

Stamford College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

© FEFC 1998

You may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 6

Curriculum areas

Science, mathematics and computing 8

Business studies 13

Art and design 18

English and communication studies 23

Cross-college provision

Support for students 29

General resources 34

Quality assurance 41

Governance 47

Management 55

Conclusions 64

College statistics

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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Stamford College

East Midlands Region

Inspected January 1998

Stamford College is a general further education college situated at the southernmost point of Lincolnshire. It serves a mainly rural area. The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report. Each department or sector within the college, the senior management team and the board contributed to the report. The membership of an internal verification group was drawn from across the college including support services; an external member from outside the college was also appointed. This group moderated and verified the report. Inspectors were in general agreement with many of the findings in the self-assessment report although too many of the statements were descriptive and lacked evaluation. Some weaknesses which were identified by inspectors were not in the report. A number of weaknesses identified by the college had been remedied by the time of the inspection.

The college offers an appropriate range of courses in eight of the FEFC's 10 programme areas and has productive links with its local community. Courses in four programme areas were inspected. The standard of most teaching is high. Courses are well planned and well

managed. Attendance on most courses is good. The provision of computing facilities in the college is also good. Most of the accommodation provides a high-quality environment, with the exception of the continued use of a few inappropriate rooms. Most of the management and co-ordination of services to support students is effective but aspects of tutorial activities and learning support are in need of further development. The college has demonstrated a commitment to quality assurance and to continuous improvement. There is a cycle of team review and evaluation which is mostly effective. The implementation of quality procedures is uneven and the use of performance indicators is underdeveloped. The governance of the college is good. The corporation has an appropriate membership, effective arrangements for delegation, and sound mechanisms for setting and monitoring strategic objectives. The reporting of non-financial indicators and targets is underdeveloped. Effective management and communication are evident at all levels. The college manages its finances well and is in good financial health. The college should address: a lack of systematic market research; a number of unresolved structural and organisational issues; aspects of poorer teaching, including the application of IT in certain subject areas; some low and declining pass rates; the cramped accommodation and poor use of space in art and design.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Support for students	2
Business studies	2	General resources	2
Art and design	3	Quality assurance	2
English and communication studies	2	Governance	1
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Stamford College is a general further education college located near the point of convergence of the counties of Lincolnshire, Rutland, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. It recruits from all four counties across a wide, mainly rural, area. All full-time provision and 40 per cent of part-time courses are located on or near the main campus at Drift Road in Stamford. This location was established in 1968 on an eight acre site. The college has its own playing field and sports facilities. An adjacent swimming pool is run by the district council. An extensive network of buses provided by the college transports full-time students aged 16 to 19 to the Drift Road Campus. Part-time programmes are also provided at the Spalding Further Education Centre, opened in 1994 by the college, and at 10 other community locations. Collaborative provision is undertaken with partners to help deliver further education in remote rural areas. Since 1993 there has been extensive development of the Stamford Campus. Over £2 million has been invested in capital projects.

2 The economy of the area served by the college is largely based on service industries. Education is the second largest employer in Stamford. Engineering and manufacturing have largely disappeared from the town of Stamford, except for a large firm which manufactures generator sets. Unemployment in the region is low at approximately 4 per cent. A high proportion of those in work commute to Peterborough. Closure or contraction of bases of the Royal Air Force in the locality have reduced opportunities for local employment as well as sources of recruitment of part-time students.

3 In November 1997, there were 3,277 students at the college of whom 62 per cent were aged 19 years or over. Over 90 per cent of the total enrolments in the college are funded by

the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The numbers of such enrolments have increased by 29 per cent over the last three years.

The college employs 137 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 62 are support staff. The college chose to divide into 10 areas for self-assessment: business studies; catering; humanities; mathematics, science and technology; early years, health and social care; leisure studies; public services; hairdressing and beauty therapy; art and design; and office and information technology (IT).

4 The educational achievements of school-leavers in the area are above national and regional averages. Participation in full-time education after the age of 16 runs at over 80 per cent throughout most of the region. In 1997, 56 per cent of school-leavers remained at school for full-time education and a further 26 per cent transferred to further education colleges. Secondary education in the area is organised on a variety of models. Since 1994, 11 schools in the catchment area have developed or extended sixth forms. There is a sixth form college and three other further education colleges within daily travelling distance of Stamford. The county of Lincolnshire, from which two-thirds of the college's full-time students are drawn, has retained selective education in many districts.

5 The college is continually refining its strategic objectives and mission. The current mission seeks 'to meet the needs of individuals, employers and the wider community by providing high-quality education and training'.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in January 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Most of this information was found to be accurate. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors, working for 30 days, and an auditor working for three. They observed 54 lessons, and examined students' work and a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff, students and parents.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 70 per cent were rated good or outstanding and under 4 per cent were less than satisfactory. This profile is better than the average for all colleges inspected during 1996-97 according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 80 per cent, which is above the average of 77 per cent for all colleges according to the same report. There was lower attendance, at 73 per cent, in art and design lessons. The highest attendances at over 86 per

cent were in science, mathematics and computing classes. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	8	7	6	0	0	21
GCSE	0	5	4	0	0	9
Other vocational	4	14	4	2	0	24
Total	12	26	14	2	0	54

Curriculum Areas

Science, Mathematics and Computing

Grade 2

8 The inspection covered a range of courses in computing, IT, science and mathematics. Twenty-one lessons were inspected. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses that had been identified in the college's self-assessment. There was some variation in emphasis. They noted that some key weaknesses identified at course level were not included in the summary of the self-assessment. A number of the weaknesses are being successfully remedied by the college.

Key strengths

- well-planned and well-managed courses
- a wide variety of teaching activities
- thorough marking of students' work
- relevant work experience for all full-time students
- most pass rates at or above the average
- computing hardware and software resources

Weaknesses

- some practical computing classes too large
- insufficient use of IT in science teaching
- fluctuating retention rates
- uneven quality of working folders of some students

9 The provision is well managed. This feature is recognised in the self-assessment. The general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and vocational programmes provide an appropriate range of

entry levels and combinations. They support progression to a wide range of higher education courses and into employment. There is effective planning and regular monitoring and review of the provision including the resources required to support the study programmes. Substantial course files, compiled to a common format, support the administration of courses. They include minutes and responses of course teams to surveys of students' perceptions.

10 Courses contain a good balance of theory and practical activities as identified in the self-assessment. In science, a wide range of teaching strategies actively involves students and maintains their attention and interest. Self-assessment identified that insufficient use was made of IT in teaching; this weakness is being addressed. In computing courses, practical work emphasises the development of professional practices. Many of the assignments relate to industrial and commercial applications. Teaching booklets effectively support the independent use by students of appropriate software packages in IT courses. A few computing classes are large and teachers find difficulty in monitoring and supporting the progress of all students during the practical work. This point was not identified in the self-assessment since the report was based on previous student group sizes. In science and mathematics, schemes of work identify resources and handouts that are required. In other courses, schemes of work are less effective as planning documents. Handouts produced by the college are well structured. Generally the marking of students' work is thorough. Helpful comments are made to assist students to improve their work, as was identified in the self-assessment. All full-time students undertake relevant work experience which is recorded and assessed by college staff and employers, and considered to be a valuable aspect of their course by many students.

11 The resources are never less than adequate; in sports science and computing as

Curriculum Areas

identified in the self-assessment, they are good. Most accommodation for computing, at both Stamford and Spalding, is of high quality. The science laboratories are appropriate for the range and level of courses offered. Technicians effectively support the delivery of the teaching programmes and manage the computer networks.

12 The standard of most students' work is appropriate. The standard of students' working folders is uneven. Attendance at the lessons observed was high at 86 per cent. Systems for following up absences work well. Students' achievements in examinations are generally at or above those normally found in further education colleges, although the GCE A level pass and retention rates have fluctuated over the last three years; some show a downward trend. Pass rates that are consistently about the average include physics, applied mathematics and computing at GCE A level and GCSE mathematics. The previous high pass rates in GCE A level biology have declined to the average for further education colleges. Retention on some courses has been low in 1996-97. The pass rate on the national diploma in computer studies, at 96 per cent over the last three years, is well above average; however, the

retention rate for this course is below average. On the first diploma in IT, the pass rates, retention rates and progression to further courses have been high. Overall, students' achievements that were above the average were identified in the self-assessment; achievements and also retention rates that were below average were not.

Examples of students' achievements in science, mathematics and computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	85	66	79
	Pass rate (%)	95	91	82
GCE A level (two-year programmes)	Retention (%)	65	61	67
	Pass rate (%)	77	76	66
GCSE	Retention (%)	74	67	52
	Pass rate (%)	52	40	34
First diploma in IT	Retention (%)	84	91	92
	Pass rate (%)	71	72	89

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

13 The inspection covered courses in business studies taught on the main site of the college. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. There was a close match between most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors and by the college in its self-assessment. In a few cases, the college overstated its strengths.

Key strengths

- the high standard of some students' work
- most pass rates at or above the national average
- a well-managed curriculum
- the effective use of visual and other learning aids
- the use in class of student responses to develop knowledge
- effective learning environments in classrooms

Weaknesses

- little variety of teaching styles in some lessons
- insufficient attention to the needs of some students

14 Inspectors agreed with the college that teaching is well planned. Visual and other learning aids are effectively used to promote learning. All full-time students undertake a work placement and many are able subsequently to draw on their experience in class discussion. Teachers use student responses positively to develop their knowledge. In the better lessons teaching is brisk, students are constantly involved through skilful use of questioning techniques and their interest is maintained. In a few classes, teaching is too

slow and learning activities lack appropriate variety. These shortcomings restrict the range of skills that can be developed, and demotivate less able students. Inspectors found that, on some occasions, teaching methods result in individual students receiving insufficient attention. Questioning that is intended to check understanding is not targeted at particular students. The variety of teaching methods to help individual students was mentioned in the college's self-assessment as a strength, but inspectors did not agree fully with this finding. The variety of assignments, including group and oral work, provides effective assessment of students' progress. Many students develop independent learning skills through the use of the computing equipment and private study facilities in the resource-based learning area of the library.

15 Courses are offered at intermediate, advanced, higher and professional levels. Most students are on full-time programmes. There is an adequate range of part-time day and evening provision. The curriculum is well managed. The annual review contributes to detailed operational planning for the next session. Meetings of course and sector teams are held regularly to review the targets that have been set and to consider feedback from the college's questionnaires to students. The development plan for the sector contributes to the college's overall strategic plan. The self-assessment identified some weaknesses in industrial links. Inspectors found that some developments were taking place in response to the training needs of local businesses. Some courses were run on employers' premises.

16 The majority of lessons are taught in a suite of rooms. These have carpets, curtains and a high standard of decoration which contribute positively to the establishment of an effective learning environment. Students make good use of the computer hardware and software which are of industrial standard.

Curriculum Areas

The strength of good facilities for specialist computing was recognised by the college in its self-assessment and confirmed by inspectors.

17 Students generally have a good understanding of business concepts. Many of them demonstrate an effective range of interpersonal and other skills that have a vocational relevance. Most students' files are well organised, in good condition, and contain an appropriate range of material. Students on two-year programmes, in particular, display a high level of self-confidence. Overall, students' work is of an appropriate standard. Most pass rates are at or above the national average for further education colleges. Some low pass rates and poor retention on GCE A level are the exception. Only 48 per cent of students in the 16 to 19 age range passed the examination in 1997 and results for the one-year evening class have been poor for the last two years.

Examples of students' achievements in business studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level (two-year programme)	Retention (%)	55	87	60
	Pass rate (%)	85	95	48
GCE A level (one-year part-time programme)	Retention (%)	59	60	47
	Pass rate (%)	50	32	29
BTEC national diploma 16 to 19 year olds	Retention (%)	76	65	90
	Pass rate (%)	94	94	97
BTEC national diploma over 19 year olds	Retention (%)	88	33	82
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	100
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	80	74	81
	Pass rate (%)	80	71	82

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 3

18 Inspectors observed 13 teaching lessons that covered the range of courses in art and design. They agreed with most of the college's overall judgements but noted that the report did not identify a number of the specific weaknesses. This sector of the college has been affected by staff changes since the self-assessment was written.

Key strengths

- most lessons well planned
- the effective teaching of basic drawing skills
- high pass rates at GCE A and national diploma level
- a good range of courses with opportunity for progression
- the successful integration of key skills teaching with vocational studies
- much good equipment

Weaknesses

- a lack of challenge in some lessons
- some cramped accommodation and poor management of use of space
- low pass rates at general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate
- low retention rates on GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate courses
- the writing of some assignment briefs
- some styles of assessment

19 There has been a rapid growth in the provision of art and design over the last few years. The college now offers a good range of full-time courses. The GCE A level provision has been extended to include textiles and media studies. The recent addition of a post-GCE A level foundation studies course provides an

opportunity for progression for students at all levels. Students who have the appropriate qualifications can progress to the new higher national diploma in graphic design, a franchised course from Nottingham Trent University. There are good links with the university, with joint development meetings and workshops for staff and students. Overall, a low proportion of students choose to progress to higher level and higher education courses. This issue was not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

20 Most lessons are well planned and well structured with clear aims and written briefs. Staff have good industrial experience which they use well in their teaching. The development of key skills is integrated with aspects of vocational studies, particularly at GNVQ intermediate level. In the better lessons students work with sustained concentration. Most students are enthusiastic about their work. In the few weaker lessons, students were not sufficiently challenged. They showed a casual attitude to work and chattered among themselves. Inspectors agreed with the college's view that there is insufficient consistency among teachers in writing assignment briefs and assessing achievement across and within courses. The self-assessment report identified these weaknesses. Students are assessed at regular intervals. In the best practice they are given full and supportive written and verbal feedback. Written work is carefully corrected for errors of fact and spelling. However, staff teaching on GNVQ intermediate courses give variable levels of feedback to their students as well as insufficient written assessment.

21 The rapid growth of the area has put pressure on resources. The college has converted available accommodation to house the growth in student numbers, but some accommodation is cramped and there is poor management of space. Photography is in a separate building away from the main site which makes it difficult to establish an identity and professional studio ethos for the subject.

Curriculum Areas

There are good facilities for photography, three-dimensional work and graphic design. The best student work is displayed in the public areas of the college. The need to develop appropriate accommodation for art and design was stated in the college's self-assessment.

22 A policy on drawing has been introduced which sets out minimum standards for all full-time courses. Students are beginning to benefit from the structured use of life and observation drawing. In graphic design, students are required to develop design ideas on paper using basic drawing skills before they are encouraged to progress to specialist computers. Students do not develop the use of sketch and note books with sufficient thoroughness nor at times do they research source material with sufficient rigour. As a result, ideas are not fully developed and the quality of work is not sufficiently high. In photography both the written theory and the practical work are of a good standard. The self-assessment report noted the strength of the pass rates at GCE A and national diploma level. Inspectors confirmed the high pass rates at GCE A level, and noted the particularly good results in photography and art and craft, where passes at grades A to C are well above national averages for further education colleges. The pass rates

on national diploma courses are in line with national averages but those for GNVQ intermediate were below average in the last two years. The low retention rates on GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate courses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Examples of students' achievements in art and design, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level art and design, art and craft and photography	Retention (%)	85	65	64
	Pass rate (%)	90	96	88
National diplomas general art and design and general design	Retention (%)	100	93	90
	Pass rate (%)	94	83	91
GNVQ intermediate art and design	Retention (%)	72	68	75
	Pass rate (%)	92	65	67

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English and Communication Studies

Grade 2

23 The inspection covered English and communication studies courses at GCSE and GCE A level. Ten lessons were observed. The college's self-assessment identified most of the strengths and some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- pass rates in English mostly above national average
- well-managed and appropriately varied teaching
- the responsiveness of staff to the needs of individual students
- effective co-operation amongst staff
- a good working environment

Weaknesses

- a decline in pass rates for communication studies at GCE A level
- insufficient detail on teaching methods in lesson documentation
- a lack of sustained purpose in some classes
- no coherent plan for developing the use of IT skills

24 Courses are generally well managed and most external assessment procedures are effectively implemented. As identified in the self-assessment report, inspectors found that staff work well together in planning courses and developing resources. Part-time staff are well integrated and make a major contribution. Schemes of work and lesson plans clearly indicate what is to be taught but lack precision in indicating the methods to be used. Students' attendance and progress are efficiently recorded and regularly monitored.

25 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is appropriately varied and effective. Most lessons are carefully and logically planned and provide students with good opportunities to contribute. There is effective use of a variety of teaching aids and resources. Videos are well selected and handouts are stimulating and well structured. Most teachers make a conscious effort to provide a purposeful learning experience. They know their students well and respond to the needs of those who require additional help to overcome particular difficulties. Most teachers ensure that students have a clear understanding of the tasks set. Written work is marked promptly and thoroughly; useful comments are placed in the main body of the answer, as well as helpful summarising comments. In many classes, students are given clear guidance on the techniques and skills needed to answer questions. In some classes a strong work rate is not maintained. Students are not given clear enough instructions nor do the tasks fill the time that is available for study. Teachers do not give enough attention to the different speeds at which students are able to complete work. The self-assessment report recognises that inadequate strategies exist to enable students to use and develop their IT skills.

26 Most students, particularly at GCE A level, have a very positive attitude to their studies. Levels of motivation at GCSE are more varied but many students work with interest and commitment at this level. Students generally work well together and are prepared to make mature and effective contributions to group and discussion work. In one GCE A level English class students rehearsed and performed rival interpretations of a scene from *The Taming of the Shrew* to emphasise alternative views of the behaviour of the main characters. Much written work reflects students' interest in their courses, though the quality of ideas sometimes exceeds

Curriculum Areas

the capacity to express them. There is insufficient use of wordprocessing skills, although in communication studies students' project work benefits considerably from the application of these skills.

27 The college's self-assessment recognises the above average results for GCSE. It does not refer to the much lower pass rate achieved by the small number of part-time GCE A level English students in 1997. In courses in communication studies at GCE A level there has been a substantial decline in the pass rate between 1995 and 1997; the students' performance on the first examination paper posed a particular problem.

28 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that students and staff benefit from the attractive and well-equipped working environment. The two main teaching rooms dedicated to the subject are effectively used. A range of useful resources has been assembled and a stimulating environment developed through display material which is shared between team members. The library is well stocked for much of the literature that is studied but, more recently, certain authors, whose work includes set texts, are under represented. There is an inadequate bookstock for the

language work on the English course at GCE A level. Some books have been relocated in specialist rooms; at certain times they are not accessible.

Examples of students' achievements in English and communication studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level English (two-year programme)	Retention (%)	56	68	73
	Pass rate (%)	92	87	90
GCE A level communication studies (two-year programme)	Retention (%)	61	48	75
	Pass rate (%)	86	67	44
GCSE English	Retention (%)	84	76	71
	Pass rate (%)	53	46	62

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

29 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses given in its report. During the inspection they noted that a significant number of the weaknesses had been rectified; they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- an efficient information and guidance service
- a comprehensive and consistent induction programme
- early screening of students to identify learning support needs
- a comprehensive tutorial programme for full-time students
- effective services for careers guidance
- effective management and co-ordination of student services
- counselling and personal advice service
- strong links with local schools

Weaknesses

- lack of consistency in the delivery and monitoring of tutorial activities
- low take-up of records of achievement
- take-up and delivery of learning support
- provision of services to part-time students

30 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strength of the range of student services. Inspectors found the management and co-ordination to be effective. An efficient information and guidance service is provided for prospective students with particularly strong links with local schools. The provision of responsive counselling and personal advice is valued by students. Although a range of services is provided for part-time

students, especially at the Spalding Centre, there is concern at the low level of usage. The self-assessment report identified a lack of consistency in induction programmes. Subsequent action taken by the college has ensured that all students are provided with a comprehensive and consistent programme. Arrangements were effectively implemented in September 1997 to ensure that students who enrol late receive adequate guidance and that those who need to transfer to another course can do so without any difficulty. Subsequent feedback from students and staff showed high levels of satisfaction with these arrangements.

31 A comprehensive tutorial programme exists for full-time students. A handbook provides detailed guidance on the content and conduct of the programme. A study of tutorial record books shows wide variations in attendance at tutorials by students. Not all tutors keep thorough records. The inappropriate timetabling of some tutorials lowers the levels of attendance. A small proportion of tutorial time is being used for other purposes, for example for assignment work. According to students there are variations in practice on tutorials, although all tutors are readily available and respond to students' problems. A major aim of the tutorial system is to give sufficient opportunity to students to develop their record of achievement but less than 25 per cent of full-time students leave the college with a completed record. These weaknesses relating to the tutorial programme were not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

32 There is an effective careers guidance service. A specialist careers adviser is a full-time employee of the careers service based at the college and partly funded by the college. There is a drop-in careers library and computer software available for students. A team of specially trained tutors provides a programme of advice and assistance specifically designed for students applying for higher education.

Cross-college Provision

33 The take-up and delivery of learning support is not fully effective. During induction the learning support needs of full-time students are identified through an efficient screening process. The needs of part-time students are identified by an examination of coursework and discussion with students. Course tutors are involved in screening but actual assessments of need are made by learning support staff. Many students have been identified as requiring learning support. In the first term of 1997-98, 66 per cent of those identified had participated, which is a significant increase over the previous year. There is a wide variation in the acceptance and use of learning support by students. Most learning support is offered at the learning centre. Records are kept of student attendance and activities undertaken. Staff development days have been held for all staff this year in order that they become familiar with the learning support available. The college recognises that it is undesirable for students to refuse support at an early stage in their course. Guidelines for delivery of support are unclear. Teachers sharing classes do not give enough time to joint planning. The key skills required by students have been identified by most course tutors. Specialised support services from external agencies are used where relevant.

General Resources

Grade 2

34 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses that had been identified by the college. A number of weaknesses identified by the college had been remedied by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- improved accommodation since the last inspection
- effective and efficient management of the accommodation

- the quality and availability of the computing facilities
- the Spalding Centre
- the use of the resource-based learning centre

Weaknesses

- the continuing use of some inappropriate teaching accommodation
- unsuitable social facilities for adult students

35 The college undertakes a regular revision of its accommodation strategy which incorporates an updated long-term maintenance plan based, in part, on a recent condition survey. The accommodation strategy supports the aims and objectives set out in the strategic plan 1997 to 2000. The continuing use of some inappropriate accommodation has been identified in the strategy. The improvements that are required are listed in order of priority.

36 Inspectors agreed with the college that over the last few years a series of capital building projects have greatly improved the quality of the learning environment. New student services accommodation, resource-based learning, and classroom facilities have been built. The number of demountable classrooms has been reduced. A large car park and a modern entrance area have been developed.

As identified in the self-assessment, the accommodation is effectively and efficiently used. A set of rooms with adjacent staff accommodation is generally provided for a curriculum area. The college recognises that provision for art and design remains in need of such an arrangement. A specification for staff work spaces has been devised and is being implemented; the college recognises the need to complete this development. Work on areas that still require to be upgraded is scheduled for completion by the year 2000.

Cross-college Provision

37 There are appropriate refectory services, recreational areas and sports facilities which meet the requirements of the majority of students. The need for suitable social facilities for adults has been identified. People with physical disabilities are consulted regularly and improvements have been made in response to their suggestions. New buildings and minor works projects carried out over the last three years have increased access to college accommodation from 66 per cent to 85 per cent for people with physical disabilities.

38 The provision of computing facilities at Stamford is good, as noted in the self-assessment. The computer centre is a large open-plan area which houses 110 computers. There are four teaching areas and one open access area with approximately 20 machines in each area. Although the centre is on the fifth floor there is suitable access for people with physical disabilities. Additional computer suites are available in the library and the resource-based learning centre. All of the computers are on a common network. Students have access to software packages of a commercial standard for work on wordprocessing, spreadsheets, databases, and desktop publishing. Relevant CD-ROMs and access to the internet are available. Appropriate software is used to prevent students accessing unsuitable internet sites. Students have their own file storage space and a monthly paper allowance. Further computing suites provide specialist facilities for students on business, computing, engineering and art courses.

39 The library has been extended to include learning support and resource-based learning areas. Space in the main library is effectively divided between provision for bookstocks and study areas for students. There have been many recent purchases to support curriculum changes but some of the older books are not suited to the needs of current courses. Students have access to the library catalogue which has been computerised. Students on many full-time

courses are required by their teachers to undertake work set in the resource-based learning area. A learning assistant monitors students' attendance and helps them to complete their work.

40 The Spalding Centre provides a pleasant learning environment for the mainly adult students who use the centre. Students with physical disabilities have full access to its facilities. The centre is in good decorative order and is equipped with modern furniture. It has five general purpose classrooms and two computer suites. The computers are on a common network and students have access to the same commercial standard software packages as students in Stamford. This provision was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. A social area is equipped with vending machines.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

41 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance identified in the self-assessment report. However, some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified by inspectors which were not mentioned in the report.

Key strengths

- the monitoring of the effectiveness of quality assurance systems
- published quality standards for all areas
- an effective system of team review and evaluation
- arrangements for student feedback
- internal and external validation of self-assessment
- appraisal for all staff

Cross-college Provision

Weaknesses

- partial integration of self-assessment procedures
- underdeveloped use of performance indicators
- variability in the implementation of procedures
- failure within self-assessment to make judgements explicit

42 The mission of the college, the strategic plan and the review and development of quality assurance systems demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement. Managers are active in monitoring, reviewing and reporting on the outcomes of quality assurance systems. The policy and procedures for quality assurance have been approved by the corporation and the academic board. The board has defined responsibilities for reviewing the quality of provision and checking on compliance with quality procedures and the achievement of standards. Standards are defined for all areas of activity and published in the student handbook. It is against these standards that the monitoring of quality assurance is undertaken. The academic board formally receives each report together with the sector's response which indicates actions taken to address issues that have been identified.

43 The college's self-assessment recognises as a strength the systematic review process carried out by staff teams. Inspectors agreed that there is a generally effective cycle of team review and evaluation which applies to all the college's activities and leads to action-planning. A clear and comprehensive quality assurance handbook defines procedures. Each team produces an operational plan which has to address any issues identified during the previous cycle. All meetings are minuted and actions to be taken are assigned to named individuals with timescales for implementation. Each team keeps a file to provide evidence that quality

procedures are being followed and that standards are being met. Student feedback is obtained through questionnaires, which are distributed twice a year. Action is taken to address issues which students raise. Parental surveys are also undertaken. User surveys obtain feedback on a sampling basis about the services provided by business support areas. Teams undertake a variety of monitoring activities at specific points in the year. There are unannounced checks on compliance with quality standards. Reports are sent to managers noting the follow-up action that is to be taken. The inspection team agreed with the college, that in curriculum areas, the rigour with which quality procedures are implemented is variable. The college acknowledges that the use of performance indicators to support quality assurance is also underdeveloped.

44 Processes and procedures for self-assessment have yet to become fully integrated. In April and May 1997, each department or sector, the senior management team and the board produced an analysis identifying those quality indicators which were met, the areas for improvement and actions still needed. The college did not initially express these in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Many of the statements were descriptive and lacked evaluation. Judgements within self-assessment were not explicit. Directors proposed grades in discussion with managers. The self-assessment process was subjected to verification. Grades were moderated through an internal verification group with a membership that was drawn from across the college including support services, and an external member who is a senior manager from another Lincolnshire college. Statements made in the report were audited by the group and evidence was checked. The verified self-assessment report was approved by the corporation in July 1997. The college then produced a supplementary 'pre-inspection report' and summarised the strengths and weaknesses in that report. The college intends

Cross-college Provision

to produce a self-assessment report every two years. In the intervening years, the established system of review will continue to inform strategic and operational plans.

45 There are clear procedures for the quality assurance of collaborative provision. The quality of this provision is monitored centrally. There is a requirement for review and self-assessment to be undertaken by the partner organisations. The system includes classroom observation and student feedback. Reviews of the quality of the provision are fed into the college system for quality assurance.

46 Appraisal for all staff, including teaching, support and agency staff, is clearly linked to the identification of development needs and incorporates the observation of work undertaken. The college recognised this practice as a strength and inspectors agreed with this conclusion. Staff development is closely linked to strategic objectives. At the time of the inspection the college was well advanced towards being assessed for the Investor in People award during 1998.

Governance

Grade 1

47 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, and the identification of the many strengths. They considered that most of the areas for improvement that were identified had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Governors are aware of the only significant remaining area of weakness and are developing strategies to remedy the situation.

Key strengths

- appropriate corporation membership
- delegation to an appropriate range of committees
- independent and effective clerking of the corporation's work

- clear and comprehensive financial information to support governors
- effective and informed participation by governors in strategic debate
- the setting and monitoring of strategic objectives

Weaknesses

- the reporting of non-financial performance indicators and targets

48 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.

49 The corporation has an appropriate membership. An effective and open search practice to fill vacancies on the board includes public advertisements which provide full information to applicants. The openness of the search process is enhanced by external representation on the search committee. These strengths were recognised in the self-assessment. An appropriate set of committees has been established by the corporation. Each has clear and comprehensive terms of reference. Corporation business has been effectively delegated to the committees. All governors receive comprehensive monthly briefings that cover: strategic issues; information relating to their monitoring and compliance responsibilities; finance and staffing; and other matters of general interest. To stimulate debate, papers for consideration by the corporation pose questions for members. Managers are often in attendance for part of the meetings of the audit committee in order to provide information.

50 The clerk is an external appointment; clerking for the corporation is effective. Corporation business is well served by these

Cross-college Provision

arrangements. Agendas are carefully planned. There is an effective approach to the time management of meetings. Minutes very clearly convey the discussions that are held and the subsequent outcomes.

51 Self-assessment is developing.

Performance indicators are being established for the corporation's work. The corporation has a register of interests and a set of standing orders. There is a code of conduct which the governors have plans to update to reflect current best practice. The corporation has taken the view that the principal is the only senior postholder.

52 The corporation has a successful record of strategic development. As the college self-assessment recognises, corporation members are kept well informed by senior management and are able to participate effectively in strategic debates. Sufficient time is allocated in meetings and through the use of workshops to develop members' understanding of and contribution to the development of strategy. The corporation recognises that it should do more to maintain effective contact with curriculum managers, staff and students. To improve contact, the corporation has reconvened the consultative committees for staff and students. It also intends that curriculum managers will have the opportunity to present their work to future meetings of the board.

53 There are sound mechanisms for the assignment of strategic objectives and the monitoring of their achievement. Individual objectives have been assigned to the principal and senior managers within a system of management performance which is reported on biannually to the corporation. These mechanisms are appropriately noted within the self-assessment.

54 The board recognises, within its own self-assessment, the need to pay more attention to the scrutiny of non-financial indicators of college performance. The reporting of non-financial performance indicators and targets is

underdeveloped. Although members were promptly informed of lower than expected GCE A level results in 1996-97, the corporation has not yet received comprehensive information that will enable it to consider fully the overall achievements of students in that year. A set of performance indicators has been agreed but not fully reported on for 1996-97. The indicators have not been placed in the context of college targets, although progress towards operational targets is reviewed every six months. Reports on students' achievements are planned to be presented at corporation meetings in the future.

Management

Grade 2

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

Cross-referencing of action points to the strategic plan was useful. In some cases weaknesses had been remedied since the self-assessment was written, but it is not yet possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions that have been taken. A few of the weaknesses identified by the inspectors were not included in the college's self-assessment.

Key strengths

- a clear and useful strategic plan
- effective direction and management
- good communication at all levels
- the efficient and effective deployment of staff
- productive community links and external liaison
- comprehensive unit costing of programmes
- comprehensive monthly management accounts
- strong financial health

Cross-college Provision

Weaknesses

- rigorous target-setting and monitoring of performance
- lack of systematic market research for part-time courses
- some unresolved organisational issues
- no review of audit needs assessment in 1997-98

56 There is a clear and useful strategic plan. Detailed development and operational plans are informed by a series of sector meetings. The need for the development of a more rigorous approach to target-setting and monitoring of performance has been recognised by the college in its self-assessment report. The college is introducing further performance indicators at course team level. The college is also seeking more involvement by employers and other representatives in the community in the strategic planning process. Enrolments and retention are effectively monitored on a monthly basis. The units that have been earned based on the funding agreement tariff have exceeded target in the last three years despite increased competition from other schools and colleges.

57 The college is effectively directed and managed at senior level. The senior management team comprises the principal, three directors of faculty and directors of finance, corporate services and operations and development. Following a major review and reorganisation in 1996 further readjustment took place in 1997. However, there are some continuing weaknesses in structure and organisation and in the effectiveness of middle management; certain aspects of these weaknesses were recognised in the self-assessment report. The principal reviews operational performance with the senior management team on a termly basis. This process is being extended to middle management. A development programme for middle managers has been started to support

them in their roles. Three senior managers act as mentors to staff moving into managerial posts.

58 Communication is good. A deliberate attempt has been made to extend further the consultative management style which was recognised by the college in the self-assessment report as needing improvement. There is a schedule of regular management and staff meetings; minutes and briefings are circulated subsequently to all staff rooms. The staff consultative committee has been reconvened and the student consultative committee re-formed.

59 A range of employment contracts contributes to the efficient and effective deployment of staff. Agency staff are also employed. Timetables of academic staff are monitored on a termly basis to ensure full utilisation is made of the lecturer hours available. Comprehensive unit costing of courses is used to inform staffing and resource decisions.

60 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college's financial health is strong against a forecast average level of funding for 1997-98 of £15.29 per unit. This figure is well below the median for all colleges of £17.00 per unit. Wide-ranging financial objectives have been set in support of the strategic plan. Monthly management accounts are prepared in good time by the finance team and circulated to senior managers. They are exceptionally full. They contain: an income and expenditure statement and balance sheet, both of which include a forecast; a statement of source and application of funds; a cashflow forecast up to two years ahead; financial performance indicators; and a statement of borrowing limits. A comprehensive commentary accompanies the management accounts. The college has clear budget procedures which are effectively applied.

Cross-college Provision

A reallocation of resources in the current year's internal audit plan was not reflected in a revised audit needs assessment for the college.

61 The strengths of external links are recognised by the college. Inspectors identified productive links with the community and effective external liaison activities.

The principal plays a key role in maintaining and developing the profile of the college. Good relationships exist with Lincolnshire Training and Enterprise Council and Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise. Outward collaborative partnerships enable the college to work in remote rural areas as well as to increase the volume of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This collaborative provision is effectively managed by the college. The pre-uniformed services programme provide good examples of effective external links. The principal is a member of the Lincolnshire Post-16 Forum, which consists of county colleges, the local authority and schools.

62 The development of part-time courses is not informed by systematic market research. This shortcoming was not recognised in the self-assessment. The college is working to establish more effective links between market research and business development.

A marketing calendar and an employer database are being compiled. The marketing manager regularly visits local schools. The management information system is adequate. Further development of the system is needed to assist planning and decision-making. The college acknowledged this issue and further changes and associated training are planned. Most staff rooms have access through networked computers to some information on students.

63 Following lengthy consultation with staff and a process of self-assessment, the policy on equal opportunities issues and the code of practice have undergone extensive revision. An action plan is at an early stage of

implementation. It has been formally adopted by the board of the corporation. There is an intention to include student representatives on the equal opportunities committee.

Conclusions

64 Although processes and procedures for self-assessment have yet to become fully integrated within the cycle of college life, inspectors were in general agreement with many of the findings in the self-assessment. The report did not clearly identify all the evidence and observations on which overall judgements were based. Some weaknesses were identified by inspectors which were not in the report; a number of weaknesses identified by the college had been remedied by the time of the inspection. Inspectors awarded higher grades in one curriculum area and one cross-college area than the college had claimed in its self-assessment report.

65 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	38
19-24 years	10
25+ years	52
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	35
Intermediate	23
Advanced	39
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	256	525	24
Engineering	49	21	2
Business	201	638	26
Hotel and catering	123	79	6
Health and community care	299	218	16
Art and design	145	22	5
Humanities	139	492	19
Basic education	0	70	2
Total	1,212	2,065	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	53	11	11	75
Supporting direct learning contact	11	0	0	11
Other support	51	0	0	51
Total	115	11	11	137

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£4,440,000	£4,601,000	£4,654,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£16.75	£16.42	£17.03
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	71%	66%
Achievement of funding target	102%	103%	112%
Diversity of income	22%	20%	30%
Operating surplus	£213,000	£168,000	£244,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	181	204	147
	Average point score per entry	4.5	4.3	3.7
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	129	157	181
	Percentage achieving qualification	89%	88%+	85%
	Position in tables	top third+	top third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	257	151
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	55%+	66%
	Position in tables	*	middle 10%	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

+college figures. The DfEE tables published overestimated data

FEFC Inspection Report 45/98

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
May 1998**