

Park College, Eastbourne

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission 1

The inspection 9

Curriculum areas

Mathematics 12

Business and information technology 19

Performing arts 25

Humanities 32

Cross-college provision

Support for students 38

General resources 47

Quality assurance 54

Governance 61

Management 69

Conclusions 77

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Park College, Eastbourne

South East Region

Inspected November 1999

Park College, Eastbourne, is a sixth form college in Eastbourne, East Sussex. The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. A number of weaknesses were understated or omitted. All sections of the college, including the governing body, had been involved in the production of the self-assessment report. The report was subject to only a small amount of external verification. At the time of the inspection the college was in the process of completing its next annual self-assessment report. Although this had yet to be validated, inspectors took account of actions recently taken by the college. Inspectors agreed with the curriculum area grades awarded by the college, but only one out of five cross-college grades.

The college offers significant provision in six of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in four areas was inspected. The college mainly provides GCE A level, GNVQ intermediate and advanced, and GCSE courses for 16 to 18 year olds. The college has been effectively led during a difficult period. It has addressed its future as an independent institution and grown significantly over the last three years. It will be some time before the full impact of some organisational changes are realised.

Programmes of study are well organised and the quality of most of the teaching is good. The majority of the GCE A level grades achieved are

better than expectations based on students' GCSE entry scores. The average GCE A level score per entry and per candidate has been rising steadily. Achievements were particularly good in GCE A level further mathematics, dance and drama. The teaching on performing arts courses is outstanding. However, most subjects have achievements below or at the national averages for sixth form colleges. Student retention has remained below national averages for the past three years. Students receive a high standard of pre-course advice and information. The new tutorial system is well designed but untested. Opportunities for students to broaden their educational experiences are good, but support for those with additional learning needs is inadequate. The quality assurance policy and procedures are clear, and endorsed by the governors. The lesson observation scheme was carefully piloted. These measures have not yet had an effect on improving some aspects of poor performance. Governors have a wide range of skills and are very committed to the college. Communications with the staff are good and the strategic plan is well understood. The general accommodation and specialist resources have been substantially improved since the last inspection. The college should improve: declining retention on most courses; achievement rates which are below the national average for sixth form colleges; the application of its quality assurance systems; the poor learning support arrangements; strategies to address financial vulnerability; management information; and the use of IT to support learning.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	3	Support for students	3
Business and information technology	2	General resources	3
Performing arts	1	Quality assurance	3
Humanities	2	Governance	3
		Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Park College, Eastbourne is located in the seaside town of Eastbourne on the south coast. It started life as Eastbourne Grammar School and became a sixth form college in 1979. In 1994, a year after incorporation, it changed its name to Park College, Eastbourne. It then had 550 full-time students. Over the last five years the college has grown significantly, and in September 1999 it enrolled 872 full-time and 30 part-time students.

2 The college is the main provider of full-time general education for 16 to 18 year olds in the town and surrounding area. However, it has sought to change its image from that of a purely academic institution to widen participation in the age group that the college seeks to serve. It shares a campus with the neighbouring general further education college, with which it has recently co-operated over the building of the Eastbourne sports park. This was part of a joint development of major sporting facilities involving the two colleges, Eastbourne Borough Council and East Sussex County Council, the national lottery fund and the Government Office of the South East. The college has close working relationships with its five local partner schools.

3 Eastbourne has a population in excess of 80,000. Although it has a reputation for having a very elderly population, the numbers of young people of compulsory school age are expanding rapidly. The local economy is heavily dependent on service industries, including tourism, professional services and public sector organisations. There are also some small-scale manufacturing and engineering companies.

4 The college offers 39 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate and advanced levels in four curriculum areas, 10 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects, intermediate level courses in sports science and

the diploma in nursery nursing. All students have, as part of their tutorial programme, opportunities to gain accredited qualifications in key skills and information communication technologies.

5 Management has recently been restructured with the aim of further improving the quality of teaching and learning. The new structure was designed in order to ensure that inclusive learning becomes a major strategy in achieving the college's ambition to provide opportunities for all students to pursue their education to the highest possible standards.

6 There are effective partnerships with the local borough council. The college is also an active member of the Sussex Sixth Form Colleges Consortium and the Sussex Strategy Group. It is a leading member of the South of England Open College Network. Over the last two years, students have been engaged in a number of exciting European projects involving performing arts productions in Rouen, Cologne and Stockholm.

7 Productive relationships with local English language schools have led to expansion of the college's overseas students' market. Around 7% of students are from non-European Union countries. Under a contract with Hastings College of Arts and Technology, groups of full-time students from the United Arab Emirates are taught at the college. Partner schools in Japan send groups of students for periods of full-time education.

8 The college's mission is to 'provide high-quality general education that enables students to progress both in terms of gaining qualifications and in their personal and social development'. Its two main aims are:

- to further improve the quality of teaching and learning
- to widen participation and encourage inclusive learning.

Context

The Inspection

9 The college was inspected during the week beginning 8 November 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors considered the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information from other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). This included data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998, which were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college provided data on students' achievements for 1999. These latest data were checked against class registers and pass lists from examination bodies, and were found reliable. Aspects of the previous ISR data were not accurate, and were resubmitted to the FEFC. The college was given two months' notice of the sample of work to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by a team of eight inspectors working for 33 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 40 lessons and some tutorials, and examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. Members of the team met governors, managers, staff and students.

10 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Approximately 77% of lessons observed were rated as good or outstanding, and no lessons were considered less than satisfactory. This is an improvement on the grade profile since the last inspection and is above the averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	23	3	0	0	29
GCSE	0	2	3	0	0	5
GNVQ	2	3	4	0	0	9
Total (No.)	5	28	10	0	0	43
Total (%)	12	65	23	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

Context

11 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Park College, Eastbourne	16.6	82
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics

Grade 3

12 Ten lessons in mathematics were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses recorded in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching on higher level courses
- excellent results in GCE A level further mathematics
- good retention on GCE A level mathematics courses
- opportunities for students to experience mathematics outside the college

Weaknesses

- poor results and unimaginative teaching on GCSE courses
- no use of information technology (IT)
- below average achievements in GCE A level mathematics
- lack of diagnostic testing and support for weaker students

13 The college offers an adequate range of mathematics courses. These include GCSE, GCE A level and further mathematics. Students who enrol are primarily full time and 16 to 18 years old. A plan to offer a course at foundation level has not been implemented. This is a weakness identified in the college's self-assessment report. The number of students enrolling on mathematics courses has significantly risen this year. At enrolment, students' grades at GCSE are used as a basis for giving guidance about course options. No other diagnostic assessments are used. GCE A level students are informed of their predicted grade. This is then used to monitor progress on their chosen course.

14 The review and development of work in mathematics is weak. Since the reorganisation, the team has lacked leadership. Team meetings are irregular and, as a result, important issues are not being addressed. Questionnaires to students about courses are analysed and the outcomes reviewed at course forums. Students are generally positive about the effectiveness of this process. Mathematics teachers give generously of their time outside of lessons. Additional pre-examination workshops are offered for all courses. Teachers agree targets for each course. These are closely monitored and used to support the judgements in the self-assessment report.

15 The majority of the teaching is good. Staff are well qualified and knowledgeable about their subject. Lessons are effectively planned and most schemes of work are appropriately designed. Teaching on the GCE A level further mathematics course is excellent. In one lesson, where the teacher created a stimulating environment, the students worked in self-selected groups and all were engaged in highly effective learning. However, the teaching in many GCE A level lessons is aimed at the level of the more able students and other students are not given sufficient attention. The teaching on the GCSE course is unimaginative. Lesson plans do not take into account students' different abilities. Students with deficiencies in basic mathematical skills do not receive additional support. In the better lessons, the teacher developed ideas working from first principles or previous learning, but there was little differentiation in the methods of teaching. The college lesson observations lack critical analysis. Good practice is not adequately shared or poor practice identified. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

16 Student retention on advanced level courses is good. On the GCSE course it is significantly below the national average and has worsened over the last three years. Students' achievements on the GCE A level further mathematics course is exceptional, with a 100% pass rate for the second year in succession. The number of students achieving high grades for GCE A level is good at 67%. However, the pass rate is 14% below the national average. The self-assessment report identifies this as a weakness.

17 Students' attendance at mathematics lessons is generally good. Teachers are supportive and attendance is effectively monitored. Homework is regularly set. In some instances, there is an over-reliance on students' self-marking. External moderators highlighted the need for consistent marking of GCE A level papers. As a result, staff now moderate each other's assessments. The modular GCE A level programme enables students to select different options. This works well. Students are positively encouraged, through trips to universities, to study mathematics in higher education. Extra lessons help more able students to prepare for entry to Oxford and Cambridge universities. Progression from

advanced level programmes to higher education is good. Of the further mathematics students, 67% go on to study a mathematics-related degree at university.

18 Mathematics is taught in dedicated classrooms. Because of large classes, classrooms are often crowded. They lack stimulating visual material. Most classrooms have an overhead projector but have few other resources. There is no use of IT in the teaching of mathematics. This is a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. GCE A level students occasionally use programmable calculators. Students can use computers in the resource centre, but the college's intranet site for mathematics has not been developed. The range of books in the resource centre is good. All students have their own textbooks for coursework.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	125	111	100
		Retention (%)	71	68	65
		Achievement (%)	40	42	32
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	108	90	64
		Retention (%)	76	77	94
		Achievement (%)	80	70	73
GCE A level further mathematics	3	Number of starters	21	16	8
		Retention (%)	95	63	88
		Achievement (%)	70	100	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Business and Information Technology

Grade 2

19 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering courses across the full range of business studies and IT courses. Inspectors mostly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- integration of IT with programme design and delivery
- good student support
- course planning and preparation of teaching materials
- positive value added to students' GCSE results by GCE A level results
- systematic course review with student involvement

Weaknesses

- poor retention on most GNVQ courses
- poor GNVQ intermediate results
- few opportunities for some students to contribute to lessons
- narrow range of library books

20 The range of business studies and IT courses offered to full-time 16 to 19 year old students includes GNVQs in business at intermediate and advanced levels, and GCE A levels in computing, IT, business and economics. There is a BTEC first diploma in IT for international students. Courses are well planned and well managed, although schemes of work and lesson plans are broad and lack explicit detail. Additional handouts and additional materials for students are comprehensive and of high quality.

21 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most teaching is good. In the better lessons, students were encouraged to reflect on their experience and knowledge and participate in discussion. In some lessons, although teachers provided appropriate content, there were too few opportunities for students to share their understanding and experience of business issues. In weaker lessons, teachers failed to summarise and consolidate students' learning. All lessons started promptly and had a sense of purpose. Where students were working with computers, teachers circulated and offered help and students also helped each other. Teachers gave good support to weaker learners, but the difficulty of the work did not always take into account the needs of the more able students.

22 Students on all courses, except the GNVQ intermediate in business, are very positive about the college experience. Teachers are generous with their time and regularly provide advice and support for students. Business and IT teachers make good use of course reviews and other quality assurance indicators. The systematic and frequent monitoring includes excellent opportunities for student feedback. This leads directly to course improvements. The self-assessment report did not identify this as a strength. The college enhances learning with external visits to commerce and industry, and work experience for some students. Teachers have a positive approach to innovative ideas and practices.

23 GCE A level results in IT, computing, business and economics have remained at, or slightly above, the national average for three years. GCE A level students achieve results that are better than their GCSE entry scores might have initially predicted. The proportion of higher grades achieved is below average. GNVQ retention is declining. For business courses, the GNVQ advanced pass rate has improved markedly to 100%. GNVQ intermediate achievement and retention is poor. The college's self-assessment report identifies this as a

Curriculum Areas

weakness. High expectations are set for the presentation of work and these are usually met. Most work is wordprocessed or desktop published. Many business and IT assignments for students are based on the consultancy needs of local businesses. The work of the more able students displays imaginative problem-solving approaches, and the reports they produce achieve a standard comparable with that of commercial consultants.

24 Students on business and IT courses make considerable use of IT. Access to computers is good in classrooms and in the resource centre. IT is well integrated with learning programmes. Modern computers with appropriate software are available, some offering Internet access, the use of which is encouraged. Teaching rooms are too small for some larger classes but the environment is pleasant and well maintained with good use of display. The resource centre is widely used and can become crowded. The library bookstock is small and lacks revision guides and extension materials for the more able.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business and information technology , 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	23	41	15
		Retention (%)	78	64	52
		Achievement (%)	100	73	44
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	10	17	19
		Retention (%)	90	71	53
		Achievement (%)	44	83	100
GCE A level business and economics	3	Number of starters	54	39	63
		Retention (%)	+	+	63
		Achievement (%)	+	+	88
GCE A level IT	3	Number of starters	*	20	60
		Retention (%)	*	85	80
		Achievement (%)	*	88	90
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	34	48	44
		Retention (%)	94	73	50
		Achievement (%)	97	80	82

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

+data unreliable, alternative college data provided

*courses did not run

Curriculum Areas

Performing Arts

Grade 1

25 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering the full range of courses in performing arts. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- very high pass rates
- lively, well-planned and effective teaching
- productive external links and opportunities for performance
- high retention rates
- the college theatre
- staff with experience of professional performance

Weaknesses

- inadequacies in college accommodation for music and dance
- low student numbers in dance and music

26 The college offers a range of courses appropriate to the needs of 16 to 18 year olds. These include GCE A level dance, drama and music, GCE advanced supplementary (AS) dance and music performance and GNVQ performing arts and entertainment industries. All students are full time. GCE AS dance is offered to second-year GNVQ students to extend their studies. Enrolments in the performing arts area have risen slowly, although the numbers on music and dance courses remain small.

27 The provision is well organised. The curriculum leader meets regularly with the three staff who teach dance and drama part time and the part-time theatre administrator. Two of these staff also teach at a nearby 11 to 16 school. Positive and mutually beneficial links, such as joint use of resources and joint performance projects, have developed between

the two institutions. All teachers are practising artists in their own right. Students benefit significantly from their skills, professional approach and the working environment in the small Park Theatre, where touring companies run workshops for students. The college identifies this as a strength in its self-assessment and inspectors agreed. Specialist staff are invited to the college to extend students' techniques, for example, by providing voice training.

28 Teaching is of a high standard. Lessons are well planned and in lessons where first and second-year students are taught together, tasks are carefully structured to ensure that the work is demanding for students at all levels. During a dance lesson, students were given examples, using video clips and demonstration, of different choreographers' work. Working in small groups to tight timescales, students were required to produce short pieces of work, which showed the different approaches. The rest of the group, using strict choreographic criteria, then evaluated their performance. Students demonstrated disciplined teamwork in producing convincing pieces of work which were both creative and technically competent. The work showed a clear understanding of choreographic style and linked to previous theory lessons. Courses are well organised and ensure that the quality of students' experience across the three art forms is well balanced. However, low numbers on dance and music courses creates timetabling difficulties which demand creative solutions.

29 Inspectors agreed with the college judgement about the value of extra-curricular learning. There are extensive opportunities for students to perform to their peers in lunchtime concerts. Regular 'showcase' events and full productions are held in the Park Theatre, and are open to the public. Students perform in other large venues and together with other groups such as the Eastbourne Community Youth Theatre. Links in France, Germany, and

Curriculum Areas

Sweden are well developed, giving students the opportunity to participate in joint productions staged abroad and to experience performing in a foreign language. Students are currently preparing to go to Germany for a millennium production of 'Faust 2000'.

30 Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment report that students' achievement is a strength. There has been a 100% pass rate in GCE A level dance, drama and GCE AS music performance over the last two years and in GCE A level music and GNVQ last year. Students achieved a proportion of higher grades in GCE A level drama and GNVQ performing arts over the last two years which was at, or above, the national average. External verifier reports refer to the GNVQ provision as exemplary. Public performances are of high quality. Students' attendance is good. Lecturers constantly emphasise the message that absence from a performing arts lesson means letting fellow students down. Students are highly motivated and committed to their studies,

A summary of retention and achievement rates in performing arts, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCE AS dance	3	Number of starters	*	10	11
		Retention (%)	*	60	82
		Achievement (%)	*	100	100
GCE A level dance	3	Number of starters	9	8	3
		Retention (%)	89	50	100
		Achievement (%)	83	100	100
GCE A level music	3	Number of starters	14	12	6
		Retention (%)	71	25	83
		Achievement (%)	80	67	100
GCE A level drama	3	Number of starters	22	21	20
		Retention (%)	95	81	90
		Achievement (%)	86	100	100
GNVQ advanced in performing arts and entertainment industries	3	Number of starters	*	11	13
		Retention (%)	*	73	77
		Achievement (%)	*	88	100

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

*courses did not run

spending many additional hours in group rehearsal or practising on their own. Some students' written work was poorly presented. Retention is generally better than the national average, and improved last year. The majority of students go on to further study but some find direct employment in the performing arts area.

31 Accommodation is of a good standard. The college theatre is well equipped and allows students to both perform and experience a variety of backstage roles. However, the facilities for music on the college site are restricted and students use those in a nearby school which enable them to use computer systems with music software, multitrack recording, additional musical instruments and scores and practice space. Dance accommodation is too small. All practical sessions are held in the theatre, as there is no suitable additional space. Pressure on the theatre accommodation means that it is used to capacity for teaching, rehearsal, performances and even sometimes for examinations. There is a need to upgrade changing areas.

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 2

32 Inspectors observed 10 lessons on GCE A level courses in government and politics, law, history, and sociology. Inspectors agreed with the college's overall self-assessment.

However, a number of strengths and some important weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- effective planning, management and development of subject content
- high-quality learning materials
- mutually supportive staff and student working relationships
- good examination preparation
- students' involvement in reviewing teaching and learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to the learning needs of the most and least able
- poor retention and achievement in GCSE sociology
- poor retention in GCE A level sociology

33 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the quality of teaching is good. Teachers pay careful attention to the way in which content is introduced and developed. The range of teaching methods used is wide and resources and materials are well presented and effectively used. The college identified this as a strength in its self-assessment report. However, the college did not identify as a strength the supportive working relationships between students. They help each other to clarify their ideas, explain difficult concepts, and organise their work effectively. They have easy access to good-quality learning materials and learn to work on their own. For example, in a GCE A level lesson, students were able to undertake

their own group research and help and support each other even though the member of staff was unable to attend.

34 Insufficient attention is paid to the learning needs of the most and least able. More able students are not given sufficient opportunity to improve their skills. Students experiencing difficulties do not receive adequate support. This was evident in lesson observations, schemes of work and lesson planning. There is no systematic assessment of students' learning needs. Teachers give generously of their time to assist students. The social science curriculum is enriched through visits, conferences and projects. For example, history students assisted children in local schools to develop problem-solving skills through a project based on a study of the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

35 Students are punctual and courteous. Attendance is monitored regularly and absent students contacted. Students' participation in formal course forums and the importance teachers give to their views and evaluations is impressive. This is a strength not identified by the college. There is clear evidence of the impact which improvements suggested by the students have on course design and classroom activities. Modules have been rearranged in history, resources improved and new induction processes introduced. A group of GCE A level social science students identified a need to develop their note-taking skills. The class acted as an audience to a drama production, during which they recorded notes. These were later analysed. It was a successful experience which students remembered and from which they learned.

36 Students are well prepared for examinations. Assessment criteria are clearly explained and students made aware of the demands of the syllabus. Model answers are provided and students undertake detailed work in assessing them. Achievements on GCE A level history, law and the one-year sociology

Curriculum Areas

course are at, or above, the national average. Those on GCE A level law have improved dramatically. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that retention in both GCE A level sociology (two year) and GCSE sociology is a weakness. Retention on the GCE A level sociology (two year) course has remained well below the national average for the past three years. In GCSE sociology, student retention has remained consistently below the national average. Students in GCSE are poorly motivated, and their attendance is erratic. Although data on the retention and achievement of students is available, teachers do not systematically analyse it in order to identify the source of problems.

37 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Students have access to well-equipped classrooms and teachers make good use of audiovisual materials. Students have good access to IT and the Internet in the resource centre, but the library bookstock for humanities and social sciences is poor. Efforts have been made to replenish the bookstock but it is not sufficient to meet the changing needs of the curriculum. Students who plan to go on to higher education are particularly disadvantaged. Teachers compensate for deficiencies in the book collection by producing their own materials for students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE sociology	2	Number of starters	16	7	10
		Retention (%)	88	57	40
		Achievement (%)	64	75	67
GCE A level government and politics	3	Number of starters	*	13	9
		Retention (%)	*	69	78
		Achievement (%)	*	100	57
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	+	+	62
		Retention (%)	+	+	83
		Achievement (%)	+	+	89
GCE A level law	3	Number of starters	19	31	34
		Retention (%)	53	42	74
		Achievement (%)	40	69	84
GCE A level sociology (one year)	3	Number of starters	*	22	24
		Retention (%)	*	68	83
		Achievement (%)	*	87	83
GCE A level sociology (two year)	3	Number of starters	81	94	54
		Retention (%)	68	57	57
		Achievement (%)	65	81	74

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

+data unreliable, alternative college data provided

*course did not run

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

38 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses recognised in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the high standard of pre-course advice and information
- effective induction procedures
- strong personal and curriculum-related support for students
- the wide range of opportunities for students to broaden their educational experience

Weaknesses

- arrangements for monitoring and evaluating tutorial provision not yet implemented
- poor learning support arrangements
- tutorial programme which delivers poor results in GCE A level general studies

39 Students benefit from a high standard of pre-course advice and information. The college has effective relationships with a number of local 'partner' schools. Staff undertake liaison visits to pupils in years 10 and 11 to provide advice and information about post-16 opportunities. Year 10 pupils are invited to take part in 'taster' days at the college. These provide a valuable introduction to subjects of which pupils have no previous experience. The college also hosts annual open days. All events are supported by attractive and informative publications. This strength was identified in the college's self-assessment report.

40 The enrolment process is carefully conducted, and students are satisfied that they are given sound advice. Staff deal supportively with students who later wish to change course. Students have a general induction to college life through the tutorial programme. Subject-specific induction is also provided and an interesting range of materials has been developed for this purpose. Inspectors agreed with the college that the induction process is a strength.

41 The college has recently changed the arrangements for its tutorial system with the intention of standardising and improving it. Students are positive about the change and feel confident about approaching tutors for assistance. Students follow a planned programme of weekly group tutorials. They also have regular individual meetings with their tutor where their progress is reviewed, taking account of their target minimum grades. There is good support for those planning to enter higher education, including an advice service after GCE A level results are published. GCE A level general studies and key skills awards in communication level 3 and 'improving own learning', are used as vehicles for encouraging students' personal and social development. However, students are not extending their learning through these additions to their programmes, and many fail to complete the examination preparation. Students' tutorial files are poorly organised and action-planning is sometimes rudimentary. A number of initiatives to assure the quality of tutorial provision are planned, but are not yet in place. The college recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report.

42 Students value the high level of curriculum-related support they receive from their teachers. This occurs both outside the classroom and through additional examination workshops. However, the college does not have a coherent learning support strategy. There is no common approach to the initial assessment

Cross-college Provision

of students' basic and key skills needs. Insufficient effort is made to provide appropriate programmes which take account of students' educational backgrounds, the demands of their college course and the student's own assessment of their needs. All students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who are identified in the transition from school to college, receive help from the learning support co-ordinator, and small numbers of students refer themselves for individual tuition in basic skills. The diagnostic test used with some of these students is daunting. Of those entered for Associated Examining Board tests in literacy and numeracy, few achieve the awards. The college underestimated the weaknesses in this area.

43 Students have good access to careers advice and information. An adviser from Sussex Careers Services visits the college two days a week. Students may either make an appointment for an interview, or attend on a 'drop-in' basis. The adviser also contributes to the tutorial programme. Changes in the careers service's priorities means that the adviser now concentrates her efforts on students identified as more likely to leave college early. The college has committed itself to achieving the 'Committed to Careers' standard of excellence.

44 A professionally qualified counsellor provides a sensitive counselling service. Liaison between the counsellor and the new principal tutors is still developing. The range of welfare advice and information available to students is small, and a formal appointments system has not been established.

45 The college has rigorous procedures for following up students who are absent. Attendance has improved over the period 1997 to 1999, though not to the college's target of 90%. Tutors are notified of students whose attendance gives 'cause for concern' so that they can review the situation with the student. The college offers additional consultation evenings specifically for the parents of students at risk.

The college has not yet succeeded in arresting declining retention rates, although new responsibilities among senior staff give high priority to pastoral care and the improvement of teaching.

46 The college offers a wide range of curriculum-related activities for students, including trips abroad and visits to university lectures and law clubs. There is an annual activities week when students can take part in sports, cultural and leisure activities or work experience. Students appreciate these opportunities to broaden their experience and understanding. The college had overlooked this strength in its report.

General Resources

Grade 3

47 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report overstated some of the strengths and did not identify sufficiently the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- an attractive resource centre and theatre complex
- well-planned and executed buildings maintenance programme
- effective partnership in high-quality sports park development

Weaknesses

- few strategies for using IT in the promotion of learning
- poor access for students with restricted mobility
- inadequate social areas

Cross-college Provision

48 Park College, Eastbourne occupies a single site. The major part of the accommodation is in a 1960s building, which has been converted from use as a boys' grammar school. There is also a small temporary classroom block which is adjacent to the main site. The college's accommodation strategy has clear priorities. Key operational targets have been achieved since the last inspection and most accommodation is now satisfactory for the courses being taught. The traditional school hall has been imaginatively converted into an attractive resources centre and theatre complex. This new theatre provides good accommodation for performing arts students and for community use. Facilities for music and photography have been improved by the provision of a dark room and a soundproof room. There are improved facilities for languages and IT. Accommodation space has been rationalised and good staff workrooms created. These are close to relevant teaching areas. The staff common room is spacious. The significant improvements are acknowledged in the college's self-assessment report. The biology laboratories have been refurbished but the chemistry and physics laboratories are outdated. The gymnasium does not provide adequate accommodation for indoor sports. Many general teaching rooms are very small, although some are well decorated and have stimulating wall displays. Students with restricted mobility can gain access to the ground floor only. They cannot reach the library section of the resource centre or some classrooms.

49 The college uses all of its available space effectively. Room utilisation is carefully monitored. The accommodation is well maintained and a planned and budgeted maintenance programme appropriately prioritises work. College staff carry out much of the maintenance work efficiently.

50 The well-designed resource centre has a wide variety of materials. It is very popular with students and effectively supplies their information needs. The annual budget is modest at £15,000 for all acquisitions. Major changes have been made in the library stock to improve its relevance, but some curriculum areas, including sociology and business studies, are still poorly resourced. There are very few materials to enable students to learn on their own or practise key skills or basic skills. The resource centre has 21 computer workstations for students' use, with Internet access provided on 10. Any Internet site visited by a student is monitored to ensure that appropriate use is being made of this facility. The centre has 110 study spaces. These are well used by students. This results in overcrowding and high noise levels at peak times. At times, the area becomes more of a social area than one for study. This deficiency is not recognised in the self-assessment report.

51 The college has improved its IT facilities and now has a ratio of about one computer to nine students. Access to dedicated IT classrooms outside of lesson times is poor. This presents problems for students who need to use software which is not available in the resource centre. All staff have good access to networked computers. The college has two intranet systems, one is used for administration and one for learning. The learning intranet has a good range of software and some CD-ROM databases. The college does not have an IT development plan. Little staff development has taken place to raise staff awareness of IT and its potential impact on teaching and learning.

52 The self-assessment report recognises that student social areas are small in size and poorly designed. They consist of an attractive dining area that closes after lunch, and an adjacent small and unattractive common room. Catering is provided by college staff and has moved from an annual deficit into profit. Catering staff respond sensitively to the requirements of

Cross-college Provision

different social and cultural groups. Community events also use the college catering staff and facilities. The college has an entertainment and bar licence for use at such events.

53 The college has entered into an enterprising partnership with its neighbouring college, Eastbourne Borough, and the county council to develop a sports park. The lottery and the Government Office of the South East provided funding of about £3 million. The first phase of the project is almost complete and provides high-quality facilities for a wide range of outdoor sports. Park College, Eastbourne has made an important contribution to the project by providing access, land and sports changing accommodation. In the future the college's maintenance team will care for the sports park in addition to existing playing fields. An indoor sports hall will be added in a second phase. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report in identifying this development as a strength.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

54 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses recognised in the self-assessment report, but identified additional important weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a clear quality assurance policy and procedures, endorsed by governors
- target-setting using a good range of performance indicators
- a well-thought-out scheme of lesson observation, carefully piloted
- staff development plans well aligned with strategic priorities
- value added to students' achievements by GCE A level results

Weaknesses

- failure to apply quality assurance systems effectively
- inadequate external verification of judgements in self-assessments
- improvements in level 3 achievements to only average levels
- declining retention rates, below national averages

55 Quality systems are well thought out and well documented. Recent changes in staff responsibilities promise a sharper focus on performance, but it is too early to say whether these changes are having an impact. The college accepts that its academic performance in the recent past was below that expected of a sixth form college. Levels of achievement and retention for the three years up to 1998 (the latest analysed data) have remained consistently below the mean for sixth form colleges. GCE A level and GNVQ advanced results in 1999 have been much better and approach, or exceed, the average for the first time. Level 2 and GCE AS results are still below the level expected. The number of higher grade passes achieved at GCE A level has slowly improved and in 1999, in 18 out of 28 subjects, the majority of students achieved grades higher than their GCSE results might have predicted. The use of target minimum grades for individual students was introduced last year, and is having an impact. While there is still room for considerable improvement, particularly in respect of retention, the academic performance of the college is now satisfactory.

56 A clear quality assurance policy has been endorsed by governors. The mission statement and college objectives stress the importance of providing a high-quality education for students. The three key stages of strategic planning, quality assurance, and self-assessment processes are appropriately linked. Self-assessment is soundly based on a system of

Cross-college Provision

course reviews, accompanied by standard requirements for performance indicators. These include recruitment, achievements, retention, progression, lesson observation grades, and students' perceptions. Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that the use of indicators is a strength. However, the achievement targets are based on calculations used in Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) performance tables rather than on FEFC benchmarking data and are therefore limited in comparison with other sector colleges. Students' views are gathered through questionnaire surveys and student review groups known as course forums. These meetings are well minuted, and students' opinions are taken seriously. Almost all course evaluations by students exceeded the target of 90% student satisfaction.

57 Most course reviews have been conducted conscientiously. However, there are gaps in some, and not all action plans are of good quality. Helpful documentation has improved the standard of reviews. Course leaders have found action plans a useful way of signalling the need for resources. There is little evidence of feedback to staff or students on the outcome of reviews. The need to provide such feedback is indicated in the self-assessment report. Support staff have also set performance targets, and conducted reviews, although not all of these have followed the same model. Service departments have a clear view of the need to satisfy their customers, although resources do not always allow the required level of service.

58 The governors' quality assessment committee has been established for some years. It scrutinises academic results, and monitors all aspects of the college's quality assurance system. It is not apparent that it exerts much influence on the maintenance of quality, or that it interrogates evidence with the necessary rigour. This represents a lost opportunity for the college to benefit from an independent view of its performance, a weakness that is referred to in the self-assessment report.

59 The scheme of lesson observations was carefully piloted and evaluated. Comments by observers generally lacked a critical edge; there was a reluctance to use the range of grades available, and fewer grade 3s were awarded by college observers than by inspectors. Nevertheless, neither college observers nor inspectors saw unsatisfactory teaching.

60 Staff are regularly appraised, through a system of 'performance management', which also identifies their development needs. The staff development budget of £20,000 covers fees for external courses, and related recurrent expenditure. There is no composite report on staff development activities, and no record which allows managers to identify whether all staff have a fair share of development support. With this lack of evidence inspectors could not form a view on whether staff development arrangements are good, as the self-assessment report asserts. The strategic priorities for staff development have recently been defined. They are simple, few in number, and clearly linked to college objectives. Staff who are undertaking new roles are undergoing a training programme arranged by college staff. They would benefit from further development opportunities outside the college. The college gained the Investors in People award in 1998.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 3

61 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report although some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- wide range of governor skills and experience
- high level of governor commitment to the college
- effective clerking arrangements
- close monitoring of the college's current financial position

Weaknesses

- lack of an effective strategy to address the college's financial vulnerability
- procedures for appraisal of senior postholders not fully developed
- lack of a formal training programme for governors
- lack of a rigorous self-evaluation process for governors

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

63 Governors bring to the corporation a wide range of appropriate skills and breadth of experience. These are effectively used to support the college. This is recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. An architect has advised on building issues, a former area bank manager chairs the finance committee and a television producer has

influenced the development of the college theatre. Governors have a good working relationship with senior managers. Joint seminars are held to consider strategic issues, and a proper separation between governance and management is maintained.

64 Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the college. The attendance levels at corporation meetings averaged 74% and 84% for subcommittee meetings held during 1998-99. Where the attendance of some governors has fallen below levels deemed acceptable, the corporation has taken positive action. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that governors closely monitor the financial position of the college. The finance committee scrutinises the three-year financial forecast and annual budget, before seeking corporation approval. The same committee reviews the management accounts at every meeting and makes recommendations to the corporation. Management accounts are distributed to all governors each month independently of the corporation and subcommittee cycle.

65 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, governors have been closely involved in the development of the strategic plan. Arrangements for monitoring the outcomes of the operational plan are unclear. The corporation gave careful attention to the strategic direction of the college after merger discussions with Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology in 1998 were discontinued. A decision was made to maintain independence for the next three years. A new strategic review resulted in a decision to increase the recruitment of international students, to support management restructuring and to participate in community projects. The college's financial health is vulnerable and financial forecasts project continuance of a weak financial position. Corporation minutes, however, had not shown evidence of consideration of a long-term strategy to address this financial vulnerability. This is a significant weakness not identified in the self-assessment report.

Cross-college Provision

66 Arrangements for clerking of corporation business are good, as identified in the self-assessment report. The clerk has no management responsibilities in the college and the contracted time for clerking duties has recently been increased. Agendas and papers are issued in good time to committee members and agenda notes always accompany corporation papers. These clearly identify whether the papers are for action or information. The clerk provides good support to the governors and acts as an independent source of advice. In addition, governors regularly receive relevant circulars and items of interest to the further education sector.

67 A governors' year plan sets out the corporation and subcommittee meeting cycle. This identifies the key areas of business for each term. The majority of committees in place have appropriate terms of reference and operate appropriately. However, the terms of reference for the quality assurance committee indicate a responsibility for determining the educational character and mission of the college. This is not a responsibility that can be delegated under the articles of government. The latest actions of the committee have taken place under the delegation of its powers to the committee chair. This process appears to bypass the operation of the committee and is not in accordance with the terms of reference contained in standing orders.

68 Whilst the principal has been recently appraised by the chair, there are no regular appraisal arrangements for senior postholders. The college recognises this as a weakness in its self-assessment. The corporation considered the college's self-assessment as a whole but did not undertake a thorough review themselves. A questionnaire completed by nine governors was analysed by senior managers, who used its findings to write the governance self-assessment report. There are few formal induction arrangements for new governors and there is no structured training programme. These are weaknesses not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Management

Grade 2

69 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good communications with staff
- well-understood strategic plan
- clear management structure
- effective leadership by senior managers

Weaknesses

- no analysis of management information needs
- ineffective monitoring and implementation of equal opportunities
- inadequate market research

70 Senior managers have provided effective leadership during a difficult period. The college has addressed its medium-term future as an independent institution and grown significantly over the last three years. All enrolment targets have been achieved, core business reviewed, the management structure reorganised, accommodation improved and day-to-day finances kept under careful control. Some of these changes, particularly the restructuring, will take some time to realise their full impact.

71 The strategic plan for 1997 to 2000 has been well prepared. Staff and governors are fully involved in the process. The plan has five priorities concerning students' achievements, learning support, staff development, community involvement and the achievement of additional income. The priorities are well understood by staff and key information is displayed on the staff noticeboard. The annual operations plan concentrates on some key issues but its relationship with the strategic plan is not explicit and monitoring arrangements are unclear. As the self-assessment states, the strategic plan is not supported by an overall

Cross-college Provision

marketing plan or in-depth market research. However, the college did use a consultant to assist in directing its marketing efforts to the priority 16 to 19 age group.

72 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the reorganisation of management during the past year has been firmly linked to strategic plan priorities. Clear lines of responsibility were established from September 1999. The deputy principal is responsible for corporate affairs, such as premises and finance, and the two assistant principals lead the curriculum divisions. In each division there are two principal teachers who concentrate on the quality of teaching and learning and four principal tutors with responsibility for providing support for students. Course leaders reporting to the principal teachers direct the main subject areas. There was good consultation over these changes and the majority of the posts were subject to open competition in the college. Some postholders have not yet had time to make an impact. The assistant principals and the principal teachers meet regularly in the curriculum management and the principal tutor groups. The establishment of these committees and other advisory groups assist communication and co-ordination. However, the closure of the academic board has led to some uncertainty as to the decision-making process.

73 Inspectors agreed that communications are good. The senior managers' weekly team meetings ensure that college affairs are well directed. Decisions are clearly recorded and the minutes are available for all staff. A senior manager holds regular briefing sessions on Friday mornings and training days are used to consider major issues affecting the college. A weekly newsletter provides information on national issues and current college developments. Regular support staff meetings in their specialist teams ensure that items of concern are drawn directly to the attention of the deputy principal. Staff value these meetings.

74 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The head of finance is not a qualified accountant but is well regarded by the corporation. Budget holders receive good support from the finance team. Budgetary responsibilities are clear and budget holders have on-line access to the financial management system. This is in addition to receiving reports which include committed expenditure. Each month the senior management team reviews the management accounts. At each meeting of the corporation, usually once a term, the finance committee also considers the accounts. The format of management accounts complies with many aspects of good practice. The exception is the absence of full accruals or a forecast year-end balance sheet. The format of management accounts has been revised in response to comments from users and internal audit. Financial regulations have been revised recently but require further updating. The college's internal and external auditors have not reported any significant weaknesses in the college's system of internal control.

75 Managers make good use of the available management information, particularly on student population changes. An example of this is the decision-making process for group mergers and class closures. A range of management information reports is provided but, as the self-assessment report states, these are not based on an analysis of management needs. Inspectors agreed that there is no clear system for ensuring that reports are linked to the decision-making of managers. There is insufficient analysis of national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC on students' achievements.

Cross-college Provision

76 The college has an equal opportunities policy and the key elements in this are drawn to the attention of students in their handbook. There are no effective arrangements for either implementing or monitoring this policy. The self-assessment process has led the college to establish an equal opportunities committee involving staff and governors to address this.

Conclusions

77 The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report through its quality assurance system. The report provided a sound basis for the planning of the inspection. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college. However, a number of weaknesses were understated or omitted. Inspectors agreed with most of the curriculum area judgements but identified a significant number of additional weaknesses in aspects of cross-college provision. Inspectors agreed with the curriculum area grades awarded by the college, but only one out of the college's five cross-college grades. In one cross-college area, inspectors considered that the strengths identified were not strengths but examples of normal practice.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	91
19-24 years	2
25+ years	7
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	8
Level 3 (advanced)	92
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	144	32	20
Agriculture	5	0	1
Engineering	4	0	0
Business	34	15	6
Hotel and catering	40	0	5
Health and community care	26	0	3
Art and design	119	0	14
Humanities	410	31	51
Total	782	78	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 5% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	43	0	0	43
Supporting direct learning contact	10	0	0	10
Other support	23	0	0	23
Total	76	0	0	76

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£2,267,000	£2,464,000	£2,535,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.30	£16.58	£16.45
Payroll as a proportion of income	79%	72%	74%
Achievement of funding target	125%	104%	101%
Diversity of income	8%	15%	16%
Operating surplus	-£218,000	-£46,000	-£130,000*

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

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

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), FEFC audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

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

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

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), FEFC audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

*data are unaudited and include a loss on disposals of inherited assets of £61,000

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	11	86	16	*	1	2
	Retention (%)	55	70	38	*	0	100
	Achievement (%)	*	18	50	*	*	50
2	Number of starters	444	424	387	28	5	13
	Retention (%)	81	80	67	86	20	69
	Achievement (%)	67	93	85	52	*	63
3	Number of starters	1,637	2,294	2,087	56	59	55
	Retention (%)	82	75	65	18	64	36
	Achievement (%)	79	77	73	90	46	59
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	7	90	176	5	1	23
	Retention (%)	86	99	100	100	100	83
	Achievement (%)	80	83	19	100	100	13
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	736	540	148	16	25	3
	Retention (%)	87	85	86	69	56	100
	Achievement (%)	97	97	98	91	100	100

Source: ISR

*ISR data may not be reliable

n/a not applicable

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