

Humanities in Further Education

NATIONAL
REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99

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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- B: Number of starters, retention and achievement rates by subprogramme area for qualifications expected to end in 1997-98

Summary

The humanities programme area is the largest and most diverse of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) 10 programme areas. It includes English, modern foreign languages, history, geography, social sciences, teacher education, general studies and a variety of smaller areas such as pre-uniformed studies (courses for those planning to enter public service). In sixth form colleges and external institutions it is frequently the largest programme area. Large numbers of adult students study part time. Humanities subjects are often used to add breadth to students' main programmes of study. General certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) general studies is a popular way of broadening the curriculum for students, especially full-time students in sixth form colleges. Overall, enrolments in humanities are increasing, but some areas are in decline; for example the number of full-time students aged 16 to 18 learning a foreign language. Modular syllabuses have become increasingly popular with students, and they have grown rapidly in number.

Colleges are using humanities subjects to attract students normally under-represented in further education, and those returning to study after some time. Courses are increasingly provided at places and at times which suit students' circumstances, to encourage the participation of those who are unable or reluctant to attend college.

Since 1996-97 the proportion of grades 1 and 2 awarded to humanities provision has declined. In the last two years, this proportion has been lower than that awarded to all programme areas. At the same time, the proportion of grades 4 and 5 awarded to humanities has increased.

There is much good teaching and learning across the whole programme area. Many humanities teachers are skilled at using a range of teaching and learning methods. They devise imaginative and demanding activities which stimulate students' interest and provoke a good level of response. They encourage students to develop skills of independent study and research. As a result, students produce coursework of high quality, often drawing on their own interests and experience. Teachers give useful feedback to students by marking their written work conscientiously and reviewing their progress regularly. Many provide additional support and enrichment activities outside normal class hours.

Humanities teachers need to do more to ensure that learning activities are well matched to students' individual needs and abilities, so that all students feel confident in developing their ideas in lessons and in working effectively on their own outside the classroom. Undue emphasis is sometimes placed on the textbook or the examination syllabus, and not enough on the development of students' skills. The use of information technology (IT) in teaching and learning activities is still underdeveloped in many colleges. The key skills of communication, application of number and IT are also insufficiently identified, developed and assessed.

Humanities students' achievements are higher on GCE A level and access to higher education courses than on general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses. Although the overall achievements of students completing their courses have, in the main, shown a slow but steady rise over the last three years, retention rates have declined. Inspectors often find poor retention where there is inadequate guidance onto an appropriate level or type of course. Colleges allow too many students to resit courses in GCSE English rather than offering them a more appropriate course. Adult students often find that one-year, part-time GCE A level courses are more demanding than they had anticipated, and either drop out or do not enter the examination. The pre-course guidance and tutorial support for part-time students is frequently inadequate.

Humanities subjects are increasingly taught by part-time teachers. These teachers are often not closely involved in curriculum planning or in staff development. In some subject areas the only member of staff is a part-time teacher. The attendance rate and the grades awarded by inspectors were lower in lessons conducted by part-time teachers than those taken by full-time teachers. Colleges need to give more thought to staff development and support for part-time teachers.

Humanities in Further Education

Introduction

1 This report largely draws on the evidence from the inspections of humanities carried out as part of the programme of college inspections in 1998-99. Inspectors observed 1,487 lessons, involving 17,338 students, and awarded 102 inspection grades. Annex A shows the comparison of the grades for programme area 9 with those for all programme areas for the last three years. In January and February 1999, inspectors visited 36 colleges not being inspected in the current year, to supplement the information gained from college inspections.

2 The report begins by assessing the humanities response to national initiatives and developments: modularisation, widening participation, inclusive learning, value-added measures, key skills and self-assessment. Its main focus, however, is on the quality of provision in the four major curriculum areas within humanities: English, modern foreign languages, social sciences and other general humanities subjects. The report also provides illustrations of good practice.

Context and Trends

Size and scope of provision

3 Humanities provision in further education is highly diverse, a diversity which is apparent in subject, course, mode of attendance and the range of students' aptitudes and abilities. The Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) database for qualifications in the humanities programme area lists 14,125 separate qualifications. This represents almost a third of all qualifications on the database. The provision includes full-time general certificate of education advanced supplementary (GCE AS) and GCE advanced level (GCE A level) programmes for 16 to 18 year old and adult students, access programmes enabling adults to gain entry to higher education, and part-time evening courses designed primarily for adults. The humanities

programme area is the largest of the 10 programme areas of the FEFC. In 1998-99, there were over three-quarters of a million students on humanities courses in the further education sector. Annex B gives details of student numbers by subprogramme area. By far the majority of enrolments in 1998-99 (81%) were part time.

4 As well as forming students' main courses of study, humanities subjects are frequently studied as additional courses, to add breadth to students' main programmes. Business studies students may be retaking general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) English, leisure and tourism students learning a foreign language, or health and social care students studying GCE A level sociology. GCE A level general studies is taken by many sixth form college students as a third or fourth GCE A level. A large number of awarding bodies accredit courses in humanities. As well as the major GCE and GCSE examining boards, these include open college networks, the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and the RSA Examinations Board (RSA). Colleges also face the challenges of the introduction of curriculum 2000.

5 English and social sciences are the largest subject areas and the programme area also includes subjects not readily associated with humanities, such as physical education, sign language, pre-uniformed studies, teacher education, sports coaching awards and door keeping. English, psychology, sociology and general studies are retaining their popularity, but enrolments are declining in some courses in modern foreign languages, classics, geography, history and politics. On access courses, designed to enable adults to progress to higher education, fewer students are enrolling on humanities courses and more are opting for vocational programmes.

6 Humanities inspections form the largest proportion of curriculum inspections undertaken in any year. In 1998-99, 19% of the curriculum

grades awarded were in the humanities programme area. Since 1996-97 the proportion of grades 1 and 2 awarded to humanities provision has declined from 77% to 60%. In the last two years, it has been lower than the proportion for all programme areas. At the same time, the proportion of grades 4 and 5 awarded has increased from 1% in 1996-97 to 6% in 1998-99.

Response to National Initiatives and Developments

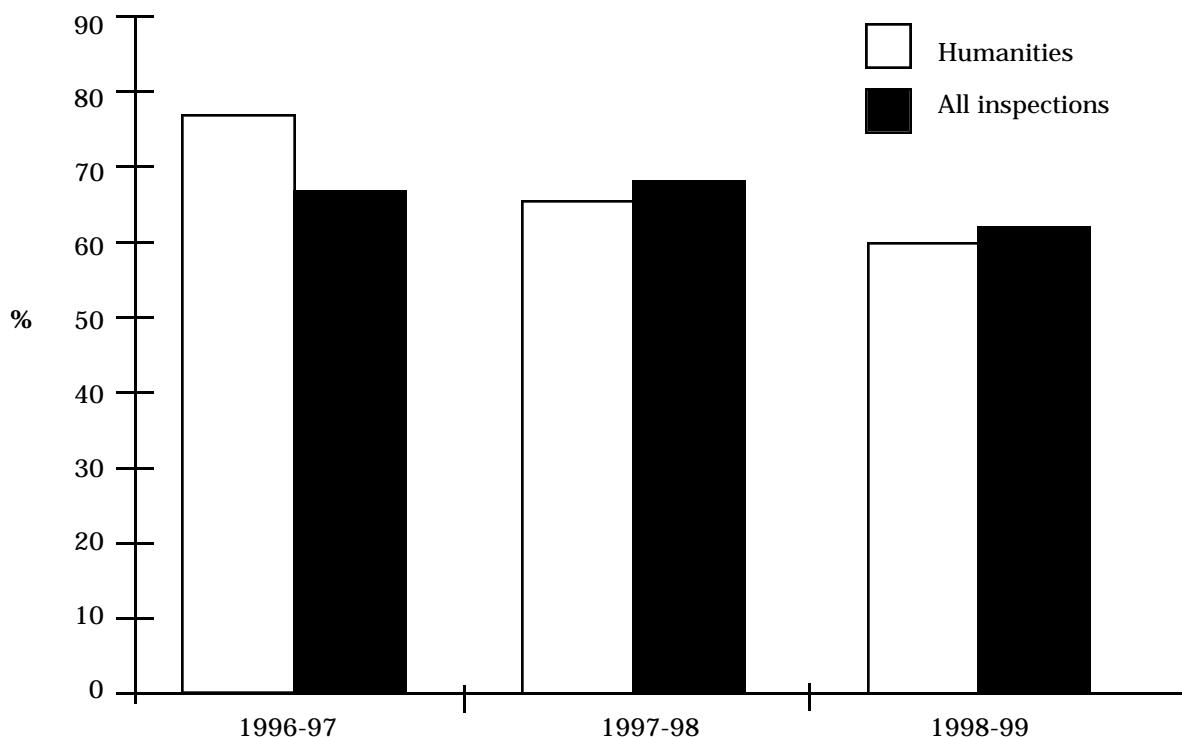
Modularisation

7 Modular syllabuses are increasingly popular. Modular GCE A levels are common in psychology and sociology, and increasing in geography, history, and law. Access to higher education courses, and some teacher education courses, also have a modular structure.

Students on these courses sit an examination at the end of each module of study, rather than waiting until the end of the course. As they sit each assessment, they can accumulate credit which counts towards the final qualification. Students may resit modules in order to obtain a higher grade. Many students who discontinue a modular GCE A level course after one year of a two-year course are able to obtain a GCE AS qualification. This provides an incentive to some students who might otherwise drop the subject to complete a year of study.

8 Students say they prefer modular courses. They believe that the modular structure allows them to gain greater understanding of the subject, and gives them opportunity to review their progress, make action plans and set targets for improvement. Teachers' approaches differ according to whether the subject is primarily content based or skills based. Some teachers are reluctant to introduce modular assessment

Figure 1. Comparison of curriculum grades 1 and 2 awarded between 1996 and 1998



Source: inspectorate database

because they feel students may not be ready, in the earlier stages of the course, to be assessed at the standard of the final qualification. Modular courses have the potential to allow students to progress through the course at different rates. By combining modules, they can follow courses tailored to their needs. However, not all colleges have sufficiently flexible arrangements to allow such developments to take place.

Widening participation

9 The wide range of humanities courses is successful in attracting students from groups traditionally under-represented in further education. However, colleges do not always ensure that students and courses are well matched.

10 Colleges have had considerable success in widening participation through their courses in community languages and through their access to higher education and Open College provision. Access to higher education courses cater predominantly for people returning to study, often with few formal qualifications. Colleges now offer more flexible timetable arrangements to meet the particular needs of these students and include in the structure of courses a programme of study skills development and confidence-building to help them succeed. There is an increasing number of pre-access and bridging courses to help students confirm their ambitions before they commit themselves to an access to higher education course.

11 Pre-uniformed services courses offer a cohesive programme of study to those interested in entering the armed services, the police forces and other public services. These courses have been successful in attracting male students in particular, many of whom have had limited previous educational success and would not have been attracted to continue in education in other circumstances. Sports coaching awards are becoming the first steps in obtaining formal qualifications for many older students.

12 The humanities courses offered by external institutions are successful in widening participation. These institutions attract a diverse range of students, many of whom enrol for personal and social reasons as well as to gain formal qualifications.

A national adult education association offers local history courses for the long-term unemployed, and for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Adults recovering from mental illness are following a course on life in a nineteenth century village. Reminiscence courses enable frail elderly people to recall, discuss and record their life experiences.

The humanities pathways programme in a residential adult education college consists of over 200 short courses, most of them organised as residential courses lasting two to five days. The college also offers a diploma programme in humanities, which enables students to progress to higher education or employment. Pass rates are over 90%, and over 70% of those who complete their courses gain a place in higher education.

13 Growing numbers of people are able to take advantage of humanities courses at non-traditional times and in non-traditional places. Courses are now being offered through local community centres, hospitals, libraries and public houses. One college has provided accredited courses in local history, criminal psychology and genealogy, which all take place away from the main college sites. Many colleges now offer courses on Saturday mornings.

14 The large number of GCSE and GCE AS/A level courses offered within this programme area have less success in attracting students from a broad range of backgrounds. As full-time programmes of study they are very largely taken up by students aged 16 to 18 in tertiary or sixth form colleges. However, it is not uncommon to find those aged 19 or over on these courses in general further education

colleges or studying in the evening in all types of college. The full-time courses are designed primarily for students aged 16 to 18 and are not always sufficiently adapted to the needs of older or part-time students. There are some successful distance-learning courses at GCSE and GCE AS/A level, for example in modern foreign languages and English, which allow students who are unable to attend college to study from home.

Inclusive learning

15 Humanities provision has been slow in responding to the inclusive learning initiative. Programme area and course plans seldom refer to inclusive learning strategies, which aim to ensure that there is a good match between what is required by the learner and what is provided. Teachers do not always adapt their learning resources and teaching methods to suit the needs of students of varying aptitudes and abilities. As a result, they do not ensure that all students are equally engaged in learning. Teachers are beginning to develop materials to suit different groups of students. Literary texts and other materials, for example, often reflect the varied cultures of the students, though they are not always used effectively. There is little evidence on teacher education courses that trainee teachers are being prepared for the challenges of inclusive learning.

16 Colleges are giving greater attention to improving achievement in humanities through the provision of learning support, for example in literacy and numeracy. Increasingly, students' particular needs are identified at the outset of the course and appropriate support is provided. Teachers provide much timetabled and informal support to students experiencing difficulties during their course. Learning support is most effective where students have individual learning programmes in which clear goals are identified to help guide their learning and monitor their progress. The best of these programmes are closely linked to their

programmes of study. Many younger students do not like attending special support sessions. They are more likely to take advantage of such support in a key skills centre or learning centre where different types of support are offered, or when it is provided as part of their normal lessons.

Key skills

17 It is only rarely that the key skills of communication, application of number and information technology (IT) are systematically identified, developed and assessed through the study of humanities subjects. Most humanities programmes involve written communication as a major element. Despite this, writing skills, including essay skills, are not always taught and practised explicitly. Note-taking techniques are sometimes taught, but many teachers assume that students are able to make effective notes. They rarely discuss the appropriate techniques to use, or examine students' files to ensure that their notes are accurate and clearly presented. Oral communication, including individual and group presentations, takes place regularly in lessons, but the opportunities to teach and assess oral and presentational skills are frequently not exploited.

18 Numeracy skills are particularly necessary for the study of social sciences, and are generally well integrated with other aspects of these courses. Many students of sociology and psychology find the numerical aspects of the syllabus difficult, and teachers increasingly provide them with extra support. This might include statistical packages, the use of IT, or numeracy programmes for those who have not achieved grade C in GCSE mathematics. Geography students develop appropriate numeracy skills through the use of data response questions and statistical techniques.

19 Many colleges offer general computer literacy courses to develop students' IT skills, but do not develop the specific IT skills required for particular humanities subjects. In many

cases, the development of IT skills is restricted to the wordprocessing of assignments; the use of spreadsheets, databases and statistical packages is much less well developed. Humanities teachers and students use the Internet as a source of information. In modern languages, it has greatly increased the range of available materials written in the foreign language. In some instances, the Internet is used to communicate with students in other colleges or other countries, enabling them to undertake collaborative projects. Tuition in the effective and efficient use of the Internet for research purposes, however, is rarely provided.

Value-added measures

20 There is increased use of predicted grades, identified at the start of a GCE A level programme, which are based on students' previous GCSE performance. The predicted grades provide a yardstick for teachers and students in measuring the progress being made during the course. They are also used to assess students' achievements on completion of the course.

In one college, students review their progress with their teachers every three months. Each student's predicted grades are confirmed or modified in the light of their coursework and assessments. Where students are performing below their grade targets, additional support is provided; those who are exceeding their targets receive letters of congratulation from the curriculum manager. Teachers take account of students' progress against their predicted grades when they are reviewing and evaluating their courses.

21 Not all colleges use value-added information well to inform their assessment of provision.

Self-assessment

22 Self-assessment reports for humanities sometimes fail to be clear about the quality of provision in specific subjects or courses. Reports identify many of the strengths of the provision, particularly teachers' qualifications and experience, students' responses in lessons and good levels of achievement. They also provide an honest analysis of weaknesses, though many are insufficiently critical. In many colleges, there is inadequate analysis of achievement and retention data and little attention to year-on-year trends. In the best self-assessment reports, colleges make good use of national benchmarking data to make a realistic assessment of their performance. Most colleges have introduced schemes for classroom observation to inform their judgements but they frequently overstate the quality of teaching and learning, basing their judgements on overgenerous assessments. The good relationships often found between students and teachers on humanities courses are sometimes mistakenly seen as evidence of effective learning and there is an overemphasis in classroom observation on teaching and resources at the expense of learning and the students' experience. Self-assessment processes usually include students' views. Some colleges use student review committees for this purpose and access to higher education programmes, in particular, usually provide good opportunities for students to express their opinions of their courses. Action plans vary in quality. Many lack quantified, measurable targets.

23 Colleges take a more generous view of their provision than inspectors. In 1998-99, the proportion of grades 1 and 2 awarded by colleges for their humanities provision was 87%, whereas inspectors graded 60% of provision at grades 1 and 2. The disparity is larger than in the previous year. Overall, 51% of the grades awarded by inspectors in 1998-99 were the same as those awarded by colleges in their self-assessments. Inspectors graded 44% of provision lower, and 5% higher, than colleges.

Teaching and Learning

24 Tables 1 and 2 show the lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors for different humanities subject areas and for the major course types in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 69% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% less than satisfactory. The proportion of lessons graded 1 and 2 compares favourably with the sector average of 65% for all lessons observed during 1998-99, and with the figure for humanities in 1997-98, when 67% of humanities lessons were awarded grades 1 and 2. The grade profile for GCE AS/A level is significantly better than the profile for GCSE

lessons with 20% more GCE AS/A lessons being awarded grades 1 or 2 than GCSE lessons.

25 In 1998-99, the average level of attendance at humanities lessons observed by inspectors was 77%, compared with the national average of 78% for all programme areas. Of the courses listed in table 2, attendance levels were highest on GCE AS/A level courses, where they averaged 80%, and lowest on GCSE courses, where they averaged 71%. The average class size for all humanities lessons was 11.7, compared with 11.2 for all programme areas. The average class size has risen from 10.6 in 1997-98.

Table 1. Inspection grades for humanities lessons by subject area, 1998-99

| Subject area | Grade 1 (%) | Grade 2 (%) | Grade 3 (%) | Grade 4 (%) | Grade 5 (%) |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| English and communication | 21 | 45 | 27 | 6 | 1 |
| Modern foreign languages and English as a foreign language | 23 | 47 | 26 | 4 | 0 |
| Social sciences* | 22 | 43 | 29 | 6 | 0 |
| Other** | 20 | 58 | 19 | 3 | 0 |
| All humanities provision | 22 | 47 | 26 | 5 | 0 |
| All programme areas | 20 | 45 | 29 | 6 | 0 |

Source: inspectorate database

*sociology, psychology, religious studies

**history, geography, politics, law

Table 2. Inspection grades for humanities lessons by course type, 1998-99

| Course type | Grade 1 (%) | Grade 2 (%) | Grade 3 (%) | Grade 4 (%) | Grade 5 (%) |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GCE A/AS level | 23 | 49 | 25 | 3 | 0 |
| GCSE | 14 | 38 | 35 | 11 | 1 |
| Access to higher education | 23 | 52 | 20 | 5 | 0 |
| All humanities provision | 22 | 47 | 26 | 5 | 0 |

Source: inspectorate database

Note: percentages subject to rounding

26 Inspectors noted a considerable difference in quality between those lessons taught by full-time teachers and those taught by part-time teachers. In particular, there is a much higher proportion of less than satisfactory lessons conducted by part-time teachers. More lessons conducted by full-time teachers were judged as outstanding or good than were lessons conducted by part-time teachers. These patterns are often reflected in poorer attendance rates at lessons taught by part-time teachers (table 3).

27 Part-time teachers are generally less involved in curriculum and staff development activities than their full-time colleagues. They are often isolated from other humanities teachers either geographically, as they work away from main college sites, or because they are unable to attend team meetings. Occasionally, part-time teachers are the only teachers of a particular subject and little heed is given to their professional development or their contribution to college activities. In some instances, colleges have chosen to observe lessons of their full-time teachers only. The outcomes of this year's inspections suggest this may give colleges a false view of the quality of their provision.

English and Communication

Context and trends

28 Recruitment for English courses is buoyant. GCE A level English language continues to be popular. Many colleges also offer GCE A level English literature. The combined GCE A level course in English language and literature is increasingly used as an alternative and tends to attract students with lower GCSE grades. In many colleges, interview and recruitment procedures to GCE A level English courses are being improved to ensure that students are placed appropriately. The improvement has often been prompted by poor retention and achievement, particularly on GCE A level English language courses. The demanding nature of this subject has not always been made clear to potential students, who often expect it to be a continuation of GCSE English. Most colleges continue to offer GCSE English. Fewer are now running GCSE English literature courses.

29 Teaching time for GCSE English courses varies from two-and-a-half to four hours a week over one year for full-time students, and can be as low as two hours a week for part-time and evening students. The English language GCSE syllabus covers written and oral skills. There is

Table 3. Comparison of grades awarded to lessons taught by full-time and part-time teachers

| | % graded 1 and 2 | | % graded 4 and 5 | | % attendance | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Full-time teacher | Part-time teacher | Full-time teacher | Part-time teacher | Full-time teacher | Part-time teacher |
| English | 65 | 59 | 5 | 12 | 77 | 72 |
| Languages | 75 | 66 | 4 | 4 | 80 | 75 |
| Sociology and psychology | 69 | 55 | 3 | 13 | 76 | 72 |
| Geography, history, law and politics | 80 | 73 | 2 | 4 | 82 | 85 |
| All humanities provision | 71 | 63 | 4 | 9 | 78 | 74 |

Source: inspectorate database

a literature component which requires students to respond to an anthology of poetry and a complete work of Shakespeare. It is very challenging for teachers to deliver this complex syllabus within the time available, especially with weaker and less mature students. The time allocated to GCE A level courses is usually between four and five-and-a-half hours a week over two years for full-time students. Occasionally colleges allocate more teaching time or combine taught hours with sessions in which students work on their own with support available from teachers. However, this has not necessarily led to more successful teaching, learning or achievement. Part-time and evening courses are most often taught for two-and-a-half or three hours a week over one year, and students on these courses need to work effectively on their own.

One college provided an additional hour a week for a skills workshop as part of a GCSE English course, with a specific focus on improving spelling, grammar, punctuation and expression. The students' examination results improved.

30 Colleges do not routinely offer lower level preparatory courses in English. Some students sit GCSE English three or four times, in the hope of achieving a grade C. These students not only need to improve their English; they also need to achieve the important 'gateway' qualification of a grade C. These two needs are not always compatible. Some colleges are attempting to introduce other qualifications as 'stepping stones' to GCSE English, but report that students and their parents do not always want alternative courses. The drop-out of students before the final GCSE examination represents a considerable waste of resources, and poor levels of achievement only compound this.

Teaching and learning

31 Of the 391 English and communication lessons observed in 1998-99, 66% were judged to be good or outstanding, and 7% less than

satisfactory or poor. This is worse than the national profile for all humanities lessons observed in 1998-99. The average size of the classes observed was 11.0. The average attendance rate was 75%.

32 Lessons are generally well prepared and well structured. Teachers use a wide variety of methods to encourage students to think for themselves, to express themselves and to develop their language skills and responses to literature. Students are encouraged to take a healthily critical and questioning approach to literature texts. Their views are openly valued by teachers. Teachers on access to higher education courses are particularly skilled in using students' previous experience to help them learn. In weaker lessons, teachers talk too much and students have too little opportunity to develop and discuss their own ideas. Many English classes accommodate students with a range of abilities and some teachers are not sufficiently skilled at catering for differing learning needs or in making sure that all students exploit opportunities to learn. Learning materials are usually interesting and chosen carefully to reflect the varied backgrounds of students.

A group of young women of Afro-Caribbean origin in a sixth form college spoke enthusiastically of their interest in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

33 GCSE lessons in particular often fail to motivate students. Teachers do not encourage these students to develop the skills of working on their own as successfully as they do with GCE A level students. For example, a GCSE group, consisting largely of 16 and 17 year old students, wasted time copying undemanding grammatical exercises from the whiteboard and completing them mechanically.

34 Too many GCSE lessons are dull and rushed. Teachers, particularly if they are not specialist English teachers, are not always able to develop the necessary skills and

understanding in poorly motivated 16 year olds. Nevertheless, inspectors found examples of good teaching, including a number of lessons on poetry.

A GCSE revision session on Seamus Heaney's poetry was lively and productive. Students, in small groups, were given cut-up quotations and asked to arrange them under thematic and stylistic headings. In this way they reinforced their knowledge of the poetry for the examination and also organised their ideas about the poems' major themes and meanings. The activity gave them satisfaction and a sense of achievement.

35 GCSE students often have poor records of attendance and punctuality. The average rate of attendance in the lessons observed was only 69%. Inspectors also noted some inappropriate behaviour in GCSE lessons. An increasing number of GCSE English students take the course in addition to a vocational course, rather than as part of a full-time GCSE programme. As a result, teachers are working with groups of students of disparate interests and levels of prior achievement, some of whom consider their other courses to be more important to them. The introduction of the new key skills qualification in communication will provide an alternative to GCSE.

36 Study skills and examination techniques are usually well taught though key skills are given insufficient attention. The maintenance of personal study files is not usually taught overtly; it is an important aspect of study skills which is often overlooked. There is little use of IT in English. It is more widely used in GCE A level communication studies, as the course requires. In some colleges, students do not even use wordprocessing facilities routinely in presenting their work. Desktop publishing techniques are sometimes used to good effect by English as well as communication studies students. Where English teachers are committed to developing IT skills, and invest time and funding in resources and training, the results are exciting and motivating.

GCE A level students in a sixth form college exchanged ideas about Hamlet over the Internet with students in other colleges. In another college, a lesson on Heaney's Tollund Man used information on bog bodies from the Internet to provide background information to the poem.

37 Many English teachers provide enrichment opportunities for their GCE A level students through theatre trips, poetry readings and outside speakers. Such activities for GCSE students are less common. However, in one college, GCSE English students regularly make their own video soap opera.

Students' achievements

38 Achievement rates on GCE A level English courses over the three years from 1996 to 1998 show a slightly rising trend in both general further education and sixth form colleges, with the exception of GCE A level English language for 16 to 18 year olds in general further education colleges. Retention is a particular weakness on both GCE A level and GCSE courses in many colleges and is, overall, declining (table 4).

39 Many colleges now enter GCSE English students at both the foundation and higher tiers. The proportion of those starting the course who achieve grades A* to C is very low. For example, in 1996, 1997 and 1998 less than a third of the students who started a one-year GCSE English course gained a grade A* to C the following year. Colleges frequently claim that students have improved on their previous grade, but rarely produce and analyse data to support this. Nor do they analyse the comparative achievements of the students taking the different tiers.

40 Some students' written work is of a high standard on GCE A level courses, especially where they have the opportunity to undertake in-depth study. Students on access to higher education courses often produce fascinating and perceptive essays, for instance, on their personal language histories. The marking of students'

work is usually undertaken with considerable care. Teachers indicate errors and make constructive comments to help students improve. Sometimes teachers' assessment and marking of written work for GCE A level English literature is more concerned with discussion of the text than with the development of students' analytical skills. There are good arrangements for the internal moderation of students' coursework grades in most colleges. However, it is not common to find a shared marking policy to which all teachers adhere.

Resources

41 Many colleges now have dedicated rooms for English courses. This has encouraged the development of resource banks and wall displays. The use of audiovisual aids has become more common. Many colleges have good collections of video recordings which are well used by teachers and students. Library resources are usually adequate or good for this curriculum area. Teachers often liaise closely with library staff to develop relevant bookstock.

Some libraries include collections of books reflecting non-British literary traditions as well as the standard canon. Contemporary fiction and poetry stocks are less well developed than non-fiction and critical works.

42 Many staff in this area are well qualified. Almost all full-time staff have first degrees and teaching qualifications; some have higher degrees. Many English teams include at least one member who is an examiner for an awarding body. Part-time teachers are sometimes specialists in subjects other than English and/or lack a formal teacher training qualification. Much staff training concerns specific syllabus developments. Some staff attend more general training events, relating to teaching methods for different aspects of English. A particularly valuable form of staff development is where course teams work together on joint planning and the sharing of good practice.

Table 4. Summary of achievement and retention rates in English and communication studies, 1996 to 1998

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|--|-------|---------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| GCSE English* | 2 | Number of starters | 57,295 | 61,879 | 56,330 |
| | | Retention (%) | 77 | 75 | 73 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 44 | 46 | 49 |
| GCSE English literature* | 2 | Number of starters | 4,020 | 4,366 | 3,630 |
| | | Retention (%) | 75 | 74 | 74 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 49 | 48 | 52 |
| GCE A level English language and GCE A level English language and literature | 3 | Number of starters | 26,850 | 29,554 | 28,933 |
| | | Retention (%) | 80 | 77 | 76 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 73 | 77 | 80 |
| GCE A level English literature | 3 | Number of starters | 20,446 | 22,057 | 19,994 |
| | | Retention (%) | 82 | 79 | 79 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 82 | 85 | 87 |
| GCE A level communication studies | 3 | Number of starters | 5,918 | 5,578 | 4,862 |
| | | Retention (%) | 77 | 74 | 72 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 69 | 73 | 73 |

Source: ISR

grades A to C

Management

43 Inspectors found examples of strong management and leadership among English teams. There are usually regular team meetings, though these are not always minuted formally enough to be useful in monitoring actions. Meetings address detailed operational matters, but seldom focus on the systematic development of the English curriculum. Part-time teachers, whilst usually informed of developments, are rarely involved in decision-making. Schemes of work have improved and many of these include details of learning objectives and teaching methods. The best also identify the means of developing students' skills. A few are still no more than a list of topic headings. Some teachers have begun to use the schemes as working documents to be evaluated and adjusted from day to day. Course reviews are usually carried out conscientiously, but some lack a rigorous analysis of students' achievements and retention rates. Few curriculum teams set targets or use performance indicators. Strategies for improving teaching and learning are not always given sufficient attention in action plans.

44 Within colleges, little collaboration with other curriculum areas takes place. In some larger colleges, opportunities to make the English curriculum cohesive and to exchange good practice are lost because of the inadequate communication between teachers on different sites. The teaching of key skills generally remains the province of vocational teachers, but colleges have begun to use English teachers more formally in the teaching of communication skills, to the benefit of all parties. Increasingly, English teachers are fostering relationships with secondary schools to gain greater understanding of their students' experience and backgrounds.

Modern Foreign Languages and English as a Foreign Language

Context and trends

45 Languages remain popular with adult students. Many colleges offer structured programmes which allow students to progress from beginners' to advanced levels. Some are increasing levels of participation by adults in innovative ways.

In a large college offering 12 foreign languages, 1,466 students are studying a foreign language, most of them part time. The college runs a successful home study course in which 160 students are learning French, German, Italian, Spanish or Greek. Each student has a personal tutor who marks their work and keeps in contact with them by telephone. Students use specially designed materials including audio-cassettes, and come in to college for the speaking component of the course.

46 Some colleges have increased the enrolments on language courses for adults by offering alternative accreditation to GCSE and GCE A level courses. For example, one general further education college changed the accreditation of its language courses from GCSE to Open College qualifications at four levels. In three years, enrolments rose from 66 to 386. Many colleges are increasing the number of adult language learners by offering courses on Saturday mornings. Effective marketing can tap into the interest many adults have in learning a language.

One college held a 'languages fair' on the Saturday before the college's main enrolment week. Over 300 members of the public sampled free lessons, and attended presentations and an exhibition. Enrolments on modern languages courses increased as a result.

47 The number of 16 to 18 year old students learning a language has decreased in recent years. For example, in a sixth form college, enrolments on GCE A level French and German dropped from 100 in 1995 to 52 in 1998. The difficulties of the transition from GCSE to GCE A level, and some students' poor experience at GCSE, are commonly cited as reasons for the decline. Some colleges have sought to address the problem by entering into local partnerships.

A general further education college has used funding from the FEFC collaboration fund to work with the local education authority, local schools and the nearby university to map local provision in modern languages for students aged 16 to 18, and to identify reasons why students choose not to study languages after the age of 16.

48 In order to maintain the range of languages offered, some courses are run with very small groups. In some cases, students working at different qualification levels are taught in the same group. This often leads to an unsatisfactory experience for students and contributes to low rates of retention. The FEFC's last national report on humanities provision, in 1996, also drew attention to this weakness.

49 Common timetable allocations are four-and-a-half to five hours a week for GCE A level over two years, and three to three-and-a-half hours a week for GCSE over one year. This is often supplemented by lessons conducted by a foreign language assistant. Part-time evening courses at GCE A level are commonly taught in one three-hour session each week over one year. Many students, however, find this insufficient, and repeat the year, studying alongside those taking GCE A level for the first time. For lower level or 'conversational' classes, two hours a week is a typical time allocation.

50 The take-up of language units designed to complement vocational courses, or to form part of an enrichment programme, is low in most colleges. GNVQ leisure and tourism students are

often encouraged, and sometimes required, to study a modern language but there is little collaboration between language teachers and teachers of vocational courses. Few colleges have an effective strategy for developing the European or international dimensions of the curriculum.

Teaching and learning

51 In 1998-99, inspectors observed 251 lessons in modern foreign languages and English as a foreign language. Of these, 70% were judged to be good or outstanding, compared with the national average of 65% for all lessons observed in 1998-99. The average class size of 9.2 was smaller than the national average of 11.2. The average attendance rate in languages was 77% and in English as a foreign language, it was 76%.

52 Teachers of modern foreign languages are skilled at using a range of teaching and learning strategies. These include whole class discussion, small group work, role-play and tasks for students to complete on their own. Most teachers conduct their lessons mainly in the language being studied. They skilfully avoid using English by good use of gesture, mime or visual aids. A minority of teachers make excessive or unnecessary use of English in their lessons, sometimes even to give simple instructions to advanced students.

53 Most teaching is well planned and lively. Many teachers make effective use of a variety of teaching aids such as video, visual prompts, flashcards, cassette recordings, articles from the Internet, and satellite television. Good use of radio and television is illustrated in the example below. However, some teachers do not make full use of the resources available to them.

In a sixth form college, students borrowed videos of the news in French, watched them at home and wrote their own news summary which they presented to the class. They were also given weekly listening homework on cassette.

54 The potential of IT to support language learning remains insufficiently exploited, although its use is slowly increasing.

Students who were studying for a computer literacy qualification chose to be assessed in French. Other students used the Internet for research and used IT to present their coursework assignments. In a beginners' French class, students wordprocessed a letter to a hotel in order to reserve a room. They learned how to add French accents and corrected their first draft after discussion with the teacher.

55 In some lessons, teachers follow published course materials too closely and do not take account of students' differing abilities by introducing supplementary materials or activities. In one lesson, for example, beginners and more advanced students were given the same task to complete in the same timescale. Other weaknesses include insufficient emphasis on oral work, lack of variety in teaching methods, too little interaction between students, poor lesson planning and insufficient encouragement for students to work on their own outside the classroom.

56 Initial assessment of students' language skills is underdeveloped. Some adult students, returning to language study after some time, do not receive enough guidance to ensure that they enrol at the right level for them. These students often drop out as they find the course does not meet their expectations. Some colleges have addressed this by giving students a self-assessment checklist or initial test. Others allow students to attend the first class free of charge and to transfer to another class if appropriate.

57 Many teachers provide additional support for students outside their timetabled lessons. Much of this is informal and given when students request it. There are some good examples of more formal arrangements, including workshops where students receive support to help them tackle specific language

problems. The setting, marking and return of students' work is undertaken conscientiously by most teachers.

58 Many colleges encourage students to enhance their language studies through visits and work experience abroad. Some colleges use IT, such as electronic mail, to enhance these links. Other enrichment opportunities include tutoring by college students of pupils in partner schools.

Students' achievements

59 Most language students are well motivated and positive about their learning. Many, particularly adults, speak the foreign language with fluency and confidence. Others make little spontaneous use of the language in lessons, often because they are given insufficient opportunity to do so.

Students at an adult education institution said they were now able to communicate with friends and relatives, read texts, listen to radio broadcasts, and deal with telephone callers at work in the language they were learning.

60 Many students' written coursework shows evidence of skilful independent research. On many GCE A level courses, students and their teachers choose the coursework option instead of the literature paper of the examination, and this provides students with the opportunity to use libraries, newspapers, radio and television, and to draw on their experiences abroad, to create interesting and personal responses to current issues.

61 Pass rates at GCE A level are higher in sixth form colleges than in general further education colleges, but for GCSE the situation is reversed. Many colleges seek to accredit courses designed primarily for adults learning for recreational or leisure purposes, so that the courses are eligible for funding from the FEFC. Achievement on these courses is frequently assessed during the course rather than in a final

examination, and where this is the case, students perform well. However, many adult students choose not to attempt the qualification, and this adversely affects the published achievement rates. This is also the case with some adults on GCSE and GCE A level courses.

62 Many language courses have declining rates of retention (table 5). In 1997-98, retention rates at GCE A level ranged from 62% in Spanish to 74% in French and German. At GCSE, they varied from 69% in Spanish to 75% in French. Because of the linear nature of language learning, it is difficult for students to catch up on work missed. Colleges should give more thought to providing students with the opportunity to catch up with work missed through absence, as in the following example.

In a Hindi lesson for adults, the teacher had kept a careful record of students who had been absent. She provided a pack of handouts and exercises tailored for the needs of each student, with advice on how to tackle the work missed. She offered an opportunity to discuss any points that needed further explanation.

Resources

63 Most teachers are highly skilled and appropriately qualified. They have a good standard of fluency in the languages they teach. To maintain a wide range of languages, many

colleges employ a high proportion of part-time teachers, many of whom are native speakers. Foreign language assistants make a significant contribution. Full-time students often have a timetabled weekly session with the assistant, in which they practise their oral skills. In the best practice, the work of the assistants is carefully planned to complement that of the teachers, and they work alongside teachers to provide support in the classroom. Financial constraints have resulted in the loss of assistants in some colleges, and in some others they are not used to best effect.

64 Colleges are increasingly developing language learning centres in which the facilities of the language laboratory are supplemented by computers, satellite television, interactive video, the Internet, and study guides which students can use on their own. Such centres allow teachers to match activities and materials to the needs of students, and to cater for individuals or small groups for whom provision might otherwise be unviable. In some colleges, access to the language centre is restricted because it is also used for class teaching. Some colleges' facilities for independent language study are inadequate. In others, language laboratories and satellite television are not used effectively, because there is not enough technician support or because the equipment is out of order or unreliable.

Table 5. Summary of achievement and retention rates in modern foreign languages, 1996 to 1998

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|--|-------|---------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| GCSE modern foreign languages (one-year courses)* | 2 | Number of starters | 20,363 | 18,938 | 16,167 |
| | | Retention (%) | 75 | 71 | 72 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 44 | 49 | 54 |
| GCE A level French, German and Spanish (two-year courses) | 3 | Number of starters | 13,969 | 13,265 | 12,126 |
| | | Retention (%) | 80 | 72 | 72 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 76 | 74 | 81 |
| One-year foreign language courses (other than GCSE and GCE AS/A level) | All | Number of starters | 27,890 | 37,080 | 40,686 |
| | | Retention (%) | 74 | 71 | 74 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 46 | 49 | 53 |

Source: ISR

grades A to C

One general further education college has opened its languages centre to the business community; it offers 15 languages on a self-study basis, with support from tutors or foreign language assistants. Many students taking regular classes use the centre for additional independent study. However, use of the centre by the business community is low.

65 In most colleges, languages are taught in specialist classrooms with appropriate display, giving a flavour of the cultures concerned, and offering easy access to specialist materials. The best rooms have video-recorders, listening facilities and overhead projectors. Access to IT is often poor. Some colleges lack a languages base room and have inadequate facilities for the foreign language assistants to conduct sessions with small groups.

66 In sixth form colleges, textbooks are usually lent to students, but in many other colleges students have to purchase their own. Adequate dictionaries are often in short supply. Handouts, including authentic and up-to-date materials from the Internet, are usually well presented. Library provision is often poor and in many cases has not been updated to reflect developments in syllabuses. Where there are good links between library staff and languages teachers, resources are carefully managed to ensure that students have access to facilities where and when they need them.

Management

67 Good teamwork is a feature of most modern language departments. However, the management and support of part-time teachers varies considerably in its effectiveness. Some colleges employ a variety of strategies to ensure good communications with part-time teachers. Others find it difficult to hold meetings of the team, and this adversely affects curriculum planning, self-assessment and staff development. In multi-site colleges, or those with a number of

outreach centres in the local community, language teachers can feel isolated. In some colleges there is no team leader for modern foreign languages.

In one college, one full-time member of staff co-ordinates the work of 11 part-time teachers. The teaching team meets each month in the early evening. Meetings are well minuted and communication is effective.

English as a foreign language

68 Inspectors have seen some very good examples of teaching and learning in courses for English as a foreign language. Most courses are well planned to suit students' needs. In most cases, the teaching provides students with opportunities to develop language through a range of activities including reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, many teachers place too great a reliance on a text book or the examination syllabus in determining course content. Some teaching fails to stimulate the students, and teachers commonly fail to explain to students the plan of the lesson or its aims. Other weaknesses include the lack of opportunity to practise speaking, poor management of group work and insufficiently differentiated activities to cater for students' different levels of ability in English. Teachers often fail to make best use of the teaching aids available to them.

Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu and Islamic studies

69 Provision in Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu and Islamic studies is meeting a strong demand from local communities, and playing a significant part in widening participation. Inspectors observed classes in college and in the community, some delivered through collaborative partnerships. They found several examples of the college and its community partners working together effectively. The quality of teaching and learning is mostly good, but there is also some very poor work. In some lessons, teachers use a suitable

range of methods, including films and tape recordings, to motivate students. In others, students spend too long working individually without support. Some teachers do not use schemes of work or lesson plans.

70 Table 6 shows a summary of achievement and retention rates in community languages at GCE A level. Most students do not follow GCE A level programmes, but are on a variety of other accredited courses. Students are well motivated, and rates of attendance are good. A high proportion of those who wish to gain a qualification do so. Students' work is thorough and well presented.

71 Teachers are all native speakers, mostly bilingual, who have appropriate teaching qualifications. Most are skilful in catering for the diverse range of students in a group. Many of the teachers are part time and those working in the community frequently lack sufficient support. Staff development opportunities and effective line management for part-time teachers in this area are often lacking. There are enough textbooks and handouts on most courses, but IT software is rarely available. Access to equipment and materials varies considerably because of the wide range of local venues in which provision is offered. Some accommodation is cramped, particularly when classes take place in private houses.

Social Sciences: Psychology , Sociology, Religious Studies

Context and trends

72 Psychology, sociology and religious studies have maintained their popularity and, after English, represent the second largest area of humanities provision. Psychology remains the most popular subject. Enrolments at GCE AS/A level continue to grow, if more slowly than previously, but GCSE enrolments in both psychology and sociology have declined slightly. In a few colleges, the introduction of GNVQ health and social care, which includes the study of psychology, has replaced GCSE psychology. Social sciences are an important element of access courses.

73 Some colleges have maintained their provision of social science subjects by continuing to run some very small classes. This has sometimes had a damaging effect on students' experience, on retention and on achievement. Another strategy has been to combine classes working at different levels and to provide appropriate materials to enable students to work on their own or in groups, with support from the teacher. With careful planning, preparation and organisation, this approach works successfully.

Table 6. Summary of achievement and retention rates in community languages, 1996 to 1998

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------|------|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| GCE A level Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu | 3 | Number of starters | 248 | 285 | 129 |
| | | Retention (%) | 84 | 70 | 91 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 57 | 49 | 45 |

Source: ISR

One college established a steering group to provide training for teachers and students in the use of learning resources for independent study. In lessons, the use of the self-study resources was successfully combined with other class activities. Each study task was clearly explained, and a log kept of the work which each student completed. All students' work was regularly assessed.

74 In most colleges, the teaching time for social science subjects has remained broadly the same over the last three years. In some it has been reduced. For full-time students, an allocation of five hours a week for GCE A level and three hours a week for GCSE is common. The timetabling of access to higher education courses is often designed to allow students to attend at times which suit their other commitments. Where taught hours are low, many colleges issue useful and informative study packs for students to use on their own, and provide additional support sessions outside the normal class time.

Teaching and learning

75 In 1998-99, inspectors observed 376 lessons in psychology, sociology and religious studies. Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 65% of the lessons observed, a figure which is the same as that for the sector as a whole. As table 7 shows, however, there were significant differences between subjects.

76 There were marked differences between GCE A level and GCSE lessons. At GCE A level, 66% of lessons were given grades 1 and 2, compared with 59% of GCSE lessons. On

average, psychology groups have 14 students, sociology groups have 12 and religious studies have 11. The size of classes varies widely. Many have over 20 students.

77 The best schemes of work show how teaching methods and activities take account of students' different abilities. Some include reference to use of the Internet, or to the growing use of up-to-date case studies. Sometimes, schemes of work fail to spell out in sufficient detail the teaching methods to be used, or they are not made available to students. Many teachers issue student handbooks which provide a useful reference throughout the course.

To assist students throughout their psychology course, teachers provided them with a comprehensive handbook. It contained detailed information about the course, including the criteria and marking scheme which would be used for assessing their work. It also outlined the skills which students would need to develop in order to complete their studies successfully. It included useful guidance on using the learning resource centre for research purposes and on interpreting statistical data.

78 In the most successful lessons, teaching is lively and purposeful. Teachers relate lessons to previous learning, check what students have learned and provide support where necessary. They develop students' grasp of technical terms and their understanding of concepts. They do this through clearly structured exposition and well-managed activities conducted in pairs, groups and as a whole class. Learning resources such as videos, IT and CD-ROMs are

Table 7. Percentage of grades by subject

| Subject | Grades 1 and 2 (%) | Grades 4 and 5 (%) |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Religious studies | 81 | 0 |
| Sociology | 71 | 5 |
| Psychology | 60 | 10 |

Source: inspectorate database

used effectively, and visiting speakers are invited where appropriate. Teachers draw on students' own experiences to good effect.

A GCE A level psychology lesson concerned cognitive behaviour therapy and irrational thought. The teacher had prepared a range of role-play exercises which required students to draw on their own experiences. The exercises helped students to explore the issues and make links with the underlying theoretical concepts.

In a sociology lesson, clear-up rates for notifiable offences were presented to students, who were asked to work in pairs to analyse the data and answer a series of questions. The teacher discussed the findings with each pair, thus checking all students' level of understanding. Many students used knowledge from their study of law as well as their study of sociology to inform their analysis. The subsequent whole group discussion built on and developed the analysis further and considered alternative research methods to produce statistics with greater validity.

79 In the least successful lessons, the pace of work is often too slow, and teachers fail to offer students enough encouragement with their learning. Many have low expectations of students and their teaching is insufficiently stimulating. The aims of the lesson are not always made clear, and teachers sometimes fail to check that students are learning. As a result, students fail to grasp the fundamental principles being taught. For example, in a lesson on social security, students spent most of their time copying from the board. There was no attempt to check that all students understood what they were writing.

80 Colleges vary considerably in the extent to which they develop key skills within social science courses. Students rarely have the opportunity to record their achievements in key skills. Few colleges develop them as systematically as the example below illustrates.

In one large tertiary college, every course in the social sciences has been designed to include the key skills of IT, application of number and communication. In an access to higher education lesson, students were working on a project in small groups. They made good use of computers to develop the skills of research and data analysis. Before presenting their findings, they had the opportunity to practise making a group presentation thus developing the key skill of communication.

81 Some teachers make good use of the Internet and of CD-ROMs to produce up-to-date teaching materials. The availability by electronic means of information such as social trends analysis and census data, and of newspaper articles, is increasing, and where they are encouraged to do so students use these sources in their assignments. Some teachers provide lists of useful websites for students' research, and put lecture notes and assignments on the college's computer network. However, there is still little use of IT in the classroom. Some teachers require training to acquire the necessary IT skills. For students who have not achieved grade C in GCSE mathematics, or require additional help with numeracy, some colleges provide extra programmes. In teaching statistical aspects of the course, teachers are not always aware of students' previous level of knowledge.

82 The information and guidance received by prospective students before they enrol for social science subjects is frequently inadequate, particularly for those enrolling on part-time courses. Students often have no previous experience of social sciences on which to base their choice because they have not studied these subjects at school. College publicity materials do not always enable students to make an informed choice of course, and some students fail to seek advice. Colleges have yet to investigate how inadequate guidance affects retention and achievement rates.

83 Greater effort is being made to take account of the very varied abilities and aptitudes of students, particularly when entry criteria are relaxed to increase opportunities for students. Increasingly, students' skills and aptitudes are assessed at the beginning of the course, and appropriate support is provided. This sometimes includes support for high achievers who wish to pursue their studies further.

A particularly strong feature of access to higher education courses is the willingness of teachers to respond to individual students by offering extra support and guidance.

84 Assessment procedures are well managed and fair. In most colleges, teachers operate a common marking policy and conduct internal moderation of marking. They provide detailed and constructive written guidance on how students can improve their performance and correct errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In the best practice, teachers have detailed criteria for awarding marks, which they share with students so that they understand the standards to be reached in order to complete the work successfully.

Students' achievements

85 Many students achieve high standards of work. They readily contribute to discussions, show good motivation and have an appropriate understanding of their subject. Their coursework often demonstrates high levels of knowledge, understanding, analysis and organisation. Students' written work contains many examples of clarity of thought and well-expressed ideas.

86 At GCE A level in 1998, there was a marked difference in levels of achievement between religious studies at 84%, psychology at 81% and sociology at 78%. Less than two-thirds of those who complete a GCE AS social science course gain the qualification. Achievements on one-year GCE A level courses remain unsatisfactory. GCSE achievements have shown steady improvement over the last three years.

87 As a general trend, retention is declining on GCE A level, GCSE and access to higher education courses (table 8). The combined effect of poor retention and achievements on GCSE courses meant that in 1998, only 32 out of every 100 students who started the course achieved grade C or above.

Resources

88 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Most have a degree in the appropriate subject, a teaching qualification and varied teaching experience. Many have higher degrees. Most full-time teachers keep themselves up to date by attending events organised by examining boards and professional associations, and many are moderators and examiners for awarding bodies. Colleges give high priority to continuous professional development despite limited resources. Staff development programmes frequently place insufficient emphasis on promoting improvements in teaching.

89 Most accommodation is well decorated, suitably equipped and conducive to learning. Some classrooms are too small for the number of students, making it difficult for teachers to adopt a range of appropriate teaching methods. Most have well-designed, relevant wall displays which give them a clear subject identity. Learning support materials are frequently provided in subject base rooms. They include study packs for topics and current reference material. Designated social science areas often have good access to audiovisual aids. These aids can help to stimulate effective learning.

In a well-planned religious studies lesson, the teacher used a short video about sufferers from senile dementia. This proved to be a simple but highly effective introduction to the complex topic covering the relationship between the body and the mind.

90 Students have ready access to computers in resource centres, but most social science

Table 8. Summary of achievement and retention rates in social sciences, 1996 to 1998

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|--|-------|---------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| GCSE psychology, sociology and religious studies* | 2 | Number of starters | 16,109 | 15,498 | 12,937 |
| | | Retention (%) | 72 | 67 | 67 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 40 | 42 | 48 |
| GCE AS psychology, sociology and religious studies | 3 | Number of starters | 3,276 | 3,299 | 4,050 |
| | | Retention (%) | 74 | 74 | 77 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 58 | 61 | 58 |
| GCE A level psychology (two-year courses) | 3 | Number of starters | 18,241 | 21,129 | 21,224 |
| | | Retention (%) | 76 | 72 | 70 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 75 | 77 | 81 |
| GCE A level sociology (two-year courses) | 3 | Number of starters | 12,881 | 13,102 | 11,738 |
| | | Retention (%) | 76 | 71 | 69 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 71 | 72 | 78 |
| GCE A level religious studies (two-year courses) | 3 | Number of starters | 1,683 | 1,692 | 1,511 |
| | | Retention (%) | 82 | 74 | 72 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 85 | 84 | 84 |

Source: ISR

grades A to C

classrooms are not equipped with computers. Some of the computers are out of date and are not networked. Increasingly, students are wordprocessing their assignments.

91 In most colleges, libraries contain adequate and up-to-date books and reference materials. In some, these holdings are supplemented by resources held locally in subject bases. Liaison between teachers and library staff is developing, and increasingly library staff attend subject and course team meetings.

Management

92 Social science courses are generally well managed. Teachers work well together. They meet regularly and attendance at meetings is good. Minutes are kept and actions monitored. In the best practice meetings are organised so that part-time teachers can attend. Increasing use of part-time teachers poses a number of problems. Many part-time teachers find it difficult to attend meetings which are scheduled at times when they do not normally attend college. When part-time teachers are also course leaders, communications with other

course team members are often unsatisfactory. In some instances, part-time teachers may act as personal tutors. They have very little time to see students individually, to follow up absentees, or to deal with assignments that have not been submitted.

93 A common weakness in departmental management is the insufficiently systematic use of quantitative data for planning, self-assessment and quality assurance. In some cases, problems with central management information systems compound the difficulties. Some departments set and regularly monitor targets for students' attendance, retention and pass rates, and use the data effectively to identify areas for improvement.

General Humanities Subjects (Classical Studies, General Studies, Geography, History, Law, Physical Education, Politics, Pre-uniformed Services Courses, Teacher Education)

Context and trends

94 These curriculum areas are responding positively to the needs of a wide range of students. Developments include modular GCE A level courses, the introduction of preparatory courses which encourage further study and the use of different approaches to teaching. Pre-uniformed services courses have grown recently. These courses encourage participation by young people, especially men, who have achieved limited success at school. They are presently offered at intermediate level and foundation level courses are being piloted. Enrolment to GCE A level general studies have also increased. There is evidence in a few colleges that recruitment to both geography and history at GCE A level has been adversely affected by the need to choose between the subjects at key stage 4. GCE A level politics is declining in numbers. GCSE programmes continue to decline and some have been discontinued. Physical education courses at GCE A level and GCSE are recruiting fewer students as a result of competition from related GNVQ and national diploma courses. Courses in classical studies and ancient history have grown, often as a replacement for Latin.

95 Increased pressure to achieve efficiencies has influenced the development of a range of teaching methods. For instance, colleges increasingly use lectures to large groups of GCE A level general studies students to teach aspects of the programme, though with varying degrees of success. For example, a GCE A level general

studies lesson took place in a lecture theatre where groups huddled in different areas and the teacher's attempts to stimulate group discussion failed.

On one general studies course, students attend a weekly lecture on a range of scientific, artistic, social and economic topics. The lead lecturer develops course materials which are shared with a team of 18 teachers and used in a weekly follow-up seminar. Student retention on the course is good.

96 General studies lessons are sometimes taught in tutorial time. This requires very careful planning to ensure that the requirements of the two programmes are properly met. Some colleges make GCE A level general studies compulsory, with the aim of generating additional funding and/or filling up a full-time student's programme. Such an approach sometimes adversely affects students' interest and motivation.

97 Teaching time for general humanities subjects has not been significantly reduced since the last humanities national report. Most full-time GCE A level courses are taught for approximately five hours a week, sometimes with additional tutorial time. Part-time GCE A levels are usually taught for three hours a week. A growing tendency to timetable all teaching for a particular subject on one day a week gives cause for concern. Students have less opportunity to seek support from staff and this difficulty is exacerbated when the staff are part time. Teachers also have to be very skilled to ensure students' interest is maintained for such long periods of time. There are isolated examples of a decline in students' retention and achievements as a result of these changes.

98 Some colleges report that classes have increased in size as a result of efficiency measures. In most cases, however, they do not exceed 20. The small size of some classes can inhibit group interaction. Where numbers have fallen, colleges have sought to maintain the

subject either by combining first and second year students in one class or sometimes by offering the subject on an individual self-taught basis, with some tutorial support. Both of these developments require skilful planning and teaching if they are to be effective.

Teaching and learning

99 In 1998-99, inspectors observed 227 lessons in geography, history, law and politics. Of these, 78% were judged to be good or outstanding, compared with the national average of 65% for all lessons observed in 1998-99. The average class size of 13.2 was higher than the national average of 11.2. Attendance rates were among the highest in the humanities at 83%.

100 The quality of teaching and learning is often good. Schemes of work are well devised and interpret syllabuses well. Lessons are generally carefully planned. Teachers use an appropriately wide range of teaching and learning strategies, particularly in the increasing number of long lessons. Audiovisual aids are often used to good effect.

In a lesson for mature students studying law, a video on the role of the barrister was highly successful. In another law lesson, students were asked to imagine that £1 million had been left to the college and to apply the concepts of distributive justice in allocating it.

With one GCE A level geography group, the lecturer regularly spends the first five minutes of each lesson prompting students to talk about 'geography in the news'. On one occasion, video excerpts about an Austrian avalanche and the development of greenfield sites in the south of England raised geographical questions which were thoroughly discussed. Students enjoy finding relevant newspaper articles for display in the classroom.

101 Some of the most effective learning results from teachers' skilful management of discussion.

Good use is made of questioning to strengthen students' understanding and to encourage them to debate issues amongst themselves. In a lesson on the Macedonian wars students themselves were encouraged to ask questions as a means of maintaining discussion and developing knowledge and understanding.

102 A pre-uniformed services lesson illustrated the use of simple practical exercises to demonstrate the importance of communication skills.

Students each had the name of an occupation on a label on their backs. They were allowed to ask six questions to try to identify the occupation. Another activity consisted of a simulation exercise which required students to identify the problems in crossing a rickety bridge and to communicate the solutions to each other. These exercises were both enjoyable and demanding.

103 In many colleges, thorough attention is paid to examination techniques. There is careful reinforcement of these through the content and structure of lessons and the regular use of test papers and examination questions. However, too much concentration on examination requirements sometimes discouraged students from forming their own opinions and providing evidence to support them.

104 Study packs are sometimes used effectively in GCE A level general studies.

In one college, students are expected to undertake private study between GCE A level general studies lessons. Resource packs are issued at each lesson, with follow-up reading, activities, quizzes and subject information. These are of good quality.

105 IT is being used increasingly in lessons. More humanities teachers are using specific computer programs to expand their information base and teaching methods.

In a history lesson, students used a software program about the Liberal government of 1908-14. Students worked well in pairs using the programme and identifying relevant data for their written tasks.

106 One college allocates time for students to use the Internet for research purposes. Increasingly, assignments are wordprocessed, but use of spreadsheets, databases and graphical packages is less well developed.

In an access to higher education lesson on study skills, students spoke for two minutes on the subject of stress. They made good use of the library and other college resources. They illustrated aspects of stress by using material about a television cartoon character which they had downloaded from the Internet.

107 Some lessons are poorly structured and managed. Teachers fail to give enough attention to students' differing learning needs. They too often answer the questions they themselves have posed, rather than waiting for students to answer. Other weaknesses in the poorer lessons include ineffective management of group work and low rates of attendance. For example, in an access to higher education history lesson on events leading to the Second World War, the teacher used an overhead transparency from which to lecture the students. The few questions asked were predominantly answered by one student. Throughout, the teacher missed opportunities for involving the whole group. Verbal information could more usefully have been given in a handout. Some of the teacher's explanations were unclear and the nature and significance of events were not highlighted effectively.

Students' achievements

108 Levels of achievement at GCSE and GCE A level vary according to the type of college. In many sixth form colleges, examination results at GCE A level are good and sometimes outstanding. The picture in general further education colleges is more mixed, partly due to the recruitment of students with weaker initial achievements. The performance of 16 to 19 year olds at grades A* to C on GCSE courses is poor and levels of achievement are generally declining. Achievements in GCSE law are particularly poor. Poor retention is also a common theme. There is little evidence that successful measures to improve retention are being developed. In some colleges, punctuality is a cause for concern and attendance is low, which are factors contributing to the low retention. Retention on teacher education courses is good, but achievement is decidedly weaker. Access to higher education courses often have poor retention rates, but those students who obtain the qualification have a good record of progression to higher education. Knowledge of students' destinations has improved significantly and many departments hold good information, particularly on those students who proceeded to degree courses relevant to their subject. A summary of achievement and retention rates in humanities subjects appears in table 9.

109 In many lessons, students contribute readily and there is much lively debate, which enables them to advance their understanding. Students on teacher education courses, in particular, give presentations of a high standard. There are examples of high-quality written work, notably in sixth form colleges. Coursework is a key component of GCE A level geography. It allows students to perform at their best and encourages wider research and investigative skills. In an outstanding project on out-of-town retail development, students demonstrated a broad range of skills, such as data collection, recording and analysis.

Resources

110 Physical resources are generally adequate. Most students have sufficient textbooks and libraries are well stocked, although not always well used. One college's library guide helps students make best use of the resources available for general studies. The availability to students of CD-ROMs and software packages has increased, and the use of, and access to, IT has markedly improved. In one college, students had access to a teacher's own computer file which contained all his current lecture notes and handouts. At another college, staff created a software program of key ideas and supporting evidence in history and politics for students to use. Teachers do not always take full advantage of IT resources in their lessons.

111 Some colleges have successfully developed their own resources to augment published materials.

One college has produced an excellent general studies handbook, designed for all personal tutors to use in consultation with their students. It includes a list of all the known higher education courses which accept GCE A level general studies for admissions purposes.

112 Classrooms vary in quality but are generally at least adequate for purpose. In some colleges there are subject-based rooms, with relevant displays, often including examples of students' work. In other cases, however, the use of general classrooms restricts the opportunities for a subject focus.

Table 9. Summary of achievement and retention rates in general humanities subjects, 1996 to 1998

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|--|---------|---------------------|-----------------|--------|--------|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| GCSE geography* | 2 | Number of starters | 2,593 | 2,138 | 1,676 |
| | | Retention (%) | 77 | 74 | 74 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 37 | 35 | 37 |
| GCSE history* | 2 | Number of starters | 3,584 | 3,047 | 2,470 |
| | | Retention (%) | 77 | 73 | 64 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 34 | 35 | 39 |
| GCE A level general studies | 3 | Number of starters | 11,088 | 12,125 | 12,608 |
| | | Retention (%) | 75 | 71 | 69 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 64 | 69 | 72 |
| GCE A level geography | 3 | Number of starters | 12,543 | 12,290 | 11,481 |
| | | Retention (%) | 85 | 80 | 79 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 74 | 82 | 86 |
| GCE A level government and politics | 3 | Number of starters | 5,494 | 4,887 | 4,235 |
| | | Retention (%) | 80 | 77 | 77 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 73 | 82 | 80 |
| GCE A level history | 3 | Number of starters | 23,749 | 26,104 | 23,744 |
| | | Retention (%) | 82 | 80 | 82 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 75 | 77 | 81 |
| GCE A level law | 3 | Number of starters | 13,852 | 13,701 | 12,775 |
| | | Retention (%) | 77 | 72 | 72 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 58 | 61 | 70 |
| Further and adult teachers certificate | Various | Number of starters | 18,488 | 18,775 | 18,497 |
| | | Retention (%) | 90 | 89 | 89 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 68 | 70 | 75 |

Source: ISR

grades A to C

113 Many colleges have good resources for physical education courses and other sporting activities. Where colleges do not own facilities, there are good arrangements for offsite resources to be used. In one college, students on pre-uniformed services courses are able to use army cadet force equipment.

Management

114 The organisation of general humanities subjects varies greatly according to the size and complexity of the provision. In the best examples, teachers hold subject-related meetings. Proceedings are well minuted and action points agreed which are subsequently followed up. Managers and teachers have a good grasp of major trends in each subject and a purposeful sense of development. In some cases, meetings are rare and records are not well kept. There is increasing reliance on part-time staff who cannot always attend meetings. When, as is increasingly the case, a single teacher has responsibility for a subject within a college, there is no opportunity for the exchange of ideas and teaching methods. Part-time specialist instructors enhance the quality of teaching on pre-uniformed services courses. The appointment of a sports development officer in one college is proving valuable, not just for GCE A level physical education but across the curriculum.

115 External links are well developed in these subjects. General studies and pre-uniformed services programmes draw extensively on external contributors to strengthen the content of the course. Physical education courses are supplemented by extra-curricular sporting programmes. One college offers elements of GCE A level physical education to professional footballers from a nearby league club. Biennial parades open to the public are a good exercise in community relations and the promotion of pre-uniformed services courses.

Conclusions and Issues

116 The strengths of the provision of humanities in further education are:

- the very extensive range of courses and programme opportunities
- the participation of students from a wide variety of backgrounds
- flexible arrangements which give students a good choice of when and where to study
- the high quality of teaching and learning in some areas
- thorough marking of students' work and effective feedback on progress
- the development of research and independent study skills
- increasingly effective use of value-added analysis to assess students' achievements and measure their progress
- much good-quality specialist accommodation, including resource bases for students
- good opportunities to participate in activities which enhance the curriculum.

117 In order to improve provision, colleges should address the following issues:

- the slow response to some national initiatives and developments
- inadequate pre-course guidance and insufficient initial diagnosis of learning needs
- insufficient identification, development and assessment of key skills
- much teaching which fails to take sufficient account of students' individual needs
- differences in the quality of teaching between full-time and part-time teachers
- poor teaching, learning and achievement on many GCSE courses
- declining retention rates
- poor management and support of part-time teachers in some colleges
- insufficiently rigorous self-assessment.

Annex A

Humanities programme area grades compared with grades for all programme areas, 1996-97 to 1998-99

| Year | Programme areas | Grade 1 (%) | Grade 2 (%) | Grade 3 (%) | Grade 4 (%) | Grade 5 (%) |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1996-97 | Humanities | 13 | 64 | 23 | 1 | 0 |
| | All programme areas | 9 | 59 | 30 | 2 | 0 |
| 1997-98 | Humanities | 14 | 52 | 31 | 2 | 0 |
| | All programme areas | 9 | 60 | 29 | 2 | 0 |
| 1998-99 | Humanities | 10 | 50 | 34 | 6 | 0 |
| | All programme areas | 10 | 53 | 30 | 7 | 0 |

Source: inspectorate database

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Annex B

Number of starters, retention and achievement rates by subprogramme area for qualifications expected to end in 1997-98

| Subprogramme area code | Subprogramme area | Number of starters* (excluding transfers) | Retention (%) | % Achieved of completers |
|------------------------|--|---|---------------|--------------------------|
| 9A | English (including communication studies) | 143,600 | 77 | 74 |
| 9B | Foreign languages | 97,500 | 74 | 59 |
| 9C | Social studies (including sociology, psychology) | 84,300 | 72 | 66 |
| 9D | Education and training | 125,900 | 92 | 73 |
| 9E | Access courses (humanities) | 21,600 | 76 | 67 |
| 9F | History and politics | 31,900 | 79 | 80 |
| 9G | Geography | 13,800 | 79 | 84 |
| 9H | English as a foreign language | 47,700 | 84 | 43 |
| 9O | Other humanities | 426,900 | 84 | 66 |
| 9P | Generic humanities qualifications with no notional level | 4,000 | 78 | 75 |

Source: FEFC qualifications database

*rounded to the nearest hundred

Note: includes all notional levels, all ages