

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

Widening Participation and Raising Standards: *Colleges' Case Studies*

Report from the Inspectorate

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Introduction	1
What works: Key Critical Success Factors	6
Case Study 1: Knowsley Community College	8
Case Study 2: Barking College	47
Case Study 3: Northumberland College	70
Case Study 4: Thurrock College	88
Case Study 5: Hackney Community College	105
Case Study 6: Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College	127

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Barking College

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Hackney Community College

Knowsley Community College

Northumberland College

Thurrock College

for giving generously of their time in contributing to these case studies.

They offer others in the sector a rich source of ideas for effective practice in widening participation and raising standards. All recognise they have developed successful strategies to widen participation, and that there is further work to be done.

Inevitably, the case studies take stock of work in widening participation at a particular point in time. Since the inspection visits were made to these colleges, further progress has been made.

Introduction

1 In 1997, the Widening Participation Committee chaired by Helena Kennedy QC published its report, *Learning Works*. The committee's work has profoundly affected developments in further education. Its definition of widening participation as

access, achievement and progression for those groups often under-represented in further education

has spurred colleges and other providers of further education to focus not merely on 'getting new students in' but, increasingly, to make sure that they succeed in their studies.

2 Commitment to widening participation is clearly reflected in almost all colleges' mission statements and strategic aims. There is broad-based support in the sector for the challenging objective set by the secretary of state for further education to widen participation and raise standards.

3 The case studies of further education colleges and a sixth form college presented in this report demonstrate that the sector can both widen participation and improve student retention and achievement. These colleges engage a wide range of learners, including those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those who traditionally shun education. They provide high-quality provision and secure good outcomes for their students. They are systematic and successful in their approaches to widening participation.

4 The case studies are designed to be used by:

- governors and managers to help review their own whole-college strategies for widening participation and raising standards
- curriculum managers and teachers
- staff development managers
- other providers of further education, including institutions outside the sector
- others with an interest in further education.

5 Many colleges have made effective use of the inspectorate's report, *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice*, published in 1997. The case studies of colleges presented in this report seek to capture further education at its best in widening participation and raising standards during the teaching year 1999. To accompany this case study report, the inspectorate is also publishing:

- a survey of progress in widening participation since 1997, with illustrations of good practice
- a summary report on the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded widening participation strategic partnerships, to be published on the FEFC's website
- materials to help colleges widen participation in different programme areas, in the 'Making a Difference' series.

What Works: Key Critical Success Factors

6 Each of the case study colleges is well managed, has sound quality assurance arrangements and effective teaching and learning. These are threshold requirements for a college successfully to manage and improve strategies for widening participation and raising standards.

7 The inspectorate identified key additional ingredients for success in widening participation and raising standards. The critical success factors were remarkably similar across the colleges. They were:

Governance and management

- strong staff and governor commitment to widening participation and ensuring high-quality provision for all students
- clear strategic goals set for widening participation underpinned by rigorous operational planning

Introduction

- the priority given to widening participation and raising standards in periods of expansion of, or reduction in, provision
- setting of recruitment targets for under-represented groups
- well-managed and effective strategies to raise retention and achievement rates for all students
- capitalising on the synergies between developments in widening participation, inclusive learning and equal opportunities
- strategic use of external funding to widen participation
- a positive image of the college in local areas with high levels of deprivation
- close and effective links with partner agencies in working towards the common goal of widening participation

Curriculum and teaching and learning

- high-quality teaching tailored to meet each student's abilities
- in general further education colleges, a broad range of courses at all levels with flexible points of entry and clear progression routes
- provision designed for particular groups; for example, excluded school pupils and unemployed men
- off-site provision to engage new student groups, including effective use of information technology (IT) in the community

Support for students

- carefully assessing each student's potential to succeed and placing them on the right level of course with appropriate support
- comprehensive support services for full-time and part-time students in all the venues used for teaching and learning
- well-planned and effective tutorial support, including carefully structured tutorials for

students most at risk of leaving courses and not achieving

- well-developed strategies to encourage students, especially those on lower level courses and in outreach locations, to progress to more advanced study or employment
- celebration of students' successes

General resources

- high-quality accommodation that is carefully matched to students' needs and that ascribes status to disadvantaged learners

Quality assurance

- rigorous and comprehensive quality assurance informed by widening participation commitments
- systematic tracking of retention and achievement rates for different student groups and action to address patterns of underachievement
- staff development programmes carefully designed to support widening participation
- innovation, research and development
- celebration of the college's successes in widening participation.

Case Study 1

Case Study 1: Knowsley Community College: Comprehensive and Successful Strategies for Widening Participation and Raising Standards

Introduction

8 Widening participation and raising standards are central to all aspects of provision; from staff's welcome to tentative potential students through to governors' close monitoring of retention and achievement rates for different groups of students. The college is in one of the most deprived areas of the country. Unemployment rates are higher than the national average and only 23% of pupils leave school having gained five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or above. Three-quarters of students are from postcode districts with high levels of deprivation. Courses are offered in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Just over 60% of provision is at level 1. The college has an extensive network of community-based centres. The quality of provision is good and retention and achievement rates are higher than the national average for the sector on most courses. Particular challenges which the college faces in widening participation yet further include:

- helping students prepare for progression to employment in a locality where there are high levels of unemployment and few opportunities to develop careers or secure well-paid jobs
- addressing lower than average retention rates on a few courses and among some students from postcode districts with high levels of deprivation
- improving progression rates from level 1 to more advanced courses.

Critical success factors

9 These include:

- particularly robust strategies to improve retention and achievements, particularly for those students most at risk of 'failing'
- imaginative ways of helping to motivate students that are carefully dovetailed with teaching
- staff who understand students' backgrounds and are dedicated to disadvantaged students succeeding in further education.

Mission and strategy

10 The college's mission is to 'respond to lifelong learning' by 'encouraging access and progression and widening participation, raising aspirations and achievements, and providing supportive and caring support services for students'.

11 The colleges' six strategic aims and related objectives help translate commitments to widen participation into developments across the college. For example, the college aims to:

- provide a wide range of learning opportunities that meet the needs of the community
- offer effective learning support services
- increase community participation and achievement in education.

12 Each strategic objective is underpinned by detailed plans for delivery and, in some cases, measurable targets. They include:

- extending outreach provision, including higher level vocational courses
- focusing recruitment strategies in the most deprived local areas
- addressing disaffection and underachievement
- improving student retention to at least 85%.

Case Study 1

13 The governors' longstanding commitment to widening participation is reviewed and further developed annually at a governors' residential event on strategy. Governors:

- regularly monitor achievements in widening participation; for example, the achievement of targets set for growth in outreach provision and the recruitment of particular groups of students
- closely monitor retention rates. If any course has a lower retention rate, they call for investigation and a detailed plan of action, then monitor progress.

14 Recently, governors raised questions about the college's ability to provide education for students experiencing serious social disadvantage such as dependency on drugs or severe behavioural difficulties. They sought, and were given, assurance by senior managers that staff were properly trained and equipped for this specialist work.

15 Staff are immensely committed to the college's mission and aims. Operational plans are closely geared to deliver the college's objectives. Successful achievement of goals relating to widening participation is given a high profile by senior managers and is celebrated.

The college's annual quality assurance report lists successful developments during the year. This is seen by staff as a 'roll of honour' which recognises and rewards their collective efforts.

16 The college has recently established a management post with specific responsibility for improving student motivation, retention and achievement, and a senior manager has overall responsibility for widening participation.

17 New initiatives for widening participation are underpinned by staff development. Training focuses on key staff developing appropriate skills and knowledge; for example, in conducting motivational interviews, and raising awareness

among other staff so that they effectively draw upon their colleagues' new expertise. Dissemination of staff development is a standing item at weekly course team meetings.

18 Strategies for widening participation are strengthened by effective planning involving all concerned with delivering programmes, rigorous quality assurance using a range of performance indicators relating to widening participation, and thorough self-assessment processes. Quality teams involving all staff are well established throughout the college. Each team sets performance targets and closely monitors the quality of its work and makes improvements. Various quality improvement groups are set up to focus on specific issues relating to widening participation; for example, developing strategies for teaching key skills and for raising levels of achievement.

Policy

19 The college's strong commitments to widening participation, equal opportunities and inclusive learning are effectively integrated. Staff are considering how best to plan and chart work in these distinct but sometimes overlapping policy areas.

Case Study 1

Policy implementation in aspects of work	Widening participation	Inclusive learning	Equal opportunities
Staff development programmes			
– motivational interviewing	✓	✓	–
– understanding anxiety and learning	✓	✓	–
– courses and careers in the pop music industry	✓	–	–
– successfully managing equal opportunities	–	–	✓
– hairdressing for men	✓	–	✓

External funding

20 The college successfully attracts external funding for provision for disadvantaged students, and for research and development activities focusing on strategies to widen participation and raise standards. About 40% of the college's funding is from sources other than the FEFC.

One example of innovation supported by European Union funding is the transnational development of tools for assessing students' logical reasoning. These assessments will help to identify students with potential to take higher level courses than their qualifications indicate and to develop support programmes in logical reasoning.

Self-assessment

21 Widening participation issues form an important part of the college's self-assessment. For example, the broad range of effective support services are identified as a key strength. Also, strategies developed to help motivate and improve retention rates for students potentially 'at risk' of failure are judged to have been successful in supporting students and raising retention and achievement.

22 Self-assessment is carried out at three levels: the individual, the team and the college. The college considers self-assessment by

teachers particularly important. Teachers' self-assessments are used as the basis for appraisal and they inform course reviews.

A teacher's self-assessment checklist of 31 points covers aspects relevant to widening participation such as, 'do I?':

- closely monitor student attendance and punctuality and take action where necessary
- meet individual students regularly to discuss progress
- take action to ensure that students who need it obtain additional support
- familiarise myself with, and participate in, cross-college initiatives; for example, motivational interviewing and the value-added project.

Each teacher assesses students' punctuality, attendance and retention for each course in relation to college targets. Teachers take into account the findings of lesson observations carried out by peers or managers, including the extent to which the different learning abilities of students are catered for, how high teachers' expectations are of their students and whether encouraging feedback is given to each student on the progress they are making. Teachers' self-assessments also draw upon evidence from student questionnaires.

Case Study 1

23 As part of course teams' assessment of provision, detailed analyses are carried out of the participation, retention and achievement rates of students from postcode areas with high levels of deprivation. These have revealed that the highest proportion of students from disadvantaged postcode districts, 89%, are enrolled in construction and motor vehicle provision and the lowest proportion, 64%, in courses in art and design. Overall, retention and achievement rates are slightly lower amongst students from deprived postcode areas, although this pattern is reversed in catering and care. The college is trying to identify why strategies are particularly effective in widening participation and raising standards in these two areas. Retention and achievement rates have not yet been analysed by sex, ethnicity or those in receipt of benefit.

24 Action plans in the self-assessment report include strategies for further improving retention and achievement. The college plans to set targets for progression rates for groups identified by the local strategic partnership as least likely to progress to higher level study; for example, women moving from level 2 to level 3 courses. The college makes extensive use of benchmarking data in its self-assessment. These include data from schools, sixth form colleges, further education colleges and colleges which typically recruit a high percentage of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The curriculum

25 The college's broad and relevant curriculum is a key factor in the college's success in widening participation. Curriculum design and review are the responsibility of senior managers and the delivery of courses is the responsibility of heads of section. This arrangement ensures that there is dialogue about curriculum design and development and that provision closely matches the strategic objectives linked to widening participation.

26 Various initiatives to enhance the curriculum and widen participation across the college are funded through a curriculum entitlement group.

This year, £10,000 was made available to enhance induction. All sections submitted bids on the basis of criteria, including:

- easing the transition of students into college and study
- improving retention
- increasing awareness of equal opportunities
- zero tolerance of breaches in equal opportunities
- developing the key skills of working with others and improving your learning and performance.

Initiatives included:

- hair and beauty students visiting Granada studios and its make-up department as part of their induction programme. After the visit they were required to reflect on their professional behaviour at the studios and accept that similarly high standards of behaviour are expected at college
- newly recruited students in office technology organising and attending a reception to which successful ex-students and local employers were invited. Guests passed on advice and anecdotes from their own experience and helped strengthen students' motivation to succeed.

27 The college is increasing the flexibility of provision to make it more accessible to under-represented groups. Community-based provision can be accessed at any time and flexible patterns of attendance are offered in college learning centres. The college is determined that unemployed students, including government funded 'New Deal' students, should

Case Study 1

be able to enrol on any course in the college at any time of the year.

A mapping exercise, conducted using a 'curriculum accessibility' questionnaire, identified courses which:

- have multiple start points
- are modular
- have learning packs to help students catch up with earlier work.

These are labelled 'hot' courses. 'Colder' courses are those that have, for example, only one entry point in the year and no strategy for inducting and supporting late enrollers. The mapping exercise is leading to action designed to increase the flexibility of programmes. Induction arrangements for late starters are being developed across the college.

28 The college has developed a modest number of open and distance learning initiatives to develop provision for under-represented groups, including unskilled and semi-skilled workers and those with restricted mobility. The college has recently established an open-learning centre on an industrial site. Other initiatives include a home-based IT scheme for students with disabilities, sponsored by the local training and enterprise council (TEC), which provides access to national vocational qualification (NVQ) training at levels 1 and 2 through CD-ROMs and the Internet.

29 The community participation unit's four outreach staff work successfully with a wide range of organisations in the community. Courses are offered in over 90 community-based centres and include an extensive range of craft courses and IT provision at different levels. Many courses are accredited by the National Open College Network (NOCN). Programmes are organised in response to needs identified by local community groups and offered in venues close to where students live.

The college's 'Portland Scheme' was developed in partnership with Portland Care Group which provides care for elderly people. The scheme recruits learners without formal qualifications to a 16-week introductory course in caring and there is the opportunity to progress to a two-year course leading to an NVQ level 2 or 3 in care.

30 New courses have been introduced to meet the needs of non-traditional learners; for example, a sports studies programme and an army preparation course.

The army preparation course is a 13-week course for young people who are undecided about their future goal. Discipline and team-building are important components and personal development and physical fitness are combined with a vocational option. Students spend one day a week with the army and are paid a training allowance by the local TEC. On completion, they achieve sports awards and NVQ units. The army has mounted grand award ceremonies for 'graduates' of this course to celebrate their achievements. Sixty per cent of students have been recruited by the army, 20% have continued at college to achieve a vocational qualification, and 20% have progressed to Youth Training.

31 The college's provision is designed to encourage progression.

All general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) students follow an enhancement course providing vocational perspectives on study as well as further opportunities to develop key skills. Options include an introduction to teaching, social work, journalism and the media. Students also build a key skills portfolio which is accredited by NOCN.

Case Study 1

32 Students' successes are routinely celebrated. For example, there are ceremonies hosted in part by former students who are also commended for their own achievements since leaving college.

Increasing progression rates

33 Many courses are designed to include 'wedges' of more advanced study to ease students' progression from one level of study to the next.

Non-schedule 2 flower arranging courses include components of a level 2 vocational course in floristry as the final module on the course. Teachers of vocational courses also teach non-vocational courses and are well placed to help students understand what is involved in more advanced study and to prepare them for progression. In 1997-98, eight students enrolled on the flower arranging course. All successfully completed the course and progressed to the level 2 vocational course in floristry.

A course for classroom assistants, accredited by NCFE, was introduced with modules linked to NVQ at level 2. Last year, 32 students enrolled, 73% achieved the award and all of those who achieved it progressed to NVQ level 2 in childcare.

34 Students learning in community-based centres are encouraged to progress to other provision at the college's main sites.

As part of their induction, the outreach co-ordinators give students information about the whole range of courses and services provided by the college. Visits to the main college sites are arranged and transport provided. Teachers frequently discuss with students opportunities for progression to other college courses. College careers officers also regularly visit centres to discuss

other study and employment options with students. Recently, the college has developed an interactive CD-ROM that gives information about college life, the range of courses offered and the support available to students. It is designed primarily to help staff respond more effectively whenever a student indicates an interest in further study.

35 Students' successes are widely disseminated within the college and the local community as a means of encouraging other students to consider progressing to further study.

36 Last year, on the access to higher education course, 40% of students were men from under-represented groups. Of the 52 students who enrolled, 100% achieved the access certificate and 100% progressed to higher education. The success story was posted in the college and published in the local press.

Teaching and learning that help to widen participation

37 Appropriate methods of teaching and learning help to motivate learners and increase their self-confidence. Teachers also ensure that each step in students' achievements is recognised. Early project work on courses is designed to provide opportunities for students to succeed as well as for teachers to assess their aptitudes and abilities. High priority is given to developing a relaxed, friendly and rigorous learning environment and fostering supportive relationships between students. Teachers carefully consider the balance between students working individually, in pairs, and in groups, and pay close attention to each student's learning needs.

In an English lesson, the teacher effectively paired students of differing abilities so that less able students received support and the more able gained in confidence by providing

Case Study 1

that support. Following a grammar revision exercise, each student identified areas where they needed practice and then worked at different levels using individual learning materials provided by the teacher.

38 The careful linking of practical work and theory helps to motivate students who feel they have not succeeded in education. Interactive computer-based materials are used successfully with non-traditional learners, and printed learning materials and worksheets for lower-level courses are designed to make minimal demands on language skills.

Working with particular target groups

39 The college has developed strategies that take into account the interests and requirements of a wide range of student groups. They have focused some work on helping men to see college as taking 'a step in the right direction – not a step down'. Various strategies are used to encourage white men from working-class backgrounds to participate in further education and to succeed.

Publications and promotional literature with images of men engaged in a range of academic and vocational study are distributed in public houses, betting shops, clubs and sports grounds frequented by men.

Staff are well informed about barriers to men's participation and the need for strategies to address issues of disaffection, prior underachievement and perceived images of 'college'.

Some courses, such as those for pupils excluded from secondary school and ex-offenders, are designed to be particularly relevant or attractive to male students. A particularly successful example is the 'Roll Over Beethoven' music course. Many young men who enrol on the course have an interest in music but lack basic educational

qualifications. Initially, staff focus on developing students' musical skills. The course leader arranges live performances during college lunch hours and performances in local pubs and clubs. As students gain in confidence and self-esteem, they are introduced to more general education and encouraged to develop key skills and to gain qualifications. Retention and achievement rates on the course are high and the majority of students have progressed to the BTEC national diploma in music.

40 The college uses role models to increase motivation.

Former male students are invited to participate in promotional roadshows in schools, community centres and shopping malls. Staff use examples of students from backgrounds similar to those in their audience when discussing why studying in further education is worthwhile. Tutors refer to male students who left school with no qualifications but have been successful in college and found rewarding employment. Examples include a chef in a top-quality city restaurant and a manager of a prestigious country club in north Wales.

A member of the college's guidance team acts as the link with a school which he himself had attended. He left school without any qualifications and spent nine years in a range of unskilled jobs. After successfully completing a psychology GCSE course at the college and some further training, he was appointed as a college link youth worker. He then acquired counselling skills and joined the guidance team. He now helps to motivate a new generation of pupils, particularly young men who do not get on well at school.

Case Study 1

Supporting students

41 Comprehensive and imaginative strategies to guide and support students' learning play a vital role in ensuring that disadvantaged students succeed in their studies. Staff working in student services are highly qualified and multi-skilled. Effective training and induction enable them to take on a range of different support roles, maintain a good overview of the support strategies available and thus provide timely and flexible support to students. Effective guidance helps to broaden and raise students' aspirations. About 80% of applicants are given a general educational guidance interview which encourages them to consider new options, particularly those for which they would not previously have considered themselves capable.

A school pupil interested in the army, police or catering indicated in her guidance interview that she may also be interested in IT but thought she was not clever enough. A further interview with the IT course tutor was arranged and after some encouragement she enrolled on an IT course suited to her abilities.

42 After the first six weeks of study, all full-time students are involved in a thorough 'right choice' review, which ensures that they are placed properly.

An adult student with no formal qualifications joined a GCSE course in art, but after a few weeks reluctantly agreed with his tutor that he would need to improve his literacy to succeed. Following his first review, he also enrolled on an English GCSE course. He went on to pass both GCSEs, obtaining a grade A for the oral component of the English GCSE.

43 The college recognises the importance of numeracy, literacy and IT skills in enabling

students to study successfully. All full-time and many part-time students are offered diagnostic screening for support with basic numeracy and literacy. A pilot project is now extending this to incorporate more advanced key skills in numeracy, literacy and IT. Individual support plans are agreed by the time of the 'right choice' six-week review.

44 Diagnostic and learning support materials engage students' interest because they are related to their vocational course or leisure interests. Some diagnostic materials are based on a recruitment exercise for jobs in a new television soap opera. Other numeracy and literacy packs, with a football theme, have been developed in collaboration with a nearby premiership football club and another college. These are used enthusiastically, for example, by a group of school ex-cludees.

Improving retention

45 The college has developed many effective strategies to improve student retention. The strong tutorial system and close links between teaching and support staff have resulted in a wide range of innovative and effective approaches for improving retention. College-wide strategies work in synergy and include:

Rigorous tracking of students' attendance and progress

- over the past two years, thorough procedures for registering and following up absences have led to a marked improvement in students' attendance. Close monitoring of attendance, punctuality and retention enables the college to focus attention on those courses causing concern

Establishing supportive relationships with students

- the college sees this as an important determinant in retention, but the most

Case Study 1

difficult to measure. The skills of staff in relating to students and local communities are highly valued by senior managers. Students respond well to teachers whose background, language and culture is similar to their own. About half the college staff come from the local area and many were themselves late entrants to education

A system of 'motivational interviews'

- if the usual support arrangements have little impact on students 'at risk' of leaving, a motivational interview is offered. Counselling skills are used in a directive way and focus on increasing the motivation of the student as a learner. The interviewer asks the student to identify positive factors which led them to start the course and what they like about college so far, and builds on these whilst acknowledging students' negative views about study. Results indicate that this innovative approach, based on interview techniques developed in health professions, is leading to improved retention rates. The initiative is being evaluated by a local university

A strong emphasis on reviewing individual students' progress and drawing up action plans with them to secure further achievements

- reviews deal with any factors that inhibit progress such as lack of confidence or personal problems

The good use made of value-added analyses, particularly in GCE A levels

- tutors use information derived from a national value-added assessment system to predict students' achievements and to set challenging and realistic study

targets for each of them. Students predicted to underachieve in terms of value-added measures have benefited from regular reviews and carefully negotiated action plans to improve achievements. Great progress has been made since 1995-96 when the college's value-added scores were below the national average. In 1997-98, these scores were significantly above the national average. The college is developing value-added measures for full-time students on vocational and access to higher education courses

The recognition of students' prior achievements as a means of tackling low attainment and early drop out

- one strategy which helps students with few or no qualifications to recognise and celebrate their prior achievements is a 'personal growth' module on a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced level course. Tutors review students' national record of achievement with them and identify practical work and work experience related to the course, drawing attention to its value in helping students to achieve well and gain employment. Similarly, on access to higher education courses, a system of 'accrued entitlements' has been developed to assess any relevant achievements, particularly students' skills in overcoming problems. A points system has been devised to give credit to students for their existing skills and knowledge. The college is investigating correlations between students' skills profiles and their achievement on the access course.

The central focus on retention in all reviews of provision leading to detailed action plans to improve retention.

Case Study 1

Developments planned to widen participation more effectively

46 Next steps include:

- further development of the recently established annual report on widening participation. Currently, this is based mainly on an audit of good practice and does not have a strong evaluative dimension
- analysis of retention and achievement rates by sex, age groups, ethnicity, those in receipt of benefits, those receiving additional learning support and those with disabilities, for different levels and types of courses
- analysis of levels of student satisfaction in relation to students' backgrounds
- further development of value-added measures and recording of students' broader achievements
- increasing the number of specialist vocational courses in community-based venues
- providing further support to personal tutors so that they can readily identify and skilfully support students at risk of underachieving or leaving courses
- review and develop careers education and guidance to help students consider and prepare for employment in other parts of the country or the world.

Case Study 2

Case Study 2: Barking College: Widening Participation and Raising Standards with Illustrations from Governance, Self-Assessment and Quality Assurance, Construction, Food Studies and Support for Students

Introduction

47 The college serves a highly industrialised area. Levels of educational achievement and rates of post-16 participation in education and training are low. The proportion of students in the college from minority ethnic groups is high at 27%, compared with 6.5% in the borough and 18.5% in the region. Student numbers have grown significantly in recent years. A significant part of this expansion has been due to an extensive programme of franchised provision. At the last inspection, the college was judged to be very well managed and to have outstanding quality assurance procedures.

Critical success factors

48 These include:

- strategies to widen participation which are systematically converted into operational objectives at course level
- challenging recruitment targets at school level
- the setting of recruitment targets by gender, ethnicity and age
- effective quality improvement strategies that are centrally informed by commitments to widening participation.

Governors' contribution

49 Governors' strong links with the local community, major employers and publicly funded organisations have played an important part in the college revising its mission so as to strengthen its commitment to widening

participation. Governors have asked for increasingly comprehensive reports on students' recruitment, retention and achievement. When aspects of student performance are below the standard expected, these are subjected to close scrutiny.

The college's poor GCE A level performance was closely examined by governors. They required staff to draw up an action plan, to present this to the corporation and to provide monitoring reports at every corporation meeting. The action taken was successful in improving the performance for each GCE A level student to an average of 10 points, which raised the position of the college close to the top of the local further education sector league tables.

A similar process is now being undertaken to improve the college's performance in GNVQ courses at intermediate level.

Mission and strategy

50 Three of the college's six strategic objectives reflect the aim of widening participation. Each objective is supplemented by success factors and operational targets for the current year.

Strategic objective:

- to develop an inclusive, learner-centred curriculum that meets local, regional and national client needs.

Associated success factors:

- to develop a broad and balanced curriculum from entry level to level 3
- to provide learning programmes which are accessible throughout the year and delivered in different locations.

School operational targets:

- the provision of programmes for excluded pupils

Case Study 2

- at least three entry points to the college each year
- the development of government-funded 'New Deal' provision for unemployed students and for modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes
- the establishment of equal opportunity targets.

51 The college's schools are allocated target numbers of FEFC-funding units annually. To encourage schools to meet objectives for widening participation within their recruitment totals, the college has adopted a number of strategies:

- heads of school discuss with senior managers how their courses match the college's strategic objectives. A checklist of the objectives and success factors is provided to facilitate the process
- tariff units, previously invested in distance franchised provision, were withdrawn during 1998-99 and used instead to establish local community-based learning centres offering basic computer training. Literacy and numeracy provision is also being developed at these 'learning villages'
- recruitment targets for gender, ethnicity and age are set at school level
- schools are allowed to expand courses at one level provided they also do so at lower levels. For example, in art and design when a proposal to develop a higher level course was submitted, the school was also asked to develop provision at level 1
- financial incentives are used to encourage schools to widen participation. For example, schools keep a larger proportion of the income

earned from 'New Deal' provision for unemployed people than from other provision

- heads of faculty may vary recruitment targets between schools in order to encourage particular developments. For example, extra FEFC funding units were given to construction to meet the demand for training in this area.

Links with external bodies

52 The college works closely with external agencies in order to address the government's social inclusion agenda. The college is represented, for example, on the borough's education committee, the steering group for 'New Deal' programmes for unemployed people, the local TEC board, social services' committees, and a multi-agency employment and training group.

There are regular meetings between college governors and members of the local borough. Items high on the agenda are:

- levels of adult literacy and numeracy and strategies for raising them
- economic regeneration
- lifelong learning
- the development of community-based learning centres
- work-based learning.

The college is exploring how to work more closely in partnership with others in the borough to address these issues.

53 Productive links with external bodies and the college's schools also focus on economic development.

Case Study 2

A 'local first' project aims to promote local people into jobs in the borough. This venture involves a building company, the Construction Industry Training Board and the college's school of construction crafts.

Self-assessment and quality assurance

54 The college's self-assessment report and course review arrangements address issues of widening participation.

- the college assesses to what extent it has removed 'barriers' to participation, by providing crèche facilities, abolishing fees for all full-time students, increasing provision of learning support, and the allocation of extra funds to support students suffering financial hardship. All these factors are identified as strengths in its self-assessment report
- recruitment at school level is profiled in the self-assessment report by age, ethnicity, gender and disability. The different categories of students listed in *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice* as being under-represented in further education are used to evaluate how successful the college is in widening participation
- course review forms require the course team to consider enrolment, retention and achievement rates and student destinations according to age, gender, ethnicity, and those receiving additional support. Course teams evaluate their effectiveness in widening participation in terms of the opportunities given for 'access, achievement and progression' to groups often under-represented in further education
- the college has established 'focus groups' in local areas, including areas with high levels of deprivation, in order to identify more clearly community

views and to use these views to help assess the college's performance and the ways in which it can make improvements

- schools analyse why students leave courses early. Any correlations between early leaving and students' ethnicity or receipt of additional learning support are explored
- course teams identify factors which contribute to good or poor results and improved performance for particular groups of students
- course teams are expected to specify the actions they will take to widen the range of students who are able to succeed on courses. This action may take the form of:
 - targeted recruitment
 - improved induction programmes
 - provision of extra support
 - modified teaching programmes
- the views of students are regularly collected and analysed and findings fed into the self-assessment. The college plans to analyse these responses by ethnicity, age and disability.

55 The self-assessment report notes that the college needs to make better use of postcode analyses in order to target more accurately those it wishes to recruit. Some schools recruit a relatively narrow range of students by level, age and mode of attendance and some have very few male or very few female students.

Staff development

56 The college's staff development programme supports the strategic commitment to widen participation. Each strategic objective is supported by a range of staff development activities.

Case Study 2

To support inclusive learning and widening participation staff development includes:

- a training day, conducted with representatives from the Commission for Racial Equality, which included consideration of setting targets by ethnicity
- sign language training
- helping teachers respond appropriately to students with challenging behaviour
- reshaping the curriculum to provide courses which are more accessible to non-traditional students
- sensory disabilities workshops
- training on mental health and inclusivity issues.

57 Some staff development is focused on specific curriculum areas in order to try to raise performance in these areas.

- where retention rates are low, course leaders are invited to attend retention group meetings in order to learn about strategies to improve retention. The group has produced useful lists of good ideas about how to improve retention
- staff development has provided teachers in print technology with support to develop distance learning materials. The materials have been used to help students who have left their course early to continue their studies at home.

Support for students

58 The college's well-established procedures and structures for supporting students play an important role in widening participation. An educational advice shop in a shopping centre is easily accessible for local residents. Students who start courses after the beginning of the academic year receive an induction programme through CD-ROM based materials, and have appropriate support in using IT.

The status of basic skills support has been raised by the establishment of an attractive and well-equipped centre. The centre provides a welcoming environment and students speak highly of the vocationally relevant learning activities and materials. There are good links between centre staff and vocational teachers.

59 Support for students with disabilities is good.

- deaf students have access to outstanding support, including note-takers and signers
- the college ensures that students benefit from specially designed equipment; for example, tilting icing boards for catering students who use wheelchairs.

60 Youth workers and students' union officers work closely with students.

- they act as advocates and brokers and find appropriate support for students who need it
- they find places to stay for homeless students
- the students' union has a specialist disabilities officer who provides valuable social and practical support to students.

Construction

61 The school is one of the college's largest and it has successfully taken steps to widen participation in line with college strategy.

The curriculum is broad:

- courses are offered at levels 1 to 3 in a range of crafts and through different modes of attendance

Case Study 2

- on some courses students can enrol at points throughout the year to suit their personal circumstances
- in order to increase the number of females in construction crafts, the school has successfully developed a range of courses based on interior design. Women now make up nearly 12% of the school's students, a relatively high proportion in national terms.

62 Teaching is flexible and suits the needs of individual students.

- some lessons start later to suit students with childcare responsibilities
- students can accelerate their progress by using learning packages in their own time and by attending for extra periods to improve their practical skills. These opportunities are especially welcomed by unemployed mature students who are often anxious to develop new skills as quickly as possible
- in order to improve their numeracy skills, students may attend the key skills centre at times that fit their schedule. The provision at the centre is helpful and relevant to their vocational studies
- teachers are sensitive to the needs of students and provide practical support; for example, by helping them to find employment and by providing tools at reduced cost, where appropriate.

63 The construction crafts school displays students' work at its annual open day. The displays are impressive and enhance the reputation of the college. They are cited as an important factor for some students, including those who would not otherwise have considered coming to college or studying construction, in their decision to enrol.

Food studies

64 The school's provision, in line with the college strategy to widen participation, meets the needs of a wide range of learners.

For example:

- NVQ craft provision is available from levels 1 to 3 and there is a full-time catering programme at foundation level
- a large proportion of students come from minority ethnic groups
- a bakery and retail course is designed specifically for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and a short bakery course is designed to meet the needs of young students excluded from school
- part-time students join for modules of the full-time course when there are insufficient students to make a discrete group financially viable. The course is structured so that part-time students cover the content in an appropriate sequence.

65 Interesting and vocationally relevant learning materials, that match the level of course, have been developed to enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils excluded from school to succeed. They add relevance and interest to the courses in numeracy and communication taken by first-year students.

66 Several strategies are used to improve students' chances of success on food studies courses.

- additional workshops are provided so that students can catch up with practical assignments and portfolio building
- teachers take care to ensure that more able students sometimes work with less

Case Study 2

competent students. This provides the less able with additional support and the more able with additional skills in managing and supporting others

- where possible, adult part-time students, who often lack confidence in their ability to cope with a new course, are paired with full-time students
- absenteeism is regularly monitored. Teachers make contact with students promptly to encourage them to return to study and to find out if they can support them in any way
- where appropriate, teachers visit residential homes to encourage students to continue with their course. They also attend meetings between students and their social workers.

The excluded pupils' programme

67 In co-operation with the local education authority, the college provides a programme for pupils who have been excluded from school. This is seen as an important development in tackling social exclusion and widening participation.

- youth workers establish good relations with the students. They provide a programme of life skills, attend the course with the students, visit students' homes to provide additional study support and liaise with parents
- enrichment activities such as canoeing help to motivate students and increase their confidence
- some students have successfully progressed to higher level courses.

68 Lessons emerging from a recent evaluation of the programme are that both staff and students need to prepare thoroughly for this challenging work, and that teaching must be at

an appropriately high level and linked to vocational areas. Youth workers or teachers who visit students' homes need to be informed about family circumstances, and may make joint visits if there are likely to be difficulties. Written guidelines for home visits are needed.

Developments planned to widen participation more effectively

69 Next steps include:

- the establishment of two new college centres to increase participation rates in local areas with high levels of deprivation
- the relocation of the college's engineering provision to the newly established 'Integrated Learning Campus and Engineering Centre of Excellence' at the Ford Motor Company site. This initiative is being developed, in partnership with Havering College of Further and Higher Education, the Ford Motor Company, the local TEC and local authorities, to increase employment and training opportunities in the Dagenham Thameside area
- English language provision for a large group of refugees living in the borough. The expertise of a range of agencies, external to the college, is being drawn upon to support this work
- more computer-based learning to bring learning to the workplace and to employees with low levels of skills; for example:
 - a computerised link with local garages to teach motor vehicle technology
 - a computer-based learning centre for teaching control engineering
- closer collaboration and joint planning with other local colleges. To date, the colleges have shared enrolment data and produced a map of local participation in post-16 further education.

Case Study 3

Case Study 3: Northumberland College: Strategic Approaches to Widening Participation with Illustrations of Curriculum Planning, and of Overcoming Barriers to Study in Isolated Rural Areas

Introduction

70 The college serves a large county with a dispersed population. Most of the population lives in the urban south-east which has suffered significantly from the demise of the coal mining industry. The rest of the county is rural with a low average population density and many small market towns. Problems of rurality, such as difficult transport arrangements, pockets of extreme poverty, high unemployment, low aspirations and marginalisation, contribute to low participation rates in further education.

71 Over half the college's students are recruited to level 1 or level 2 courses. Part-time enrolments have grown by over 50% in the three years up to 1998. Fourteen per cent of students enrol at the college's outcentres.

Critical success factors

72 These include:

- curriculum mapping which helps identify gaps in provision and enables the college to draw up a carefully planned timetable
- close working links between community guidance workers and college managers
- the 'learning bus' which brings education and training to the community
- the development of IT to support learning at a distance.

Mission and strategy

73 Widening participation is integral to the college's mission and a key strategic objective. Success factors, established by the corporation,

and annual operating objectives, translate policy and strategy into action at curriculum level.

The college's success factors include: 'a curriculum which meets the needs of the individual, the area, society and the economy'.

Annual operating objectives are written to address each success factor. For example, for the above factor, there is an operational objective requiring programme area teams to 'identify new courses which meet business needs, meet the needs of women, and can be offered as outreach provision'.

74 Commitment to widening participation is seen by all staff as driving developments. The operational planning processes enable staff to be fully involved in decision-making and to feel that they have a stake in, and a responsibility for, the outcomes. Programme and service area teams produce their own operational plans reflecting the operational objectives of the college. Ideas about, and enthusiasm for, widening participation are encouraged at all levels and senior managers are accessible and willing to discuss new suggestions.

Programme teams are required to provide vocational courses at entry, levels 1, 2 and 3 and specifically to identify and report on how they are widening participation.

The programme team for art and design has developed courses in women's photography and digital photography to be taught on the college's 'learning bus', and are thus helping to achieve two of the college's strategic objectives: meeting the needs of women and providing courses through outreach work.

Case Study 3

Policy formulation and review

75 Widening participation is considered whenever existing policies are reviewed or new ones formulated.

The recently revised community development policy now refers explicitly to widening participation and establishes a cross-college community forum to ensure effective internal communication. The role of outcentre provision, distance learning and the use of new technologies is emphasised. The policy targets non-traditional learners, and, in so doing, recognises the need to work with external partners and to develop appropriate monitoring, evaluation and review mechanisms.

76 The IT policy has been revised. It seeks to facilitate widening participation through the development of new methods of learning, and more effective use of IT by students in the college, outcentres, the learning bus and at home.

Curriculum planning

77 The college seeks to provide a broad range of courses from entry level to level 3 and to provide good opportunities for progression. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from a curriculum and qualification aims which match their individual needs.

A 'curriculum map' of the college groups courses by level and type (academic, general vocational or vocational), and provides a timetable for each individual unit. The mapping helps to eliminate timetabling clashes. Gaps in provision are readily identified and new courses developed. Mapping has also helped to address strengths and weaknesses in college provision. Positive features of the curriculum include:

- the wide range of vocational and academic provision from entry level to higher education
- extensive cross-college programmes at entry level which combine the development of key skills with an introduction to many vocational areas, and help prepare students for progression to the next level of study
- the identification of vocational areas which offer no suitable progression routes for entry level students and the development of new provision. For example, new courses in travel and tourism and in health and social care have been developed at levels 1 and 2
- the option for students to combine additional qualifications such as NVQs, GCSE or GCE A level subjects with their main course of study. Examples include care students on the higher national diploma who are also taking NVQ level 4 in management
- the wide choice of modes of attendance and starting points offered by the college
- the elimination of unnecessary duplication of courses in different sections of the college.

Community guidance workers

78 Three community guidance workers, who have substantial experience of community work, are based in the college's three main outcentres. Their roles include community liaison, support and guidance for individual students, and the identification of new markets. They have close links with local communities and are responsible for the initiation of much of the college's work in widening participation. The community guidance staff work closely with other college managers.

Case Study 3

The college's programme area leaders, co-ordinators for full-cost work and external funding, the curriculum director and the three community guidance workers meet regularly at 'community forum meetings'. This arrangement is a key factor in the college identifying new markets, ensuring appropriate funding is secured and promptly mounting new provision for non-traditional students.

79 The work of the forum has led to the identification of educational needs in isolated communities, ideas for successful European funding bids, new ways to deliver basic skills in the community and extended use of the IT learning bus.

Working in partnership

80 Work with local district councils and other providers of education and training fosters the development of provision for non-traditional learners. Some of the partnerships involve formal agreements with several partners and attract substantial external funding, including European funding.

The college is a lead partner with the local authority and TEC in a Single Regeneration Budget funded scheme aimed at the regeneration of several wards suffering from severe deprivation. These wards have a high proportion of lone parents, unemployed men, and families on low income and below average levels of literacy and numeracy. The scheme includes the creation of 'peoples' centres' with neighbourhood co-ordinators, training programmes, and the development of youth accommodation projects. A number of refurbished houses are used as bases for regeneration and education. Under the scheme, clear targets have been set for education and training; for example, to reduce from 12% to 3% the proportion of pupils who take no exams at 16.

The college provides accommodation and management support for 'New opportunities for women'. Activities include training for women in forming craft co-operatives and managing small businesses, and developing a database of courses specifically designed for women which can be used by guidance staff and potential students.

81 Some partnerships develop in response to requests from other agencies.

In response to an approach from the health authority, the college has established short, 10-week courses at entry and level 1: 'positively kids'; 'live safe', 'stay safe'; and 'caring for children'. These courses are delivered in a room close to where young lone parents who dropped out of school take their children to see the health visitor and to be weighed. All 12 mothers completed the courses, which have been accredited by NOCN. A trained community nurse provides the teaching and mothers learn whilst looking after their babies.

82 Franchised provision plays an important role in widening participation by enabling funding to be directed to partners that have expertise or facilities not possessed by the college.

A women's training centre offers courses in IT and personal effectiveness skills alongside courses in aromatherapy and reflexology. The centre has a proven track record in delivering training to local women.

Arrangements to overcome barriers to participation posed by rurality and deprivation

83 Many students have to make significantly long journeys to college.

Case Study 3

In partnership with local bus companies and the local authority, free bus passes are provided to all full-time students. This has led to an increase in enrolments.

The college has a small number of residential rooms available for students who cannot travel to college on a daily basis.

84 The development of high-quality community-based provision helps to involve new students who would not otherwise participate in further education.

In addition to the main college site and three outcentres, 14 other buildings, including annexes and family centres are used. These form a network that covers the county well.

Outreach students are well supported. The college employs staff in outcentres who are often from the local area, helping to ensure students can relate easily to them. Part-time teachers of IT are required to teach for at least a year at the main college site before teaching at an outcentre. Full-time teachers teach both at the main site and at the outcentres, helping to maintain the quality of the teaching at outcentres.

85 In order to facilitate learning by people who live in districts remote from the college or its outcentres, the college takes provision to the community.

The college's well-equipped 'learning bus' is a self-contained teaching facility. Powered by its own generator, there are audiovisual teaching facilities and 12 modern, networked computers with a range of up-to-date software. It is accessible to students with physical disability. The bus visits outlying districts regularly and is a powerful way of developing new outreach provision as well as an excellent marketing tool.

Following a request from several travelling communities living in outlying areas of the county, the learning bus is being used to help parents in these communities to develop their knowledge and skills in IT so that they can better support the education of their own children.

86 The use of IT supports individuals, wherever they live, to gain access to education and training.

The college has invested heavily in video-conferencing, Internet access and IT. A college-wide IT campus links provision across the county. High-speed telecommunications connect the main site and the three outcentres, providing a reliable communications network and access to the full range of college IT resources.

In order to make learning by computer effective, the college has established service level targets for its response to students; for example, the targets for the speed of response to electronic mail communication, the time taken to return students' work, and the promptness and quality of telephone access to support from tutors.

A new course, the European computer driving licence, is provided by on-line tuition. It is modularised, thus enabling students to plan their own programme. The high quality of the course has prompted the British Computer Society to recommend students to enrol with the college. The new course is replacing some other qualifications and is proving highly successful at retaining students and improving pass rates among students often under-represented in further education.

Case Study 3

Developments planned to widen participation more effectively

87 Next steps include:

- closer monitoring of retention and achievement rates of students from different backgrounds
- more comprehensive strategies to improve retention and achievement
- greater involvement in economic regeneration initiatives for remote rural areas, in partnership with other agencies.

Case Study 4

Case Study 4: Thurrock College: Strategic Approaches to Widening Participation with Illustrations from Franchised Provision, Support for Students, Health and Social Care, and Basic Education

Introduction

88 The college operates from a single site serving a large area in the south east which has low levels of prior educational achievement. The college makes provision in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas and there is a strong vocational emphasis to the curriculum. The college has particularly effective relationships with local education and training providers. Inspectors judged the college to be well managed and effective in providing high-quality teaching and support for students.

Mission and commitment

89 Governors are firmly committed to widening participation and four years ago revised the college's mission to reflect this. The first of the college's six strategic objectives is to widen participation and remove barriers to equality of opportunity. The college's commitment to widening participation is also reflected in a number of separate policy statements. The college is in the process of developing an overall single policy framework that makes widening participation an integral element of all areas of work. A local skills audit has indicated that poor basic skills is the primary barrier to achievement and employment. The range of the college's programmes and the priority given to learning support reflect the importance given to addressing this issue. A high proportion of students enrol on programmes at level 2 and below. Each teaching school is required to present its curriculum portfolio as 'a ladder of opportunity'.

Critical success factors

90 These include:

- the priority given to raising students' literacy and numeracy skills
- good vocationally specific initial assessment and learning support
- effective work placements and links with employers
- adaptation of courses to meet the needs of specific student groups.

Strategies and targets

91 The college has adopted a number of strategies to widen participation; although the extent to which each school promotes these remains variable. Strategies include:

- the development of specific programmes for disaffected school pupils, refugees and asylum seekers
- increased off-site provision
- a range of strategies to improve retention and achievement, including a TEC-funded action plan to raise educational achievement.

92 Whole-college targets have been set for student recruitment, retention, attendance, achievement and progression to employment or higher education, and these have been monitored for several years. It is planned to introduce targets in the same areas at school and course level, and there is currently a pilot scheme operating in hairdressing and beauty therapy.

Franchised provision

93 The college's franchised provision has been focused on geographical areas where travel to the main college campus is difficult for students. In discussion with training partners, it has been agreed to target four groups, offering courses to: unemployed people and those unable to travel; low-skilled workers in the care sector; women returners; and people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Case Study 4

Staff development

94 The college's staff development programme focuses on widening participation issues.

The programme offers opportunities for:

- increased disability awareness during induction for staff
- training for governors on the Kennedy and Tomlinson agenda
- staff training on differentiated learning and barriers to adult learning
- the acquisition of basic skills qualifications by specialist vocational teachers and support workers.

Support for students

95 The college has expanded its support services to provide more effectively for the wide range of students it recruits. Specialist staff include six communicators to support hearing impaired students, 12 learning support workers and a qualified counsellor. There is a year-round enrolment service, and regular guidance sessions are offered in partnership with the adult education service. 'Taster' courses are offered to all students, including those with learning support needs, and tours arranged for individual students who may lack the confidence to enrol or who have restricted mobility. The college has good links with secondary and special schools that help promote the transition to further education especially for those with low levels of achievement.

96 Learning support arrangements are well developed.

Screening for learning support needs is carried out for all full-time and a substantial number of part-time students. Vocational teachers, trained in basic skills, work alongside support tutors in the study skills centre and in the classroom. On-course support for students who are hard of hearing

and those with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, is exemplary.

Communicators prepare notes for students, assist in practical workshop lessons, help students organise their assignments and support them in examinations. Staff readily adapt services to meet the individual needs of students.

97 The contribution of central support services to widening participation is recognised but not currently evaluated.

98 Tutorial arrangements are effective.

Full-time students' progress and achievement is monitored at weekly group tutorials. Part-time students do not have formal tutorials but are expected to analyse their own strengths and weaknesses, to discuss these with the tutor during practical lessons, and to use this to inform their action plans. All students have an individual action plan.

Preparation for employment

99 The college offers comprehensive careers education and guidance. Well-developed links with employers assist students in their preparation for the world of work.

The college has developed a highly successful NVQ training centre at the very large local shopping mall. Through TEC funding and in partnership with the owners of the mall, the college has been able to offer an extensive programme at the centre in retail, customer care, catering, IT, and travel services. The centre effectively supports employees from a traditionally mobile and unqualified workforce, helping them to develop work-related skills and achieve qualifications. Over 30 employers actively support the centre and there are over 100 students at any one time. The centre tracks employees when they change jobs to ensure training

Case Study 4

continues with the new employer. There is a flexible approach to assessment in the workplace which often takes place at weekends or in the evening.

The college successfully uses a food retail outlet for a group of 14 to 16 year old, low-achieving students from a local school. The manager, who is a local school governor, has arranged for students to conduct customer surveys, to experience work on the tills, and to see how stock is ordered and controlled. The students working on optional BTEC foundation in business units have high levels of achievement. Progression from this course to other courses in the college has also been significantly enhanced.

Health and social care

100 The college has developed more practically based studies in response to the needs of adult learners.

Provision of access to higher education has been redesigned more clearly to integrate practical and theoretical work. This has resulted in significant improvements in retention and achievement to a present level of 80% for both retention and achievement.

Basic education

101 The college has further developed its good basic skills provision to meet the needs of learners.

It has moved away from general basic skills provision to courses in numeracy and literacy at specific levels, each offering accredited awards for successful completion. Teaching focuses on vocationally relevant themes and students in part-time or shift work can develop their literacy and numeracy skills at times that fit in with work and family commitments. The college has

run a successful summer school, and provided training courses for a local insurance firm. Training is provided to employees of the Ford Motor Company in upgrading their literacy and numeracy skills and adapting to new work practices. Teachers adapt their teaching methods to take account of the subject and level of ability and age of the students.

102 Some provision is carefully designed to meet the needs of particular groups of disadvantaged students.

A course in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was specially designed for Kosovan refugees. Through close liaison with social services, the college was able to take account of the differing needs of younger students with previous experience of formal education who wanted to remain in this country and an older group with little education who wanted to return home. New teaching materials were created and, in the light of recent traumatic events, care was taken to avoid the use of family contexts. References to the home and money management, often used in such courses, were replaced by more neutral work-based themes. Opportunities were planned for students to sample vocational courses.

Strategies to raise retention and achievement rates

103 The college has several well-documented strategies for raising levels of achievement.

These include:

- the identification of learning support needs for a third of all full-time students through initial vocational specific screening and the provision of carefully planned and effective support

Case Study 4

- the creation of a welcoming and supportive learning environment for all students
- the use of vocationally relevant learning materials in a well-resourced study skills centre
- growing use of NOCN accreditation to provide programmes responsive to particular groups of students
- teachers' systematic checks on lateness and absenteeism
- remission of course and examination fees, subsidised childcare, and travel.

Developments planned to widen participation more effectively

104 Next steps include:

- the creation of an adult learning website in partnership with the local authority adult education service and library services
- strategies for strengthening financial and other practical support for adults
- further development of opportunities for those in unskilled employment
- the use of enrolment and course data from all local colleges to map levels of participation and provision for different student groups, in order to target provision more effectively at those who are under-represented in further education.

Case Study 5

Case Study 5: Hackney Community College: Strategic Approaches to Widening Participation in an Inner-city Area with Illustrations from the College's Accommodation Strategy, Strategies to Improve Retention and Achievement, ESOL and Support for Students

Introduction

105 The college serves a community that is richly diverse in race, culture and religion. The borough has high levels of unemployment. Ninety-seven per cent of students live in postcode areas with high levels of deprivation. A small proportion of residents is employed in the city and west end of London. The college is the fourth largest employer in the borough. Minority ethnic groups, including a large number of refugees and migrants, many of whom speak languages other than English, constitute a third of the local population. The borough has some of the highest rates of poverty and poor housing in Britain.

106 The college offers a rich portfolio of over 500 courses including vocational training at all levels, a comprehensive range of GCE A levels, and adult and community education classes. Strong partnerships with local employers, schools, and the voluntary and community sector produce beneficial opportunities for customised training, work-shadowing schemes for staff, work experience for students, and joint planning of strategy and the curriculum. The college has grown by nearly 25% during the last four years to some 4,000 students enrolling each year. Half the students come from minority ethnic groups. The number of students following basic skills and ESOL courses is substantial, but retention is poor and attendance is erratic. The college uses detailed statistical analyses of its student cohort, according to age, gender, ethnicity and disability, to inform planning.

Critical success factors

107 These include:

- significant progression from non-schedule 2 to schedule 2 provision
- high standard accommodation
- successful management of externally funded initiatives to support new developments
- a comprehensive range of childcare support
- celebrations of students' success.

Mission and planning

108 Widening participation is at the heart of the college's mission and is its core activity. The corporation is firmly committed to ensuring that the college contributes to the regeneration of the community through education and training. The 16 explicit references in the strategic plan to widening participation are supported by clear strategic objectives and related operational plans. Improving retention and achievement are central objectives.

109 The college has adopted a number of strategies to widen participation, although the degree of their success varies. Strategies include:

- the provision of a wide portfolio of courses
- courses designed for refugees and asylum seekers, school excludees and those with few or no qualifications
- provision in over 90 community venues
- effective links with community workers and organisations
- high-quality, attractive and safe accommodation
- good-quality assurance procedures for off-site provision
- the promotion of progression from non-schedule 2 courses.

Case Study 5

Strategies to improve retention

110 In many areas of work, retention and achievement rates are low but improving. Retention rates have risen by 5% in each of the last three years and the college is aiming for a further rise of between 3% and 5% over the next two years. A retention action plan was developed following a staff conference in July 1998. Research into ESOL provision in the college found that employment, housing and cultural factors contributed to retention rates that are half the rates of most other college programmes. Seasonal and temporary work among ESOL students adversely affect attendance and retention rates. The college is continuing to test a range of solutions outlined in its retention action plan. This plan includes:

- staff development to help promote a strong learning culture among students and to develop strategies to motivate students
- individual tutorials for all students, including the development of tutorials for part-time students and those studying in outreach centres
- a system to track each student's pattern of attendance, retention, return to study and achievement using a unique student identification code for each student
- identification of students who will benefit from early morning telephone calls to ensure they are up and getting ready for college
- follow-up of absentees during a weekly 'retention hour' allocated to all course tutors
- the introduction of 'repeat' sessions for students who have missed a lesson
- the development of individual target-setting for students, building on good practice in some curriculum areas
- the rigorous monitoring of quality in community-based provision. Registers are being checked and absences followed up. Retention and achievement rates are being

monitored and compared with those in the college main site. Action is being taken to address problem areas.

111 Early signs indicate that the intended improvements in retention are being achieved. The college has recently set clear strategic objectives to raise achievement as part of its quality improvement strategy and it is currently developing an achievement action plan.

Range of work with under-represented groups

112 There is a diverse range of provision designed for students from groups often under-represented in further education. Examples include:

- provision for people with mental health difficulties in partnership with a local hospital
- work with Jewish groups, including some work franchised to Jewish organisations
- provision for people with disabilities from minority ethnic groups.

113 A distinctive strength is the college's success in re-engaging students in learning after they have had long periods out of education. On one course, for example, all the students had been out of education for between five and 26 years.

Accommodation strategies that widen participation

114 College managers believe that the community is entitled to and is enriched by having the highest quality environment for learning. A 'flagship' new college building provides a particularly high-quality environment for learning. Imaginative planning of the building and surrounding area contributes to the college's mission to be a community college. There are well-developed plans to establish a new sports and media centre in the main campus.

Case Study 5

The borough library was built next to the college campus. The college restaurant sells a wide range of foods, including Caribbean and halal food, and there are several shops and snack bars. The high level of unobtrusive but professional surveillance increases students' confidence and feeling of security. Some 87 cameras continually scan the buildings. The student centre provides a place for meeting, socialising and finding out about college services and facilities in the local area from well-informed community workers. Thoughtfully selected artefacts and exhibitions reflect the multicultural nature of the college.

115 In contrast with the public areas, classrooms contain little display material. Students, however, feel good about working in the fine modern buildings and are proud to study here.

Almost all basic skills groups have now been brought to the new site. Students have responded positively and have felt more encouraged to study other subjects at college. Staff commented that since relocating here no ESOL students had dropped out. One said, 'It brings basic skills in from the cold. Why should our students have to use grotty venues?'

116 The college is both within 'splendid walls' and also 'a college without walls', working with centres in the community to offer provision to under-represented groups. Many students prefer to learn in familiar local surroundings, such as the '100 flowers' Turkish community centre, before progressing to the college. Support workers living and working on housing estates play an important role in arranging education programmes for local communities. Provision is also offered in local hostels for newly arrived refugees.

Partnerships and collaboration with other organisations

117 The college is actively involved in a number of partnerships that help promote work with new student groups. There is detailed consultation with the borough's education and social services departments about work with schools and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has compact arrangements with three universities. There are effective links with a wide range of employers. The college delivers non-schedule 2 and other funded work in partnership with many community and voluntary organisations. A number of funding partnership arrangements include economic regeneration initiatives.

Progression

118 The college has a 'progression framework', setting out routes for students to move from basic education to more advanced provision and from non-schedule 2 local authority funded courses to accredited courses. The college systematically tracks students' progression. Eighteen per cent of the 6,500 students on non-schedule 2 provision have moved to schedule 2 courses, an increase from 14% in 1997.

For example, one group of profoundly deaf students, attended a non-schedule 2 course in IT. Initially, the students were taught by a deaf teacher who helped them develop their confidence and learn new concepts in computing using sign language. The teacher prepared students to progress to accredited courses in IT taught by other teachers.

119 Many part-time courses in basic education lack timetabled tutorials to help ensure that systematic guidance is given to students about progression to more advanced courses. Some good use is made of 'taster' courses, however.

Case Study 5

For example, nine out of 10 basic skills students who joined a 'business studies taster' course progressed to full-time business studies courses. One challenge for teachers is the very wide variety of students' backgrounds. On one 'taster' course for young people in business studies, for example, there were three students with learning difficulties and 13 with ESOL needs.

Teaching and learning in ESOL

120 The good quality of the teaching in ESOL is a significant factor in the college's success in widening participation. The diversity of students, the level of their learning and their practical support needs present great challenges. Many ESOL students have difficulties in learning to read and write because they are not literate in their first language.

Teachers are successful in making learning relevant to students' lives. Learning programmes are closely linked to the students' personal aims; for example, to be able to communicate with staff at their child's school. Good practice includes the use of students' own cultural backgrounds and literature as a stimulus for developing English language skills. Teachers skilfully use information about the borough as a means to help students learn more about their own locality and to develop valuable study and research skills. Opportunities to learn in 'drop-in' workshops make it easier for students, including lone parents, who find regular attendance difficult. In the workshops, teachers ensure that the teaching and learning match each student's needs and abilities. Women appreciate opportunities to learn in women-only groups.

121 In some ESOL lessons, there are too many learners for teachers to address their individual needs adequately. Many teachers do not have a wide enough range of learning resources. There

are often no individual learning programmes for ESOL students.

Support for students

122 Strategies to support widening participation can be seen working successfully in systems for supporting students. The college is developing a more consistent approach to advice and guidance on entry, so that all students have a better chance of successfully achieving their learning goals. Induction, especially for full-time students, is well structured and designed to enable newcomers to England and/or to the college to adjust to life as students. The college has a well-established system of learning support for students, though the learning support centre is not yet providing effectively for part-time students and those in outreach centres. Many staff speak several languages and this helps to support students with little English.

Childcare

123 Childcare is well co-ordinated and of a high standard. In addition to nurseries at the two main sites, the college runs 21 crèches at 14 community sites.

One childcare centre can accommodate 73 children at any one time and is open from 08.30 hours to 21.00 hours. This enables students to attend twilight and evening sessions and to leave children up to the age of 14 in a safe and stimulating environment. Each child is welcomed, assessed and provided with an individual plan of activity. Parents are invited to discuss what their child enjoys at the centre and any improvements staff could make. Parents are very pleased with the quality of the provision. Access funds are used to support childminding expenses.

124 Despite the range of provision, there is a waiting list for crèche places of nearly 300. At

Case Study 5

one childcare centre, the children of students with disabilities and students in need of language support are given a higher priority.

Recognising students' achievements

125 The college carefully assesses if students are ready to take examinations. Staff take pride in only entering students for examinations if their confidence is high and is unlikely to be damaged through failure. Governors celebrate students' individual successes at special events such as awards ceremonies. Several students claim that their achievements have been 'life changing' and have dramatically increased their self-esteem.

Booklets describing the 'value-added' in learning over and above qualifications have been produced with individual students.

Developments planned to widen participation more effectively

126 Next steps include:

- refining strategies to improve retention and achievement rates
- the development of key skills workshops and improved diagnostic assessment materials
- extending educational provision in the community beyond the traditional academic year
- making use of the college at weekends to provide access to vocational equipment and facilities which are unavailable to community groups.

Case Study 6

Case Study 6: Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College: Successful Strategies for Improving Students' Achievements, using FEFC Inspection Findings as the Basis for Action

Introduction

127 This sixth form college is based in an inner-city area with high levels of unemployment. Seventy-nine per cent of its students are from postcode districts with high levels of deprivation. As well as GCE A levels and GCSEs, the college offers GNVQs at each level, ESOL, various courses in IT and other short courses in community-based centres. There are 1,600 students, just under half of whom are full time. Most are aged 16 to 19. English is not the first language for some 60% of students and 40% of full-time students are assessed as having literacy or numeracy skills at or below level 1. Students enrolling on GCE A level programmes have low point scores in GCSEs, slightly below an average of grade C. The college subscribes to a national service that measures actual achievement at GCE A level against expected achievements. In 1995-96, the college was in the top 15% of providers in terms of 'value-added' measures and in 1996-97 it was in the top 25%. The college uses a range of benchmarking data to assess its own performance including retention and achievement rates in sixth form colleges, general further education colleges and colleges which typically recruit a high proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The college finds each set of comparative data useful, but that none are drawn from 'like' institutions: sixth form colleges in areas of high deprivation and where students' previous attainment levels are low. The college successfully attracts external funding for work with adult students, which accounts for some 15% of provision. The

college has developed a number of innovative programmes for particular communities.

After discussions with Yemeni men living locally, the college mounted a programme of activities on Sundays at the college. About 80 men attend courses in ESOL, Arabic, IT and numeracy each week and enjoy the various sporting activities organised as part of the programme. The college used external funding to give students vouchers for books and field trips related to the programme.

128 At the time of the FEFC inspection in 1998, the principal had been in post for one year. The college considers widening participation as its core business. Action taken by the college after the inspection to address weaknesses led to significantly improved achievement rates in 1998-99.

Critical success factors

129 These include:

- effective post-inspection action-planning
- successful strategies to improve student achievement
- the positive profile of the college in the local community, partly achieved through its range of community activities
- offering subjects which are interesting and relevant to local people; for example, GCSEs and GCE A levels in religious studies and community languages, ESOL and IT
- recruiting students with the potential to succeed even though their academic qualifications may be poor.

Key challenges

130 Like other colleges, staff have to assess a number of 'risk' factors to make sure that they do not debar students with potential from having an opportunity to study at advanced levels while recruiting students to courses only if they have a good chance of succeeding. The

Case Study 6

local context makes accurate assessment of students' potential to succeed particularly challenging:

- pupils in local schools achieve below the national average of grade C or above in GCSEs
- many school pupils just achieve the entry requirements for GCE A level courses after intensive coaching and support. Their GCSE results are not necessarily a good indicator of whether they can readily progress to study at advanced level
- conversely, some students, for example those who have come to settle in England as teenagers, may achieve poor GCSE results yet have tremendous potential for success at GCE A level
- many students studying full time have to manage competing pressures of various kinds; for example, working part time to contribute to household income or undertaking significant domestic responsibilities. The college needs to plan with students how they will devote sufficient time to study in order to succeed
- parents are usually supportive, but are generally not well informed about further education. The college identifies how it can best advise parents of the importance of homework and educational visits, and make every effort to secure their commitment
- a significant proportion of students have poor basic skills. The college has to provide them with support in developing basic skills while ensuring that subject teaching matches their abilities.

131 The college recruits some students to GCE A level programmes who barely meet minimum entry requirements. Some students do extremely well in their studies from relatively unpromising starting points.

One Yemeni student who arrived in England five years ago speaking no English failed his English GCSE at school but passed eight other GCSEs. He enrolled at the college to study four GCE A levels in sciences and Arabic with intensive English language support. He achieved three grade As and one grade B. Another student enrolled on three GCE A level courses at the college having achieved only four GCSEs at grade C. On reflection, he recognised that he only just managed to convince tutors, and himself, that he was ready for GCE A level study. In the event, he gained three grade As and has been accepted to study medicine at university. Both students praised the college for encouraging them, for their teachers' high expectations and faith in their abilities, and for the valuable help they received in developing English language skills.

Key findings from the FEFC inspection of the college in 1998 relating to widening participation and high standards

132 College staff and governors agree that widening participation means achieving successful outcomes for disadvantaged students. Inspectors found that the college has effective leadership and that many positive developments were under way to address weaknesses. At the time of the inspection, it was too early to judge the effectiveness of a number of quality improvement strategies, particularly those relating to student achievement.

The curriculum

133 A key finding of the FEFC inspection was that some student achievement rates were below national averages for sixth form colleges, and that many achievement rates had declined significantly in 1997-98.

Case Study 6

Examination results	1996-97 (%)	1997-98 (%)
GCE A level (grades A to E)	72	65
GCSE (grades C or above)	55	42
Vocational advanced	71	67
Vocational intermediate	66	50
Vocational foundation	59	70
Two or more GCE A levels	–	76
Three or more GCE A levels	–	78

134 The quality of mathematics provision and additional support in mathematics was found to be particularly weak. Much teaching failed to take sufficient account of the differing abilities of students and achievements were poor.

135 There was evidence of improvements in retention rates in some curriculum areas. However, in many cases achievement rates in these subjects had declined. For example, between 1996-97 and 1997-98, in GCSE psychology and sociology, retention rates increased from 79% to 87% but achievement declined from 69% to 45%. The college was beginning to investigate possible relationships between retention and achievement rates and to devise strategies to bring about further improvements in both.

Support for students

136 Overall, the quality of support was found to be good, but some weaknesses were particularly significant in relation to widening participation. The college recognised that it had recruited some students inappropriately. For example, it had enrolled students who were interested in music as a subject, but were not necessarily ready or interested in taking the GCE A level examination. Many did not complete the course.

137 The college recognised that tutorials are a key way of raising students' achievements, especially for those from under-represented groups. A recently revised system of group

tutorials resulted in improved attendance, but the quality of tutorials ranged from barely adequate to outstanding. Guidelines for tutors were not sufficiently clear and there had been little training for them. In contrast, tutorials for individual students were effective.

In individual tutorials, the tutor reviews each student's progress with them. This helps to motivate students and raise their expectations of success. Students benefit from evaluating their own performance and helping to set suitably challenging targets for future achievements in each subject they study.

138 Some students did not receive appropriate learning support, especially those taking mathematics and those studying part time in community-based provision. There were no 'drop-in' workshops in basic skills and some ESOL support was not linked closely enough to the main subjects students were studying.

139 The college was found to offer a valuable range of personal support for students.

The support included:

- close links with community-based support centres for students from different cultural or religious backgrounds

Case Study 6

- college subsidies for educational visits from an allocated budget of £4,000. One ESOL group planned and organised a day trip to London and used the exercise as an 'English language driving test' to see how well they could function in strange surroundings, communicating only in English.

140 Careers advice for most students was good, but little advice was offered to students in community-based provision.

Quality assurance

141 Quality assurance arrangements were judged to be satisfactory. Useful departmental reviews included good use of performance indicators for attendance, retention and achievement and were increasingly focusing on the quality of action plans. A significant weakness in quality assurance arrangements was that they were not yet leading to improvements in the level of students' achievements. The college did not analyse achievement in relation to students' ethnicity.

142 The college recognised that there was scope to share good practice across the college. In science subjects, staff had developed effective ways of sustaining high retention and achievement rates, including good value-added results, though many of the same students fared poorly in mathematics.

Governance

143 The governance of the college was judged to be good. However, inspectors concluded that not enough attention was being given to monitoring students' performance and that not enough action was being taken to improve retention and achievement rates.

Management

144 Productive links with a wide range of community organisations and local businesses

were found to be a strength. In many respects, the college was found to be effectively managed. Key weaknesses were unreliable management information and an academic management which had not successfully addressed declining achievement.

Action taken since inspection to raise achievement

145 The college has implemented a rigorous post-inspection action plan well. Each of the action points listed in the following sections had target completion dates within 12 months of the inspection. Action taken has led to substantial improvements in the level of students' achievements.

Curriculum

146 The college's major drive is to improve student achievement. Considerable work is being undertaken to improve the quality of mathematics provision by:

- improving guidance to students who have grades F, G or U in GCSE
- conducting initial assessment tests for students recently arrived in England who do not have mathematics GCSE at grade C
- raising GCSE mathematics entry requirements and providing alternative courses to GCSE, for example Associated Examining Board numeracy courses
- providing staff development in teaching methods for students of diverse abilities
- setting up an IT resource centre for mathematics
- measuring, under test conditions, the attainment of each student every half term and planning improvement strategies with those who are underachieving
- providing an extra hour of tuition during the first year of GCE A level courses for students with GCSE mathematics at grade C or below

Case Study 6

- providing additional weekly lessons for students likely to fail in statistics, mechanics or pure mathematics
- following up any absences in additional mathematics support sessions
- offering half-term and Easter holiday revision courses that are compulsory for students with previous low levels of achievement in mathematics
- timetabling an extra session to support students preparing for November resits
- offering individual revision support during the examination period
- including a review of any students causing concern as a standing item at all departmental meetings
- weekly departmental meetings to discuss progress in addressing weaknesses in the inspection.

147 Steps have also been taken to improve provision in other curriculum areas. These include:

- reviewing entry criteria
- developing schemes of work to include plans for teaching key skills
- developing and using suitably varied methods of teaching to cater for the range of abilities in classes
- sharing good practice in teaching methods for students with diverse abilities at departmental staff meetings
- monitoring and analysing reasons for students leaving courses and drawing up action plans to address problem areas
- allowing lunchtime access to practice and rehearsal facilities to support learning
- identifying students 'at risk' each half-term and as part of their progress reviews, planning action to strengthen support and improve motivation
- increasing the stock of ESOL learning material in the library

- improving progression opportunities for ESOL students.

Support for students

148 The college has taken a number of initiatives to strengthen support for students. These include:

- creating an attendance officer post to follow up student absences, and to make home visits where appropriate
- setting up a strategy to increase the take-up of learning support. A survey showed that the four main reasons for students not taking advantage of learning support were:
 - the feeling they did not have enough time
 - unpreparedness to admit that they needed support
 - the perceived stigma attached to support
 - the timetable clashes with ESOL provision.

The college has planned ways to address each of these issues, for example by publicising the value of support for students in positive ways to staff and students

- introducing individual learning plans for all students receiving learning support
- reviewing and grading each student's attendance record and including it in the student's quarterly report. Grade 1 is for attendance of 95% and over, grade 2 for 85% to 94%, grade 3 for 84% or below. Students are set targets for improving attendance and parents are contacted if students under 19 are given a grade 3. The approach has helped motivate students and improved attendance rates
- developing a mentoring scheme for students from ethnic groups with low achievement rates
- reviewing each student's progress against the achievement targets set with their tutor

Case Study 6

- setting up individual interviews with the principal for each GCE A level student identified as being 'at risk' of leaving college or failing assignments or examinations. Early signs suggest the review with the principal is helping to motivate students and raise levels of achievement
- lengthening the tutorial period and preparing a new tutorial booklet and guidelines for tutors. Attendance at tutorials has risen to 85%
- establishing a pairing system to link ESOL students with students on other courses who are fluent speakers, in order to help them practise their English language skills in social situations
- improving contact with parents and developing more systematic arrangements to report to them on students' progress.

Quality assurance

149 The college has:

- strengthened departmental reviews and action plans by focusing on improving retention and achievement
- set up procedures for tracking the progress of students from deprived postcode areas
- reviewed its staff development policy and improved links between the staff development plan and objectives in the strategic plan, including objectives relating to raising retention and achievement rates
- provided staff development events on: approaches to enrolment; running tutorial sessions; simplifying the language used in assessments; using plain English
- introduced a system under which tutors monitor students' attainment in assessments against the target minimum grades set and analyse these in relation to students' ethnicity and gender. This is enabling the college to identify patterns among students achieving below, on, or above target and to take action as needed;

for example, to raise teachers' expectations of students from certain backgrounds.

General resources

150 The college has:

- extended library opening hours. The library now remains open until after daytime lessons finish and during holiday periods.

Governance

151 The college has:

- reviewed its mission more accurately to reflect its commitment to provide for those from the local inner-city area
- formalised reporting on retention and achievement and made this a standing agenda item at each corporation meeting
- established an annual cycle of reporting on retention and achievement targets and their achievement, and on the destinations of students
- improved the monitoring of equal opportunities, including trends in enrolments, retention and achievement by gender, ethnicity and disability
- given careful consideration at a recent governors' meeting to statistics on retention, achievement and ethnicity. Figures for 1997-98 showed that:
 - the lowest retention rates in GCE A level programmes were among white and black Caribbean students
 - the lowest achievement rates overall were among black Caribbean, Indian, Chinese and other Asian students
 - the lowest GCSE course retention rates were among black African, black other, Chinese and white students
 - the lowest achievement rates were among black other, who have by far the worst achievement rate, Bangladeshi and black Caribbean

Case Study 6

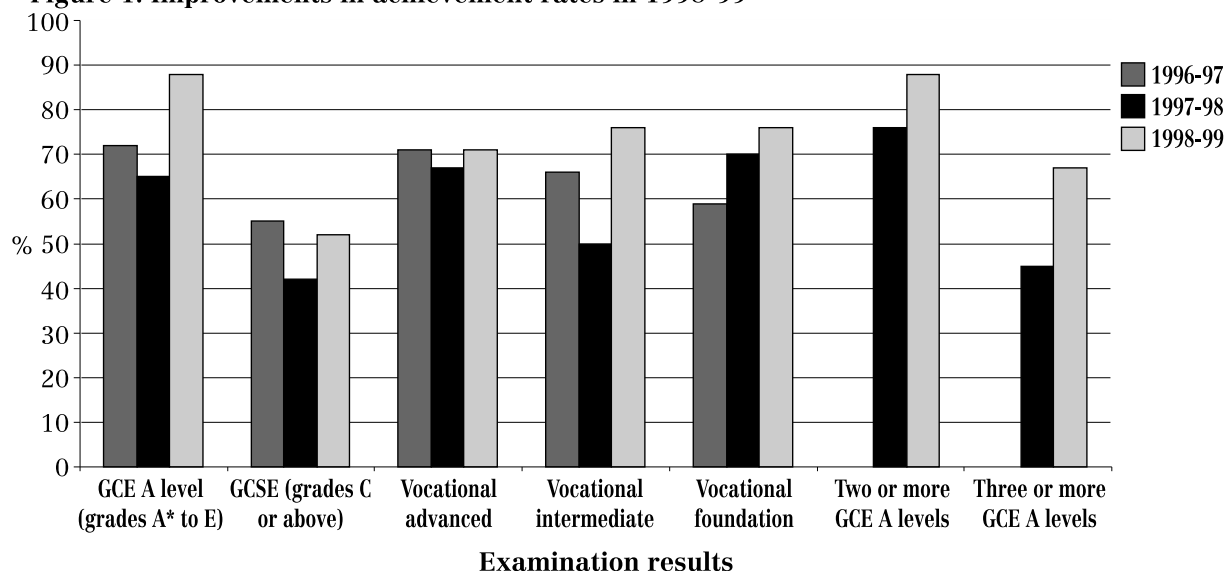
- begun to monitor trends for 1998-99 and to receive reports on plans to address underachievement among certain ethnic groups
- begun to implement action plans and monitoring arrangements for each aspect of the equal opportunities policy commitments.

Management

152 The college has:

- established a focus on retention and achievement as a central part of monitoring and reporting in each curriculum area
- set aside two days of the usual timetable prior to summer term examinations for revision lessons
- established a curriculum board of heads of department to advise and support curriculum developments in community-based provision and to help steer developments in assuring quality in this provision
- set up monthly reporting to senior management on enrolments, attendance and retention rates
- made departmental action plans a standing item at departmental meetings
- reviewed its curriculum to ensure it is suitable for students of different ages in the local area
- continued to pay attention to issues of race, and possible racism, in the college
- considered its provision in the light of recommendations to educational providers in the 1999 MacPherson report on institutional racism, following the murder of Stephen Lawrence. It has analysed exclusions and disciplinary hearings in terms of students' ethnicity. It has assured itself that it is uncompromising in dealing with any physical violence and is placing a great emphasis on a safe learning environment for students. Reception and security staff have undertaken training in dealing with challenging or violent behaviour and diffusing conflict. The college believes it is meeting the MacPherson report recommendations
- improved the reliability of management information
- purchased a new management information system that will report on students' home languages and subcategories of ethnic groupings that will help the college to monitor trends in relation to groups such as Yemeni and Bosnian students.

Figure 1. Improvements in achievement rates in 1998-99



Case Study 6

153 Achievements in mathematics, which were particularly weak at the time of the inspection, are now improving:

- GCSE resit examination results were 60% grade C or above in November 1998 compared with 56% in 1997-98
- the retention rate in GCE A level in 1998-99 increased to 81%, compared with the target retention rate of 70% for this year
- the pass rate in GCE A level was 97% grade A to E and 45% grade A to C, compared with the target pass rate of 80% at grade A to E for this year.

Developments planned to widen participation more effectively and to raise standards

154 Next steps include:

- exploring techniques for assessing students' academic potential in a systematic way, possibly based upon systems developed in the United States of America and England for adults wanting to enter higher education but who lack the necessary qualifications
- expanding the use of certificates of commendation for students
- partly in response to the Moser report on basic skills, mapping and assessing the quality of all basic skills provision, including provision which forms part of support for students and provision which is an integral part of subject teaching

The college intends 'every teacher to be an English language teacher' and to strengthen students' language skills at every opportunity. Plans are being made to have wall displays in teaching rooms, which will include word boards, grammar points and vocabulary lists of terminology specific to subject areas taught in that location. Lesson observation criteria for next year include 'appropriate use of English language'.

- raising part-time students' awareness of college facilities, including careers advice and financial support. Induction is to include a visit to the college to encourage students to use college-based support services
- having a large awards presentation evening to celebrate students' achievements and help encourage other students to see what they too can achieve
- revising the accommodation strategy to include all community-based centres used by the college
- extending quality assurance arrangements to courses in the community
- issuing minimum grades as targets for students to achieve for each qualification towards which they are working
- introducing appraisal criteria for teachers relating to the effectiveness of target-setting for individual students' achievements
- nominating a governor with a link role for target-setting
- developing more entry-level courses
- doubling the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by 1999-2000
- giving consideration to six 'learning blocks' in the year with tutorial, work experience and enrichment weeks in-between
- achieving a year-on-year increase in retention rates for community-based provision.

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