC performance indicators for 1995-96 and 1996-97. These have been achieved at the same time as the college has been successful in attracting

students from a wider cross-section of the community. Overall responsibility for quality assurance lies with a vice-principal and the staff development and quality assurance manager. There is extensive staff involvement in the quality assurance processes. The views of students are considered and student representatives participate in the review of courses.

55   All course teams complete annual course reviews. The documents produced by course teams vary considerably in their level of analysis. Course teams are provided with relevant management information about enrolments, retention and achievements, but as the self-assessment report acknowledges, there is some variation in the extent to which course teams use this information to assess their performance. The annual reviews are summarised and discussed at faculty level. In most cases, actions for improvement are agreed. An overview faculty report is then made to the faculty advisory committee. Some of the summaries produced by faculties for the advisory committees are insufficiently thorough. The course review process has not yet resulted in improvements to students' retention and achievement rates in all curriculum areas, a fact not recognised in the self-assessment report.

56   Arrangements for the quality assurance of the college's collaborative provision are effective. Staff working in the centres where the collaborative provision is delivered contributed to the self-assessment report. College staff visit each of the centres frequently to monitor performance. Quality teams have been established recently in all college service areas. This has led to a number of quality improvements in areas such as enrolment procedures, policies on the purchase of computers, and the payment of suppliers. The self-assessment report does not fully acknowledge these gains.

57   Members of the corporation play an effective role in quality assurance and self-

assessment. A lead governor represents the corporation in quality assurance and self-assessment matters, and has led a governors' review and development event to help governors assess their own performance. The lead governor has been an active member of the college's self-assessment review group.

58   Inspectors agreed with the college that the programme of staff development is effective and well managed. It is linked to the findings of the staff appraisal process and the quality assurance procedures. The staff development budget is slightly less than 1% of payroll costs. Priorities are established in the light of the college's strategic objectives. Account is taken also of the needs of course teams and individual staff as identified through course reviews and staff appraisals. An effective link with Middlesex University has led to a work-based masters degree programme for middle managers. New teachers have a mentor and those without a teaching qualification are observed teaching and are required to take a teacher training course. The staff development programme is reviewed systematically and participants' views are taken into account.

59   There is an established two-year cycle of appraisals for teachers which focuses on their professional development. In one year, the appraisal is conducted by the teacher's line manager but with no observation of teaching; in the next year, a head of school or staff tutor undertakes a lesson observation and assesses the competence of the teacher. An appraisal system for support staff is being piloted.

60   The college self-assessment report is clear, comprehensive and evaluative. The report draws on the findings of staff teams throughout the college and on evidence from the quality assurance procedures. Only limited evidence from lesson observations was available to help the college make assessments about the quality of teaching and learning. Immediately before the inspection, the college used a team of people from within the college and outside to update

the report. The main findings of the updated report have been used to inform the college's operating statement for 1998-99. Some of the strengths listed in the report are descriptions of routine practice. Inspectors broadly agreed with the report.

Governance

Grade 1

61 Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the self-assessment report on governance, but considered that some of the weaknesses were overstated.

Key strengths
- skills and professional expertise of governors
- governors' close involvement in strategic planning
- effective use of expertise through the 'lead governor' scheme
- governors' very close links with the college and its curriculum
- good working relationships between governors and college managers
- governors who carefully assess and manage their performance
- high level of attendance at corporation meetings
- effective clerking arrangements

Weaknesses
- there are no significant weaknesses

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

63 The corporation has a membership of 16, comprising eight independent governors, a TEC nominee, three co-opted governors, two staff governors, a student governor and the principal. There is a good balance of long-serving governors, who provide stability and continuity, and a few recently appointed governors, who are able to contribute fresh ideas. The college benefits from the skills and professional expertise which governors bring to the corporation. Efforts are continuing, through the search committee, to increase the number of women and representations from minority ethnic groups. A 'lead governor' scheme has been established whereby named governors focus on specific areas of the college's work on which they have particular expertise. The self-assessment report records the success of this scheme.

64 The governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. The work of the corporation is assisted by a code of conduct for governors. There is a register of interests which has been completed by those members of college staff who have significant financial responsibilities, as well as by all governors. The full corporation meets twice each term. In addition, there are training days annually at which senior college staff make presentations on curriculum areas and current issues in further education. Governors have assessed their performance for the past two years, and set formal targets for the first time in 1998. One governor took the lead in producing the self-assessment report for governance.

65 Through attendance at faculty advisory committees and course evaluation and development boards, the governors have gained an exceptionally good understanding of the college and its curriculum, and take a close interest in its quality. They also regularly visit the college to attend prize-giving and other events. Many governors have observed lessons. Managers speak very highly of the involvement

of governors in the life of the college. Governors identified in their self-assessment report that they would like more direct contact with teachers.

66   The corporation has established committees which are operating effectively; their work is overseen but not duplicated by the full corporation. These committees cover: finance and staffing, audit, and the remuneration of senior postholders. The committees meet with appropriate frequency. Governors closely consider financial reports at their meetings. The audit committee effectively monitors internal and external audit plans and reports. Effective clerking arrangements lead to efficient meetings of the corporation and its committees. Agendas and papers are circulated at least seven days in advance of meetings. The papers are well produced and include summaries of longer documents, and a summary of the decisions taken at the previous meeting. The self-assessment report recognises this strength. Meetings are well attended. Draft minutes, providing a clear record of proceedings, are available soon after the meetings.

67   Governors contribute effectively to the strategic planning process, both at full corporation level and through the work of committees, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Strategic planning is properly linked to financial forecasting. The corporation receives reports from the principal which provide appropriate information on a wide range of issues, including enrolments, achievement rates, retention rates and funding. Minutes of meetings of the academic board and its subcommittees are presented to the corporation.

Management

Grade 2

68   Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the management section of the college's self-assessment report. However, they identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong mission statement which is reviewed regularly
- clear management reporting lines
- coherent strategic planning cycle which includes governors and staff
- efficient deployment of staff
- high-quality, timely management information
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- target-setting and monitoring not fully established in some areas
- inadequacies in some faculty development plans

69   The college is generally well managed. The principalship meets each week. The college management committee meets approximately eight times a year; it comprises the principal, vice-principals, deans of faculties, personnel manager, estates manager, registrar, management information systems manager, marketing manager, accountant, and quality assurance manager. There is some variation in the frequency with which deans and heads of school meet their teams. There are clear management reporting lines in the college. Communications between managers and staff are assisted by the fortnightly bulletin, and by bulletins on specific issues produced from time to time. Staff are deployed efficiently.

70   Each faculty has a faculty advisory committee which meets twice each year. These

committees are chaired by a governor and include external members to advise on matters relating to specific vocational areas. Reports from committees are sent to the college management committee, governors, and the academic board. The college recognises in its self-assessment report that inconsistent staff representation on the academic board has hampered its effectiveness in advising the principal. The board has recently been reconstituted, but it is too early to be able to identify whether this had led to improvements. Health and safety and equal opportunities policies are monitored through subcommittees of the academic board.

71   The college has a well-established strategic planning timetable and process. As identified in the self-assessment report, all staff contribute to the planning process through course team, school and faculty meetings. Each faculty produces a three-year development plan. The faculty plans are drawn together by the vice-principal to produce a coherent strategic planning document for the whole college. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge the lack of focus and inadequacy of some of the faculty development plans. The strategic plan is considered by governors, the principalship, and the college management committee. The strategic aims are realistic, and the college generally achieves them. Copies of the strategic plan are readily available to all staff, who have a good understanding of its contents. The college has a clear mission statement which is currently being reviewed by college staff and governors. Staff understand and strongly support the college's mission statement.

72   The outcomes of curriculum area inspections show that the process of delegated management and target-setting has yet to benefit the learning experience of all students. At course team and school level, there are differences in the understanding of the processes used for target-setting. Monitoring of performance against targets has only recently

been established and is not yet carried out effectively by all schools and teams. This weakness was not emphasised sufficiently in the self-assessment report.

73   Managers receive timely, accurate management information. Inspectors found most of the data on students' achievements to be accurate. A wide range of reports is available on request, many of which are designed to suit the specific needs of the college. The information is available to senior managers and deans on a computer network. The college is extending this service to all staff workrooms. An IT users group has been established to identify the needs of staff, and to recommend developments. The considerable strength of management information systems in the college is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

74   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. Governors and managers monitor the college's financial position frequently. They receive timely and comprehensive management accounts. A qualified accountant manages the finance team. Financial procedures and regulations were updated recently, and approved by the corporation. Budget holders are unclear about the process for delegating budgets, but they felt that allocations are equitable. They receive timely, user-friendly reports from the finance team which help them to manage their budgets effectively. No significant weaknesses have been identified by the internal or external auditors.

Conclusions

75   The college's self-assessment arrangements are good and well informed by evidence from the college's quality assurance procedures. The report was clearly written, comprehensive and evaluative, and involved all college staff. The inspection team agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. A few additional weaknesses were noted

Cross-college Provision

by inspectors. Some weaknesses in the report were not emphasised sufficiently. These related particularly to the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements. The grades awarded in the curriculum areas by the college were mostly confirmed during the inspection; one grade awarded by the inspection team was lower than the grade which the college had awarded itself. In the cross-college areas, one of the five grades awarded was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	13
19-24 years	16
25+ years	65
Not known	4
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	67
Intermediate	17
Advanced	8
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	7
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	418	5,147	34
Construction	31	99	1
Engineering	306	265	4
Business	293	1,912	13
Hotel and catering	201	214	3
Health and community care	101	3,495	22
Art and design	232	486	4
Humanities	335	2,028	14
Basic education	379	355	5
Total	2,296	14,001	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 49% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	134	23	14	171
Supporting direct learning contact	42	0	0	42
Other support	75	0	16	91
Total	251	23	30	304

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£9,937,000	£10,472,000	£10,087,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£18.77	£17.84*	£16.99*
Payroll as a proportion of income	78%	67%	66%
Achievement of funding target	94%	102%	102%
Diversity of income	17%	17%	16%
Operating surplus	-£458,000	£11,000	£12,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)
ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)
Payroll – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
Diversity of income – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)
Operating surplus – Council Circular 97/35 (1996), college (1997 and 1998)
*figures amended by the Council

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	165	643	863	897	1,542	1,948
	Retention (%)	73	77	66	77	70	78
	Achievement (%)	43	38	37	35	28	29
2	Expected completions	1,083	1,240	1,416	722	1,353	1,175
	Retention (%)	71	63	77	67	64	67
	Achievement (%)	64	66	61	52	48	59
3	Expected completions	–	921	792	–	1,145	1,024
	Retention (%)	–	61	70	–	64	66
	Achievement (%)	60	58	54	50	48	52
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	10	5	–	298	176
	Retention (%)	–	70*	40	–	63	64
	Achievement (%)	0	40	0	51	37	57
Short courses	Expected completions	54	281	558	857	839	6,151
	Retention (%)	83	86	96	91	83	95
	Achievement (%)	38	32	78	28	30	83
Unknown/ unclassified	Expected completions	141	93	229	485	299	328
	Retention (%)	77	83	73	75	81	77
	Achievement (%)	17	24	59	29	47	49

Source: ISR
–ISR data not collected
*ISR data may not be reliable

FEFC Inspection Report 07/99