

Totton College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Totton College

South East Region

Inspected January 2000

Totton College is a sixth form college in Hampshire. The self-assessment report which the college prepared before inspection was the first it had produced on all aspects of the college. It drew upon findings from the existing quality assurance procedures. The report was comprehensive. It identified strengths and weaknesses and included action plans. The report provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. The college provided a valuable update to the report immediately prior to the inspection. The self-assessment process involved all staff and governors. A consultant from another college gave an external view on the quality of the report. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the report but considered that some had been given insufficient weight. They also found strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified. They considered that one curriculum area had been under-graded and one over-graded. In one cross-college area, inspectors awarded one grade lower than that given by the college.

The college provides courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. It also offers a large number of community and adult education courses not funded by the FEFC. Provision was inspected in four programme areas, including basic skills, as well as all cross-college areas. Since the last inspection, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, reflected in the profile of lesson observation grades awarded, which is much better than the national average. The

college has also carried out considerable improvements to its quality assurance arrangements. Students' achievements are often above national averages. Retention rates on some courses, particularly at level 3, are sometimes below national averages for the sector and the college has introduced some student support measures to improve them. It continues to offer good levels of support to an increasingly diverse range of students, although inadequate support is provided for some part-time students. The college has improved its general resources through judicious investment in IT and improvements to accommodation. Governors are fully committed to furthering the success of the college. They monitor carefully the college's financial position, the educational standards achieved by students, and the continuous improvement of the quality of provision. Since the last inspection, the management of the college has improved. Management is open and consultative. Communications within the college are good. Planning is robust. The college has successfully continued to develop its work with the community and with business. The college should ensure the improvement of: student retention rates; students' take-up of learning support; arrangements for providing part-time students with learning support; self-assessment by some teams; room utilisation; the link between appraisal targets and strategic objectives; implementation and monitoring of equal opportunities; the self-assessment of governance; and compliance with published guidance on transitional arrangements for governing bodies.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and computing	3	Support for students	2
Art and design	2	General resources	2
English and modern languages	2	Quality assurance	2
Sociology, history and law	2	Governance	2
Basic skills	2	Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Totton College was established in 1969. Totton is a small town with a population of 35,000. Well served by motorway links, it is the largest urban area in the New Forest. It is only 5 miles to the west of Southampton centre and near to the industrial centres of the Solent and Fawley. The college attracts students from Totton, the nearby Waterside area, Southampton, Romsey and increasingly, the Salisbury area. The economic profile of these areas and the social composition of the student population are very mixed. There is above average unemployment in some areas. The Redbridge ward, where the college has one of its community centres, has an unemployment rate of 7.4%, the second highest number of lone parent income support claimants and the ninth highest level of income support in the south east of England. To the west of Totton, some modern residential areas have unemployment rates well below the national average.

2 The college's mission is to provide first chance, post-16 education to full-time students and to provide second chance, post-19 education to full-time and part-time adults. There is a broad curriculum. Of the college's full-time students, approximately half follow general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses, whilst the remainder are on vocational courses and programmes for students with learning difficulties. There is a range of complementary courses and activities for full-time students with a strong emphasis on sports. The college works with a wide range of local authority secondary and special schools in Hampshire and Southampton. The local environment is highly competitive in terms of the recruitment of young people. In the immediate area there is a large general further education college, a tertiary college and three other sixth form colleges. There are also several former grant maintained schools in south west Hampshire; some became 11 to 18 schools as recently as 1997.

3 In pursuit of its aim to serve the wider community, the college also enrolls large numbers of part-time students, in total, there were around 2,500 at the time of the inspection. Last year, the college successfully bid for higher national diploma and certificate work, directly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The college now offers community courses from pre-entry to higher education levels, using 20 sites. It is much involved with outreach work, including externally funded projects. In one project, residents in a home for the elderly use laptop computers to produce graphic and artistic displays. In another, the college assisted a local school to fund the installation of a computer suite which is used for a variety of training, including holiday schools for literacy through information technology (IT).

4 The college is committed to a partnership approach to providing services to the community. The local recreation centre, a community nursery, a sports club and the local careers service headquarters are all based at the college's main campus. The college is a member of the Southern Strategic Partnership, Southampton Learning Alliance and the Hampshire Sixth Form Colleges' Partnership. It also facilitates an area partnership by bringing together organisations from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The college has sought to form close links with local business and has developed a business training services unit on a local business park. It has led a University for Industry project, collaborating with all Hampshire colleges.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in January 2000. Inspectors had previously analysed the college's self-assessment report and information provided by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements taken from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data, in the same format, on students' achievements for 1999, using FEFC-approved computer software. The data were checked against college registers and awarding body pass lists and were largely accurate.

6 The inspection was carried out by 10 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 40 days. Inspectors observed 65 lessons, including four tutorials. They read students' work and a range of college documents. Meetings were held with students, governors, managers, teachers and support staff.

Inspectors spoke with representatives of external organisations, such as the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 83% were rated good or outstanding. None was less than satisfactory. These figures are well above the national averages recorded for colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	17	3	0	0	24
GCSE	2	6	0	0	0	8
GNVQ	2	3	2	0	0	7
Access to higher education	1	3	0	0	0	4
Other vocational	1	2	1	0	0	4
Other	2	11	5	0	0	18
Total (No.)	12	42	11	0	0	65
Total (%)	18	65	17	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Attendance ranged from 80% in basic skills to 86% in art and design.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Totton College	9.8	83
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Computing

Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in mathematics, computing and IT. The self-assessment reports of the two departments were detailed and inspectors agreed with the majority of strengths and weaknesses identified.

Key strengths

- good planning of teaching and learning
- a wide range of courses, including opportunities for learning support
- good curriculum organisation and management
- rigorous monitoring of students' performance and attendance
- students' high achievements in GCSE mathematics, consistently above national averages

Weaknesses

- poor and declining retention rates on GCE A level mathematics and computing courses
- declining percentages of successful advanced level students
- little use of computers in mathematics teaching

10 The college has expanded the range of computing and IT courses in response to local demand. It has recently introduced courses leading to the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) in IT at intermediate and advanced levels, and GCE A level in IT. Other courses include GCE A level computing and GCSE IT. Mathematics courses include GCSE and GCE A level in a modular form, with a wide range of options, and further mathematics at GCE A level. Mathematics is managed by a separate department from that responsible for computing and IT. Both departments are well

managed. Leadership is good and teamwork is effective. Teachers meet regularly to participate in decision-making about the content and organisation of the curriculum.

11 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that teaching is good and some lessons are outstanding. Lessons are well planned and teachers communicate their aims clearly to students. Mathematics teachers make good use of a range of equipment. GCE A level mathematics students often use graphical calculators. In one outstanding further mathematics lesson, students used experimental mechanics equipment to model the behaviour of a complex theme park circular ride. The teacher used a graphical calculator linked to an overhead projector display to plot graphs associated with students' models. These were then discussed by the class. In contrast, teachers make little use of computers and specialist software. GCSE mathematics teaching, however, is lively. Students engage in investigation which challenges them to think and explore appropriate mathematical concepts. On GNVQ courses, students carry out key skills activities which are linked meaningfully to the vocational content of their course. In an outstanding GNVQ advanced IT lesson, students analysed results of a survey on the use of IT in key skills application of number activities. Their findings will be used by the college and students valued this practical application. Teachers of computing and IT monitor students' practical work carefully. Although teachers often use an appropriate variety of methods, in some lessons insufficient attention is paid to students' individual needs. In some instances, teachers miss opportunities to build on learning covered in previous lessons and they spend too much time on exposition.

12 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that students' GCSE mathematics results are a strength. They have been above national averages for the sector over the last three years and significantly so in 1997 and 1998. Retention rates are similar to the

Curriculum Areas

national average. Students' achievements on GCE A level courses are often above the national average but in some years they have been poor. For example, the students' examination results in GCE A level mathematics were particularly good in 1997 and 1999, but poor in 1998. Results in GCE A level computing were well above the national average in 1997 and 1998, but were extremely poor in 1999. The pass rate and retention rate on the GCE A level further mathematics course have been consistently high, at 100%, but enrolments are low. Students' retention rates on all other GCE A level courses and on the GCSE IT course are poor. In effect, fewer than half the students who enrol on GCE A level courses gain a qualification. The college identifies this weakness in its self-assessment report and proposes action to rectify it. At the time of the inspection, the retention rate of students on mathematics courses was improving. Students' attendance is closely monitored and action is taken to deal with absenteeism. Students are set performance targets and their progress towards meeting these is closely monitored. A variety of support is provided to students experiencing difficulties.

13 Teachers are well qualified. Classrooms for mathematics teaching, in a relatively new building, are of good quality. Specialist rooms for computing and IT are appropriately equipped and their design allows them to be used flexibly for a variety of learning activities. There are reliable computer networks and adequate technician support. All rooms contain colourful displays but staff miss opportunities to include students' work in these. The learning centre has a small but adequate stock of relevant books. Books and magazines are also held in the departments, but are not centrally catalogued. However, the mathematics department has a staff workroom. This has an associated area for students, with computers and study spaces, where students receive informal and effective support. Computing and IT students report that they have adequate access to IT facilities.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics (grades A to C)	2	Number of starters	338	300	268
		Retention (%)	78	70	82
		Achievement (%)	56	56	47
GCSE IT	2	Number of starters	23	37	21
		Retention (%)	65	70	62
		Achievement (%)	40	42	38
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	+	+	13
		Retention (%)	+	+	92
		Achievement (%)	+	+	50
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	48	55	46
		Retention (%)	94	71	57
		Achievement (%)	95	73	96
GCE A level further mathematics	3	Number of starters	6	+	5
		Retention (%)	100	+	100
		Achievement (%)	100	+	100
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	18	35	29
		Retention (%)	94	57	62
		Achievement (%)	82	94	61

*Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
+course not running*

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

14 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in art and design, covering general education and vocational courses. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the weaknesses in students retention rates had been understated.

Key strengths

- well-planned curriculum to meet students' needs
- well-planned and stimulating teaching
- students' achievements on most courses above national averages
- good specialist resources

Weaknesses

- poor and declining student retention rates on advanced level courses
- some inappropriate use of accommodation

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the department is successful and resourceful in meeting the demands of the local community. Courses range in level from 1 to 4. They include an appropriate range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects and vocational courses. Modular and linear courses are available to meet the varying needs and interests of students. Through the European Social Fund, graphic design and interior decoration courses are successfully offered for retraining the long-term unemployed. Access courses to higher education are popular with adults returning to education. The curriculum includes talks by regular guest speakers who are visual arts practitioners and visits to national and international exhibitions. Students benefit from assignments for real clients, such as the design of publicity materials for the college. Staff meet regularly and contribute effectively to college planning.

Whenever possible, the timetable is arranged to allow students extended periods of practical work and they use these well.

16 Teaching is good. The students engage in exciting projects which hold their interest, develop their skills and extend their knowledge. The themes and topics chosen for assignments are relevant and demanding. Teachers plan and use a suitable variety of methods, including whole-class teaching, individual assignments and group projects. Students are encouraged to work responsibly on their own. Life drawing is regarded as fundamental for fine art teaching. On a GNVQ advanced course, students learned about the historical significance of the painter Manet and, using different media, devised their own adaptation of his painting, 'Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe'. Students were introduced to this exciting project through a video portraying nineteenth century Parisian society. Extensive questioning by the teacher, to check students' understanding and to develop the lesson further, led to a fruitful discussion about modern painting techniques and philosophies, comparing them with those of the time of Manet. Access students produced stimulating work based on the multiple imagery of Andy Warhol and the pop art influence of Roy Lichtenstein. Students are encouraged to further their understanding of tasks through trial and error experimentation. Discerning use is made of video as a teaching aid, and teachers constantly question students to assess their understanding. Teachers have clear expectations of the standards of notes they require of students. In some instances, theory lessons, in which the teacher gives an exposition or the students engage in written work, take place in practical rooms which are unsuitable for these activities. As recognised in the self-assessment report, relationships between teachers and students are good and students appreciate the efforts made on their behalf by staff. Teachers sometimes failed to insist that students remove outdoor clothing and wear protective attire for some specific lessons.

Curriculum Areas

17 Students' practical work is often of a good standard and is displayed attractively around the college. The achievement rates of students completing courses is high. The GNVQ advanced courses have had 100% pass rates for the last three years and students' pass rates in GCE A levels in design and technology, graphic communication and art are usually well above the national averages for sixth form colleges. The student achievement rate on the GNVQ intermediate course, introduced in 1999, was 100%. Students successfully progress to popular higher education institutions. Students' retention rates are a weakness. On most courses, retention rates have been poor and declining over the last three years and these have not been acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The college has, however, introduced better enrolment procedures, extended induction periods and more structured counselling, with the aim of improving retention rates. There are indications that these measures are proving successful and that retention rates are improving.

18 All teachers are well qualified and several have worked professionally as design practitioners. Recently, students have benefited from the appointment of some new teachers who have up-to-date vocational experience and expertise. Much teaching accommodation has been successfully rationalised and all two and three-dimensional activities, including photography, are taught within the art and design area. The design workshop is well equipped with power tools, hand tools and airbrush equipment. All staff have appropriate qualifications to supervise activities in this area. The workshop has to be used as a thoroughfare and this can be distracting for students. The department has insufficient storage space for large items of work. Dedicated IT facilities, with up-to-date graphics software are used effectively. Equipment and materials are well maintained by full-time technicians. The learning centre has a good supply of research materials, books and magazines.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE graphics	2	Number of starters	+	+	9
		Retention (%)	+	+	89
		Achievement (%)	+	+	88
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	+	+	12
		Retention (%)	+	+	75
		Achievement (%)	+	+	100
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	6	14	14
		Retention (%)	100	64	57
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level design and technology	3	Number of starters	9	21	9
		Retention (%)	100	71	66
		Achievement (%)	100	87	100
GCE A level art	3	Number of starters	26	27	30
		Retention (%)	100	56	50
		Achievement (%)	88	93	100
GCE A level graphics communication	3	Number of starters	13	29	17
		Retention (%)	92	69	71
		Achievement (%)	100	100	83

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
+course not running

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Languages

Grade 2

19 Inspectors observed 17 lessons. They included: lessons in GCE A level English, English language, English language and literature, French and German; GCSE English and Spanish; lessons in modern languages which were part of National Open College Network (NOCN) provision; and one English lesson on the access to higher education programme. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses listed in the self-assessment report. Inspectors considered, however, that the college had given undue weight to the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- lively and well-planned teaching
- achievement rates on many courses above the national average
- effective monitoring of students' performance
- good management of GCE A level and GCSE courses
- a wide range of opportunities for students to enrich their studies
- good accommodation for English teaching

Weaknesses

- poor retention rate on the GCE A level English language and literature course in 1999
- inconsistent practice and poor communication within the part-time NOCN modern language provision
- poor examination results on NOCN courses

20 Enrolment to GCE A level courses has declined since the last inspection but there are viable teaching groups in both first and second years. GCSE English is taught to large numbers

of adults and students aged 16 to 19 in six groups. English is also a major part of the access to higher education course. Whilst GCSE Spanish enrolments are small, more than 200 part-time adult students take NOCN evening courses, in four languages on four different sites, at levels 1 to 3. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that management of courses is good. English teachers work well as a team and the established teaching observation scheme has led to the sharing of good practice. Strategies have been developed for managing the 17 part-time modern languages courses, and the part-time staff who teach on them. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, however, arrangements whereby these part-time staff can communicate with one another, share ideas, and ensure their teaching methods are consistently effective, have yet to be established.

21 Teaching is lively and, as the self-assessment report indicates, lessons are carefully planned and well resourced. Teachers use a range of teaching methods successfully, including group and pair work and effective class discussion and debate. In the majority of modern language lessons, the language being taught is used effectively as the medium of instruction. Through their enthusiasm for their subject, the teachers largely sustain the students' interest. Modern language teachers on NOCN courses for adults successfully sought stimulating contexts within which students could use the foreign language. Advanced French language students enthusiastically practised the use of the conditional tense by discussing changes they would make if they were dictators. German language students examined the lot of Turkish women living in modern Germany. Access students vigorously debated the qualities which make a good teacher, having watched an excerpt from the film *Dead Poets' Society*. GCSE English students examined and compared in detail the McKellan and Olivier versions of Richard III's speech, 'Now is the winter...'.

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Students responded enthusiastically to the actors' ability to elucidate meaning through voice and movement. Access students vehemently argued over Rochester's relationship with Jane Eyre. The teacher skilfully brought together disparate views into a coherent account. Students join college trips to plays, films and conferences. Modern language students undertake supported work experience abroad. In a few lessons, teachers failed to involve all students sufficiently in activities and at times group work went on too long and students lost interest. These weaknesses occurred particularly where groups were large. Teachers monitor students' performance and progress regularly and effectively. They readily give of their own time to help individual students who need additional support.

22 Examination results in GCE A level subjects in 1999 are good. The 100% pass rates in English language, literature, French and German and 97% pass rate in English language and literature are well above national averages for sixth form colleges. The proportion of students who gained grade C or above in GCSE English, and the pass rate in GCE A level French and German are well above the respective national averages. Students' results on NOCN evening courses in modern languages were poor. Many of the students on these courses follow them as a leisure activity and although they are entered for the examination, they do not take it. Retention rates have improved on a number of courses. Those for GCE A level English literature, German and GCSE Spanish courses are well above national averages. However, the retention rate on the GCE A level English language and literature course in 1999 was 63% and well below the national average. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report and strategies to improve retention are under way. Students' attendance and punctuality during the inspection were good,

particularly on GCE A level courses. Students write well and readily engage in discussion and debate. Many modern language students speak the target language fluently and with confidence.

23 Full-time and part-time teachers are well qualified. There are two modern language assistants. Classrooms used for the teaching of English are well furnished, appropriately decorated with relevant posters, and well equipped with television and video facilities. Satellite television, however, is not available. The 16-place language laboratory in the language base room, though old, is effectively and frequently used. The resource centre has a good stock of relevant books, magazines, videos and CD-ROM for subject teachers and students to use.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NOCN German	1 to 3	Number of starters	+	333	323
		Retention (%)	+	88	73
		Achievement (%)	+	49	39
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	196	190	142
		Retention (%)	71	69	76
		Achievement (%)	62	47	65
GCSE Spanish	2	Number of starters	30	34	18
		Retention (%)	80	74	94
		Achievement (%)	58	28	65
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	22	20	8
		Retention (%)	91	85	50
		Achievement (%)	82	90	100
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	61	58	51
		Retention (%)	93	72	63
		Achievement (%)	93	79	97
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	18	30	20
		Retention (%)	94	77	85
		Achievement (%)	59	78	100
GCE A level French	3	Number of starters	12	17	12
		Retention (%)	100	76	83
		Achievement (%)	50	92	100

*Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
+course not running*

Curriculum Areas

Sociology, History and Law

Grade 2

24 Inspectors observed 10 lessons, covering history, sociology, law and access to higher education courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They found both strengths and weaknesses not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- thoughtfully planned teaching
- students' high achievements on the access to higher education course
- success of many GCE A level students in obtaining higher grades than those predicted for them
- high standards of students' coursework
- improved quality of provision within the area
- students' impressive study and subject-related skills

Weaknesses

- low retention rates in the second year of GCE A level courses
- insufficient sharing of good practice

25 The college provides courses in GCE A level history, sociology and law, GCSE sociology and law, and a course leading to the certificate of legal studies. The college also offers GCE A level religious studies to meet a perceived demand, but this course was not inspected. Most students are aged 16 to 18. The number of adult, part-time students on GCE A level courses has declined since 1997. Part-time students may join daytime classes designed mainly for two-year full-time students. The college has decided to develop its access to higher education course and this has recruited well. Students are offered a variety of study patterns. Pre-access

courses give potential students the opportunity to sample these. The quality of teaching and learning and the standards of students' work have improved. Teachers work well together. Full-time staff provide part-time teachers with support and assistance. Students' views on the quality of the college's provision are collected, analysed and action is taken on them. Students' examination results are also carefully monitored in order to identify trends and ways of improving student achievement rates. Communications between teachers have improved and teachers have successfully standardised procedures for course induction and the monitoring of students' performance and attendance. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to acknowledge that staff do not spend enough time at team meetings identifying and sharing good practice.

26 Most teaching is effective. Lessons have a clear sense of purpose. Teachers provide an appropriate sequence of activities to help students develop skills and understanding. In a history lesson, access students compared political maps of Europe, before and after the First World War. Discussion of differences encouraged speculation about the principles underlying post-war peace treaties. Further material introduced students to historical evidence. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students receive detailed guidance on how to achieve high standards in their coursework. GCE A level sociology students first encounter methods of sociological research through small-scale investigation into variations in the diet of male and female college students. On GCE A level law courses, small tutorial groups enable students to work at a pace and level suited to their individual needs. In a few lessons, the teacher talked for too long and the students were not given enough opportunity to carry out demanding work which challenged them to explore concepts and think for themselves. Questions asked by some teachers concentrate

Curriculum Areas

too much on recall of knowledge, and fail to help the students develop higher levels of thinking. Assignments are appropriate and well co-ordinated. Teachers mark and return them promptly, appropriately graded. Their comments mostly deal with strengths and weaknesses and provide insufficient written guidance on how students might improve their work.

27 Most students successfully develop valuable study and subject-related skills. They maintain well-presented files containing useful notes. The quality of many students' coursework is high. In the best work, the students demonstrate the ability to think clearly and perceptively and express themselves lucidly. Writing is often fluent. Most students make good use of IT. In history, the teacher keeps a record of each student's competence in using the Internet, CD-ROMs and wordprocessing. Students have learnt to work productively in small groups. Attendance by most students is good.

28 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that examination results on most courses in this curriculum area are good. Students' achievements in GCE A level sociology, history and law are mostly above the national averages for sixth form colleges. In 1999, approximately two-thirds of all students on GCE A level history and sociology courses obtained better grades than those which were predicted for them, on the basis of their GCSE results. Between 1997 and 1999, about 10% of students aged 16 to 18 on GCE A level courses obtained better results than those predicted for them and achieved the two highest grades. For the last three years, almost all students who completed the access to higher education course did so successfully. In 1999, 88% progressed to higher education. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges as a weakness the low retention rates of students aged 16 to 18 on GCE A level courses in sociology, history and law, which are below the national averages. Departmental records explain reasons for

students' early withdrawal from courses. They show that few students abandon their studies because of dissatisfaction with their subjects. Nevertheless, the department has recently introduced measures, such as early warning monitoring and extended induction, with the aim of improving student retention rates. Teachers also provide support and encouragement to individual students when they face difficulties.

29 Students benefit from the work of experienced and well-qualified teachers. Lessons take place in suitable classrooms. Access students have an appropriate room of their own. Recent liaison between specialist teachers and staff in the learning centre is beginning to lead to an increase in resources for humanities and social studies students. Some access students said they found the learning centre crowded and noisy on occasions.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in sociology, history and law, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE law and sociology	2	Number of starters	12	25	16
		Retention (%)	100	80	56
		Achievement (%)	33	25	63
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	46	33	33
		Retention (%)	67	64	73
		Achievement (%)	87	90	83
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	33	28	36
		Retention (%)	64	57	61
		Achievement (%)	100	100	95
GCE A level law	3	Number of starters	16	26	36
		Retention (%)	56	69	61
		Achievement (%)	100	94	81
Access to higher education in humanities and social sciences	3	Number of starters	54	64	57
		Retention (%)	87	64	67
		Achievement (%)	97	100	97

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

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

30 Inspectors observed 13 lessons across the college's range of basic skills provision. The self-assessment report was based on a thorough process of consultation, involving staff in a number of different departments. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified by the college. Inspectors attached less significance to some of the weaknesses highlighted by self-assessment, but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong emphasis on helping students to plan and work on their own
- varied and lively teaching, well suited to the diverse needs of students
- many teachers' acquisition of qualifications for teaching basic skills
- innovative approaches to helping non-traditional students to learn successfully
- clear progression routes and appropriate accreditation
- the high priority given to students' achievements
- a co-ordinated approach to the management of basic skills across curriculum areas

Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in the preparation and review of individual learning plans
- variation in the quality and availability of teaching resources at community venues

31 The college offers a comprehensive range of basic skills courses, with clearly identified progression routes, to meet the needs of a varied body of students. This includes a number of innovative literacy and numeracy

projects, study skills support for full-time and part-time students, and basic skills work as an integral part of pre-vocational and part-time courses for students with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college teaches basic skills in the Totton area and well beyond, using community venues, although most takes place on the main college site. The college has made a successful bid to be the lead college in a University for Industry project on basic skills. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that both the range of provision and the imaginative use of IT are strengths. The co-ordinated management of basic skills provision across curriculum areas has begun to raise the profile of basic skills throughout the college.

32 Most teaching is good, well prepared and takes account of students' differing levels of ability. Teachers provide a variety of appropriate tasks to stimulate and maintain students' interest and they relate their lessons to students' own experiences. In some good literacy lessons, teachers used contexts for learning, such as the family or job-seeking, which the students found highly relevant. For example, students developed literacy skills by studying job advertisements and learning how to apply to employers. Similarly, teachers used IT imaginatively to improve students' study skills as well as literacy or numeracy. In some lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, physical activities such as shape manipulation significantly aided the students to understand numerical concepts. The wide range of teaching methods and good class management were understated as strengths in the self-assessment report.

33 During induction, the students' needs for help with basic skills are identified. Teachers agree individual learning plans with the students and these are reviewed half-termly. The plans are insufficiently thorough, however, and in many the learning goals are not clearly defined. For example, on one learning plan, the

Curriculum Areas

learning goal consisted of no more than the one word 'spelling'. The plan gave no indication of the extent of the student's problem with spelling or what specific remedial action was required. The aims of learning plans are too generalised and do not relate to the identified and specific needs of individual students. This weakness persists throughout the process of planning students' learning. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to acknowledge this weakness, although managers and teachers readily understand the need to improve learning plans to underpin their work with individual students.

34 There are clear progression routes for students. Many students gain confidence through outreach provision, which enables them to progress to other college courses at higher levels. For example, since 1997 at least six students who attended a basic skills summer school have progressed from sampling beauty therapy modules to a national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 beauty course. Most students' work is good, and students' commitment to learning is high. Courses lead to appropriate certification and many students are able to obtain a qualification for the first time in their lives. There has been a significant improvement between 1996 and 1998 in students' performance in levels 1 to 3 of the achievement tests in literacy, and a modest improvement in levels 1 to 3 of the achievement tests in numeracy. Students value the

opportunities to succeed which the college has provided. Students' achievements are celebrated at presentation events, which reinforce their high priority within the college's aim of widening participation. Basic skills Easter and summer schools have made a significant contribution to extending learning opportunities to non-traditional students, a strength which was identified in the self-assessment report.

35 Teachers are highly committed to helping their students to succeed and many possess specialist basic skills qualifications. There is a particular emphasis on appropriate staff development, and part-time teachers without teaching qualifications are encouraged and supported to undertake them. Teachers are assisted effectively by learning support workers and by volunteers. Teaching accommodation is good, providing a pleasant environment which is conducive to learning. Classroom displays are stimulating, and help to create an atmosphere of purposeful learning. Learning resources are good, although some photocopied worksheets are not reproduced well and are difficult to read. The quality of the teaching resources at community venues varies considerably and at some, it is poor. Although some venues provide students with access to laptop computers, others have no local stock of books or worksheets.

Examples of retention and achievement rates in basic skills, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Achievement tests - literacy	1, 2 and 3	Number of starters	85	120	145
		Retention (%)	100	81	94
		Achievement (%)	35	49	71
Achievement tests - numeracy	1, 2 and 3	Number of starters	85	75	91
		Retention (%)	100	87	82
		Achievement (%)	35	31	45

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

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Support for Students

Grade 2

36 Inspectors largely agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Many weaknesses had been addressed before inspection. Inspectors found one additional weakness.

Key strengths

- effective publicising and good promotion of provision
- strong partnership links with schools
- thorough interview, enrolment and induction procedures
- strong pastoral support for full-time students
- extensive range of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- good childcare facilities

Weaknesses

- students' poor retention rates
- low take-up of learning support by students

37 The college uses a range of methods to publicise and promote its provision effectively in a highly competitive environment. Students find the full-time prospectus and part-time course directory helpful and there is a comprehensive range of subject and course leaflets. Regular press releases highlight students' academic and extra-curricular achievements and open evenings complement this publicity.

38 There are good links with many local schools. A team of highly experienced liaison tutors maintains close contact with over 20 partner schools. Tutors visit schools to make presentations and give advice and guidance at parents evenings, year 11 tutorials, post-16 evenings and careers events. Recently, college

staff have given presentations to pupils on curriculum 2000 and these have been highly appreciated. Teachers and students from the college visit local schools to talk to pupils. A pilot initiative whereby college students mentor school pupils is under way.

39 Over the last three years, there has been significant decline in students' retention rates. At level 3 they have been below the national averages for sixth form colleges. In an attempt to improve retention rates, the college has revised arrangements for the interviewing, enrolment and induction of students. These arrangements are now well organised and thorough. Liaison tutors interview most year 11 pupils in their schools. Applicants needing further advice have further interviews and always receive an interview at enrolment. Students confirm their choice of subjects and course two weeks into the term after they have had some experience of their studies. During induction, students are made aware of the college charter, their entitlements, the expectations the college has of them, and college services. The measures the college has introduced to improve retention are having some success. Retention rates on full-time courses between September and January improved from 86% during 1998-99, to 93% for the same period in 1999-2000. The provision of pre-enrolment guidance and induction for part-time students is less systematic. Applicants are given advice by telephone and during the first meeting of the course, which is used as an induction session.

40 All full-time students, and some part-time students, have their literacy and numeracy skills assessed at induction. Assessment and provision for learning support are co-ordinated by the study support centre. Assessment results are promptly available to personal tutors who encourage students to make appointments to attend the study centre. Individual learning programmes are agreed with students. Few students attend support sessions, in spite of

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being urged to do so by the centre and tutors. Of the 144 students for whom support was considered essential in September 1999, only 17% were attending support sessions in January 2000. Of those students identified as needing learning support, 25% have left the college and a further 34% have not kept their appointments to attend the study centre. Students can also be directly referred for support or they can refer themselves. The majority of support is provided on an individual basis, but students work in groups or attend short courses to help them improve their spelling and acquire other specific skills. There is a good range of part-time and full-time provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some students with physical disabilities and other specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia and Asperger's syndrome, are integrated with students on other courses, and specialist staff provide them with help and support when necessary.

41 There is strong pastoral support for full-time students. This is provided through a network of experienced and dedicated staff, including personal tutors, pastoral advisers, a careers and higher education co-ordinator and careers service guidance specialists. Students have access to a counsellor and a chaplaincy team. They receive good careers education and guidance. Arrangements for providing students with advice on applications to higher education are particularly effective and 96% of students were successful with their applications in 1999. The area office of the careers service is on the college site and students benefit from regular visits by training providers and employment advisers. All early leavers are now interviewed by a pastoral adviser. Exit counselling for students is often extensive.

42 All full-time students and those on substantial part-time courses have a personal tutor. Tutors are allocated an hour each week for this work, when they hold group sessions and individual tutorials. Group tutorials are

carefully planned and they are carried out well. In the tutorials the inspectors attended, there were effective discussions about higher education applications and college policies on harassment and equal opportunities. Students' attendance is rigorously monitored. Teachers report any absence, even for the space of a day, to personal tutors. They also provide the tutors with weekly summaries of students' absences. Parents of students aged 16 to 18 are contacted rapidly if their child's attendance or progress is a source of concern. Subject teachers carry out formal termly reviews of students' progress during which the students agree their predicted grade in the examination. Personal tutors monitor students' attainment in the light of these predictions, which are made on the basis of the students' GCSE grades. Students agree targets for improving their performance, and learning plans are drawn up to help them achieve these.

43 The students' union organises social and fund-raising events. It has negotiated a service for students with a national bank. The chair of the union regularly attends corporation meetings as the student governor. There are excellent childcare facilities on the main college site. A college nursery offers 26 places with up to 100% fee reduction, and some further provision is available through a privately run nursery. There is additional provision at a community centre.

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General Resources

Grade 2

44 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- improved accommodation and resources since the last inspection
- good community facilities
- modern learning resource centre
- well-maintained and tidy accommodation
- good IT facilities
- extensive sports facilities

Weaknesses

- low utilisation of teaching space
- inaccessibility to upper floors for students with restricted mobility

45 Since the last inspection, the college has significantly improved the quality of accommodation and has increased its usefulness to the local community. The Totton site is a community campus, comprising the main college building, a swimming pool and recreation centre run by the local council, and a nursery run by a local entrepreneur. New accommodation, since the last inspection, includes a sports hall, rugby pavilion and a second, college-run nursery. Effective partnerships have led to the development of facilities at minimum cost to the college. A new learning resource centre has replaced the library, which was identified as a weakness during the last inspection. The old library building is now rented to the careers service and is used as their local headquarters. The college owns a business training centre in the nearby Rushington business park and a small centre in west Southampton. Teaching also takes place in 17 other centres away from the college.

46 The new learning resource building includes nine classrooms and has replaced all but one of the college's former huts. The remaining hut is classrooms and the second nursery. A lift provides access to the learning resource centre for students with restricted mobility, although not to the upper floor of the two-storey main building. Ground floor rooms are easily accessible. Access to the spacious and welcoming reception area has been improved by the recent fitting of automatic doors.

47 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that buildings are clean and well maintained. Workrooms for most teaching and support staff are good. Classrooms are tidy and have appropriate resources. Most have been redecorated. There is extensive display of art and design students' work in circulation areas. Since the last inspection, the physics laboratory has been refurbished and art and design provision has been brought together in one area. The refectory has been extended but is still overcrowded at peak times. A new and cheerful students' lounge has been provided but it is little used. Catering, cleaning and most maintenance services are now carried out by staff employed directly by the college. This arrangement has proved more efficient and more cost effective and it enables college managers to exercise quality control in respect of these services.

48 The 10-year maintenance plan shows the college's clear commitment to improving accommodation. A committee oversees estates matters effectively. Most current objectives in respect of accommodation have been successfully achieved. The issue of ageing heating boilers is being addressed. The college has submitted a bid to the FEFC for capital funding and awaits the outcome. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that space utilisation is poor, though it has improved. It has increased from 27% in 1997 to 32% in 1999. A committee monitors health and safety issues effectively.

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49 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the new learning resource centre is a strength. It includes the library, an area for study support and an additional IT classroom. The college has improved its provision of learning resources. It has increased investment in learning resources and has introduced effective new arrangements for their management. The budget for library stock is £19,000, a 12% increase from last year. This represents expenditure of approximately £16 per full-time equivalent student. The library has over 12,000 books. The library budget and the library stock have been increased by 50% since the last inspection and are now adequate. Most items of stock are on the library's computerised catalogue. Some departments continue to hold their own bookstocks. Most of these are not catalogued centrally, however, and students are not necessarily aware of the books available to them in the departments. The library has extended opening hours on two evenings a week to cater for the needs of students attending evening classes. Statistics on library usage have only recently begun to be collected. The learning resource centre has 64 study places with some reserved for quiet study. Except at peak times, the provision of places is adequate.

50 The college has 290 computers available for general use, of which 228 are for students. Of the college's computers, 60% are connected to the college network and the Internet. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is 6:1 and this is the same as it was at the last inspection. The computers, however, are modern and most are adequate for students' needs. Sixteen computers are available in the learning resource centre and students use computers not already in use in classrooms. Access to computers for teachers is satisfactory. A learning technology group monitors IT matters effectively. It has recently devised a three-year IT strategy. The college has been very successful in applying for European Social

Fund and University for Industry money to develop IT provision for the local community and for online training.

51 College directional signs are inadequate in some areas. Improvements are being made, including the introduction of tactile signs. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that sports facilities are good, enabling the college to set up a sporting academy in football, rugby, basketball and swimming. There are two football pitches, two rugby pitches and a tennis court. Students can use the leisure centre and swimming pool at any time of the day, free of charge. The college's three mini-buses are well used to transport students to the college, and for educational visits.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

52 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- effective integration of quality assurance and management processes
- comprehensive and effective framework for quality assurance
- strong commitment to upholding high professional standards
- effective arrangements for staff development, linked to strategic planning

Weaknesses

- insufficiently rigorous self-assessments by some teams

53 The college has made considerable progress in developing its quality assurance

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system since the last inspection. It carefully planned the introduction of comprehensive self-assessment. Staff have established a culture of rigorous self-evaluation within the college and they are committed to sustaining this.

Improvements in performance are not yet evident across all areas of the college. Since the last inspection, however, there have been significant improvements in teaching and learning. At the last inspection, the proportion of lessons graded 1 and 2 was 48%. In this inspection it is 83%. Staff use self-assessment as a major aid in managing the curriculum and business support areas. Detailed information from quality assurance activities enables the executive team to monitor closely the performance of individual students and staff, and the quality of courses, and to take any necessary remedial action. The best self-assessment plans express clear relationships to the college's strategic objectives and staff development.

54 All staff teams assess their performance using a coherent and simple quality assurance system. They report their assessment to the executive team. A self-assessment steering group, comprising staff from all areas, refined the quality assurance system after open consultation. The quality improvement group offers practical support to teams to help them to increase the rigour and thoroughness of their self-assessment. It also acts as a 'watchdog', checking that each team's self-assessment process complies with the requirements of the quality assurance system and is carried out effectively. Validation panels of senior staff scrutinise thoroughly the teams' documentation and meet every team leader. The panels agree action points for each team and progress towards reaching these is formally monitored at a mid-year review. Teams monitor their own progress during regular meetings. Staff are expected to meet very high standards. Many can give examples of specific improvements in their own practice and in their students'

learning experiences. They clearly understand and support the executive team's commitment to improving the quality of provision. Each year, the quality of aspects of provision is evaluated through an external review, carried out in partnership with other colleges.

55 In the main self-assessment report, the college overstated the extent to which all contributory self-assessment reports are self-critical and rigorous. Some teams gather and interpret evidence soundly, show a high degree of understanding of key issues and draw up realistic action plans for improving provision. Others are not incisive in their self-assessment and fail to produce a credible plan for improvement. As part of quality assurance, all teaching teams consider data on students' achievements, retention, and attendance, comparing students' performance with national averages. Some teams do this more effectively than others. Not all action plans address the issue of retention. Targets are set for students' achievements and retention on each course but these are not differentiated to take account of the growing number of adult students on courses. For individual students, predicted grades are determined and these are used as a basis for monitoring their performance. Value-added data relating to students' achievements on both GCE A level and vocational courses is calculated by comparing students' final examination performance with their GCSE grades. Business support teams define standards for their work; some are arrived at through consultation with customers. Many are clear and measurable, but others are not. Staff in some areas of work do not assess their performance systematically against standards. Staff monitor franchised courses by making regular visits to franchise providers and observing lessons. Franchise providers have just begun to produce self-assessment reports.

56 Evidence from a variety of sources, including the views of students and other users, is taken into account in course reviews. There

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are effective arrangements for gathering students' views on the quality of provision and these are acted upon. During 1998-99, employers were also invited to give their views. The number who responded, however, was too small to enable the college to obtain a representative sample of employers' opinions. The college does not methodically review the extent to which it meets the commitments it gives in the college charter. As part of self-assessment, the college evaluated 66 lessons, using the same grading system as inspectors. The grade profile for the college was compared with that for the sector published in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*. Teaching teams considered the outcomes of lesson observations during a training day and discussed ways of improving teaching and learning. The profile of lesson grades awarded by inspectors was very close to that arrived at by the college through self-assessment.

57 The college produced its first full self-assessment report for inspection, building on findings from a pilot scheme. The self-assessment process involved all staff and governors. A consultant from another college gave an external view on the quality of the self-assessment report. The report is comprehensive and the self-assessment process is linked to the college's planning and review activities. The report was fully evaluated through a rigorous validation system.

58 Staff are appraised annually. The main aim of appraisal is to give staff the opportunity to reflect on their work and to identify training needs. The staff development programme is determined by training needs identified during appraisals, team action plans and strategic priorities. The college provides five training days annually. These focus on college priorities, such as teaching and learning issues. A good range of training activities is available to staff and they feel encouraged to be involved in these.

Evaluation of staff development activities is thorough and meticulous, but the findings from evaluation are not taken into account sufficiently when planning future training activities. Staff say, however, that they have been able to improve their work and performance as a result of their participation in training. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that staff training for managers is unsystematic. Similarly, the staff induction programme deals with some important topics too late, so that new staff have to rely on incidental help and guidance from more experienced colleagues. At the time of the inspection, a mentoring scheme for new staff had just been introduced. The college was re-awarded Investors in People status in April 1999.

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Governance

Grade 2

59 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report. They found some weaknesses, however, which the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- governors' strong focus on the college's performance, students' achievements and the raising of standards
- good use of governors' experience and expertise
- comprehensive and effective committee structure
- effective administration of corporation and committee business
- governors' good and appropriate working relationships with senior managers
- governors' clarity of understanding and scrupulous observance of the distinctions between governance and management

Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in the self-assessment of governance
- inappropriate interpretation of guidance on transition arrangements for corporation membership

60 Governors have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and of the distinction between the role of the corporation and the executive team. New governors follow an induction programme and are kept well informed about college developments through residential workshops and briefings by the principal. The training needs of individual governors have not been identified systematically. Governors are committed to helping forward the work of the college and

have developed an open and trusting working relationship with senior managers. Whilst supporting the principal and the college executive, governors will, when necessary, challenge their decisions and require them to justify these. Managers make presentations to the board. Governors are linked to different curriculum areas and are in contact with teachers. Governors' attendance at corporation and committee meetings is monitored and appropriate action taken where a governor's attendance is poor or in decline.

Self-assessment procedures for governance have not been updated to reflect developments in the sector.

61 During the past 12 months, governors have demonstrated a keen awareness of the importance of students' achievements. They consider the raising of standards to be a key aspect of their work. The college's performance is reviewed in detail and student achievement rates are compared with regional and national averages. The corporation plays a key role in setting targets for improving the quality of provision and in monitoring progress towards reaching them. Governors are strongly committed to supporting the college's mission to diversify provision and widen participation, whilst ensuring that the strengths of the college's existing curriculum are sustained and nurtured. Good use is made of the experience of governors and their links with different communities.

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

63 Governors have fully considered the requirements of the modified instrument and articles of government, and the corporation has

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re-determined its membership to 20. This comprises seven business governors, three co-opted governors, two staff governors, a student governor, two local authority nominees, two community nominees, two parent governors and the principal. On the advice of the search committee, the corporation has re-designated the categories of membership of some governors to provide for a swift transition to the new structure. Whilst the governors consider this approach to be pragmatic and appropriate, it does not accord with published guidance on transition arrangements. In one case, it has led to the inappropriate extension of the effective term of office for a governor to seven years.

64 The work of the corporation is well supported by seven committees. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the corporation has an effective committee structure. Meetings are scheduled on a yearly cycle designed to ensure the corporation's timely compliance with external requirements. The committees work within clearly defined terms of reference and are used effectively by the corporation to give detailed consideration to, and to formulate recommendations on, items of corporation business. Routine corporation meetings are held termly, with further meetings being called as necessary to address significant, additional items of business

65 The audit committee substantially operates in accordance with Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*, including the production of an annual report of its activities to the corporation. It has ensured that there are effective college audit arrangements in place, and that college staff provide regular feedback on the operation of these. It has recently developed formal performance indicators for assessing the effectiveness of both internal and external auditors. The finance and general purposes committee has undertaken the detailed monitoring of the financial position of the college and provides good support to the full corporation in ensuring there is an effective review, approval and monitoring process for key financial decisions.

66 The work and advice of the clerk to the corporation are highly valued by governors. Agendas, supporting papers and minutes are timely and well produced. The corporation has followed good practice in the approval of, and adherence to, a code of conduct, code of ethics, 'whistleblowing' policy and standing orders. There is also a long-established register of business interests which is updated annually.

67 The principal's appraisal is conducted annually through the remuneration committee. The process for obtaining evidence for a wide ranging review of the principal's performance is exemplary. Evaluative comments are received from a range of governors, staff and students. An analysis of these comments provides the basis for a set of personal development initiatives for the principal which reflect the strategic needs of the college.

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Management

Grade 2

68 Inspectors mainly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some of the statements of strengths and weaknesses, however, lacked detail and clarity.

Key strengths

- strong leadership
- beneficial collaborative partnerships and external links
- successful diversification of provision to widen participation
- effective internal communications
- staff involvement in planning and development
- positive use of self-assessment as an aid to management
- consistent achievement of enrolment targets
- prudent financial management

Weaknesses

- small and financially inefficient classes
- inadequate implementation of the equal opportunities policy and insufficient monitoring of its effectiveness

69 The college is well managed. Leadership is positive and effective. Recent restructuring aims to rectify some of the organisational weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. It is too early to assess the impact of these changes, which have reduced the size of the senior management team, now the college executive, from seven to four. Three directorates have responsibility for support services, curriculum and quality, and partnerships, respectively. The principal directly manages finance, personnel and administration, the registry and management information. A range of personnel

policies and procedures has been developed but some are in need of review and updating. All postholders have job descriptions, most of which are up to date, and they understand their lines of responsibility. The 15 teaching department heads report to the director of curriculum and quality. In general, management within departments is good.

70 The college executive promotes an open, participative approach to management, which creates an atmosphere of trust. Staff speak particularly highly of this atmosphere and how it helps them to carry out their day-to-day work effectively. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that communications are good. Staff appreciate the opportunities provided for them to influence management decisions and senior managers' preparedness to listen to, and take action on, their views.

71 The strategic plan is clearly structured and provides a sound framework for development. It identifies where responsibility for achieving broad objectives lies. Monitoring of progress in fulfilling these objectives is carried out at department and directorate level. During the staff appraisal process, however, insufficient care is taken to ensure that the personal objectives of staff accord with the strategic objectives of the college. In its strategic objectives, the college reflects its duty to meet the needs of the community it serves, and to establish proper priorities for its post-16 educational provision. Some specific objectives, however, are insufficiently demanding. The improvement of the quality of provision is central to the strategic aims of the college and the work of senior managers is focused on raising standards. All staff are aware of the importance of continuous improvement. Strategic planning is closely linked to self-assessment. Self-assessment procedures are well developed and good use is made of action plans on a routine basis as part of day-to-day management.

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72 In line with its mission and strategic aims, the college is developing as an open access institution. It increasingly attracts non-traditional learners from its local and wider community and a range of courses has been established at venues in the local community. The college has also developed specific training courses for employers. Funding from a variety of sources including the city council, the county and district councils and the European Social Fund, has enabled the college to establish imaginative projects to widen participation. Good use is made of market research data. The college plays a key role in the local community and is a partner in a number of local and regional developments. The equal opportunity policy has been revised recently and staff have been involved in assessing the extent of compliance with the policy. As yet, there is no explicit cross-college strategy for the promotion of equal opportunities and for monitoring progress in fulfilling objectives for its improvement.

73 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college employs an experienced finance manager to lead the finance team, with the principal operating as the finance director. They work closely together in controlling the college's finances and in providing advice to the executive team and the corporation. The internal and external auditors have not identified any significant weaknesses in the college's systems of financial control. Management accounts are produced four to six weeks after the end of each month. The format of the accounts accords with most aspects of good practice. The cashflow forecast, however, is not produced on a rolling 12-month basis and there is no forecast out-turn for the income and expenditure account.

74 The college has consistently achieved or exceeded its funding targets for the last three years and its diversity of income has increased from 18% to 23% over the same period. Key

financial ratios, such as cash days in hand, remain below the sixth form college averages published by the FEFC. Managers have taken action to improve the college's financial position. This has been successful. Operating deficits have significantly declined and the college is forecasting a small surplus for 1999-2000.

75 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's conclusion that the average size of teaching groups is small. Small classes are only permitted to continue after review and assessment of the cost of running them. In the context of the college's overall financial position, however, they represent a significant inefficiency. Computer-derived management information has improved since the last inspection and the capture and generation of information are generally reliable. Analysis of enrolment patterns provides marketing information. There is some on-line computer access to information for managers and staff.

Conclusions

76 Inspectors found that the college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, but considered that some had been given insufficient weight. They also found strengths and weaknesses the college had not identified. They considered that one curriculum area had been under-graded and one over-graded. The grade inspectors awarded for one area of cross-college provision was one grade lower than that given by the college.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	9
25+ years	65
Not known	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	14
Level 2 (intermediate)	18
Level 3 (advanced)	27
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Non-schedule 2	40
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	186	297	15
Agriculture	24	61	3
Construction	0	15	0
Engineering	3	424	13
Business	59	659	22
Hotel and catering	24	10	1
Health and community care	109	202	9
Art and design	134	99	7
Humanities	262	531	24
Basic education	43	162	6
Total	844	2,460	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 5% 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 1999)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	62	30	2	94
Supporting direct learning contact	15	8	0	23
Other support	53	12	1	66
Total	130	50	3	183

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£3,650,000	£3,772,000	£3,895,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.42	£17.31	£16.94
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	70%	70%
Achievement of funding target	111%	101%	100%
Diversity of income	18%	22%	23%
Operating surplus	-£135,000	-£114,000	-£18,000

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

ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Achievement of funding target - Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	173	362	322	307	321	406
	Retention (%)	79	83	84	84	87	87
	Achievement (%)	76	85	99	88	87	94
2	Number of starters	719	828	803	384	411	405
	Retention (%)	80	76	70	75	81	85
	Achievement (%)	68	61	94	83	83	93
3	Number of starters	767	875	952	219	186	257
	Retention (%)	90	71	69	81	70	70
	Achievement (%)	82	90	87	73	77	88
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	245	110	172	452	824	396
	Retention (%)	92	75	78	89	92	86
	Achievement (%)	66	91	71	67	99	79
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	75	233	154	1,091	3,554	1,984
	Retention (%)	95	95	92	96	97	95
	Achievement (%)	78	82	87	93	94	94

Source: ISR

n/a not applicable

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