

Blackburn College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	7

Curriculum areas

Science and computing	11
Engineering	16
Catering and bakery	22
Health, social care, childcare and hair and beauty	28
Art, design and performing arts	34
English and modern languages	39

Cross-college provision

Support for students	45
General resources	52
Quality assurance	58
Governance	66
Management	74
Conclusions	82

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 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

Blackburn College

North West Region

Inspected March 1999

Blackburn College is one of the largest tertiary colleges in the sector with over 27,000 enrolments. College managers are committed to self-assessment. All staff contributed to the college's self-assessment report through course team or service area team reports. All final reports went through an auditing process. Lesson observation is in place on a three-yearly cycle. The outcome of these observations informed the self-assessment process. The academic board validated the grades awarded to programme areas. Governors set up a working party to prepare its self-assessment. Inspectors judged most of the curriculum and cross-college grades awarded by the college to be well founded. However, they considered that the college was overgenerous in its grading of two curriculum areas and of governance. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report and with a number of the weaknesses. Some weaknesses of governance and the weakness in management information were not identified. Several curriculum areas underestimated the importance of weaknesses in retention and students' achievements. In several instances, identified weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

The college offers a wide range of courses from entry to further education to postgraduate degrees. Some provision is made in all of the

FEFC's 10 programme areas. The inspection sampled provision in six of these programme areas, and aspects of cross-college provision. The corporation, managers and staff are working effectively to widen participation and provide an inclusive learning environment for all college students. Issues identified in the last inspection report have been addressed. The profile of good or outstanding grades awarded by inspectors for the observation of teaching and learning remains substantially above the sector average and showed a slight overall improvement compared with the previous inspection. The proportion of lessons judged to be outstanding was twice the national average. Support for students throughout the college is outstanding. Accommodation and general resources are excellent. Quality assurance arrangements are effective. Governors conduct their business openly and have established productive working relationships with managers and good communications with staff. The strong management structure provides clear strategic planning, collaborative partnerships and effective resource deployment. The college should: monitor retention rates over the duration of courses rather than annual retention; develop further its procedures for target-setting and monitoring of performance indicators; strengthen some financial controls; increase the rigour of some course reviews; review its systems for recruitment, induction, training and performance evaluation of governors.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and computing	2	Support for students	1
Engineering	3	General resources	1
Catering and bakery	2	Quality assurance	2
Health, social care, childcare and hair and beauty	2	Governance	3
Art, design and performing arts	1	Management	2
English and modern languages	1		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Blackburn College is a large tertiary college founded in 1888 as the town's technical college specialising in textiles and basic engineering. Subsequently the college has developed to offer a broad range of courses in nine of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas and some provision in agriculture. It became a tertiary college in 1984 following the reorganisation of post-16 education in parts of Lancashire.

2 By March 1999, 22,125 students were enrolled on further education programmes at the college. The college is based on a compact campus in the centre of Blackburn where 92% of its activities take place. There are also 28 outreach centres, three of which are owned by the college. Other sites are leased and shared with borough and community users. One of these is a women-only centre for both education and training. A number of 'learn centres' have been developed to support students' learning and these along with the library facilities are centrally co-ordinated. The college is an Associate College of Lancaster University.

3 Blackburn with Darwen has a population of 140,000 with the Asian heritage communities making up almost 18% of the total. Over one-third of the working population is employed in the manufacturing sector and a further quarter in the public, education and health sectors. Unemployment is higher in Blackburn with Darwen (5.5%) than in other parts of East Lancashire (average 4%) and certain areas within Blackburn with Darwen have particularly high unemployment rates. Blackburn with Darwen is forty-first on the list of social deprivation factors.

4 General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results in local Blackburn with Darwen schools are lower than the national average; 35.8% with grade C or above passes, compared with 46.3% nationally. The continuation rates for full-time education across East Lancashire

are high at 61.4% and in Blackburn with Darwen at 62.8%.

5 The college attracts students from Blackburn with Darwen, East Lancashire and a significant number from West Lancashire. The college competes for students with a sixth form college half a mile from its main site and four large further education colleges within a 10-mile radius. There are also private schools with sixth forms, an 11 to 18 school and a number of large training providers. The college enjoys good relationships with key partners including eight universities, local schools, the new Blackburn with Darwen Local Education Authority (LEA), Lancashire Education Authority, and East Lancashire Partnership and it also is a core member of the East Lancashire Lifelong Learning Partnership.

6 The mission of the college is to serve the educational, cultural, social and economic needs of the local community and to provide further and higher educational opportunities to a local, national and international clientele. The strategic aims for 1999-2000 are:

- to continue working towards becoming an inclusive learning college
- to develop further its widening participation strategies
- to develop further collaboration and partnerships across East Lancashire and within Blackburn with Darwen as part of the Lifelong Learning Partnership.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 22 March 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. An inspector attended a governors' strategic planning meeting before the inspection. Data for 1996 and 1997 were taken from the FEFC's individualised student record (ISR). Data on students' achievements for 1998 were validated

Context

by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. These data were found to have a number of discrepancies. During the inspection, further variations were identified by curriculum area inspectors. In the main, they were able to verify sufficient data held by curriculum managers to inform inspection judgements. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The inspection was carried out by 18 inspectors working for a total of 66 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 129 lessons and tutorials, and examined students' work and college documents. The inspection team held meetings with governors, managers, college staff and students and consulted the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and other key partners. There was a concurrent inspection of some curriculum areas by the Training Standards Council. During the inspection a Muslim religious celebration and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) end tests took place.

8 This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors. The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons observed, over 79% were judged to be good or outstanding and under 5% less than satisfactory or poor. The profile of good or outstanding grades awarded by inspectors for

the observation of teaching and learning showed a slight overall improvement compared with the previous inspection and remains substantially above the sector average. The proportion of lessons judged to be outstanding was large, at twice the national average.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	10	12	4	1	0	27
GCSE	2	3	0	1	0	6
GNVQ	4	11	5	2	0	22
NVQ	15	9	5	0	0	29
Other vocational	8	11	5	1	0	25
Other*	10	7	2	0	1	20
Total (No.)	49	53	21	5	1	129
Total (%)	38	41	16	4	1	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

*includes two tutorials

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Blackburn College	10.7	79
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Science and Computing

Grade 2

11 Thirty-two lessons were observed in computing, information technology (IT) and science. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that the college had overestimated the quality of teaching and learning and understated the weaknesses in achievements and retention. However, inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements made by the college.

Key strengths

- good-quality teaching and learning
- high levels of achievement in general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects
- good retention and achievements on GNVQ science courses
- a wide range of courses, particularly extensive in computing
- effective practical work
- good computing facilities

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some courses
- declining achievement rates on some courses
- some ineffective use of time in lessons

12 There is a wide range of courses in science and computing. Students are able to study science from foundation to advanced level and higher education. A good range of computing courses is offered at many college centres. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report regarding the range and availability of qualifications.

13 Inspectors agreed with the college that most teaching in science, computing and IT is good. In many lessons, teachers are skilful in

questioning students to ensure that they understand the work. Practical lessons are used effectively to promote the development of students' skills and conceptual understanding. In one GNVQ science lesson, careful planning by the teacher enabled students to organise a complex activity well. This approach also encouraged effective teamwork by the students. Students in a GNVQ advanced IT lesson were involved in discussing IT systems after undertaking research which drew information from the internet. There are well-produced and interesting learning materials although in a minority of cases they were of poor quality. In a few lessons, teachers fail to ensure effective use of time. Inspectors agreed with the college's positive judgements regarding assessment. Appropriate assignments are regularly set and are closely related to the requirements of the accrediting bodies. However, some written feedback to students regarding their work, particularly in computing, is insufficiently detailed.

14 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that examination pass rates in GCE A level physics, chemistry and biology are outstanding. They consistently exceed national averages, often significantly. In these subjects, students are performing significantly better than their GCSE grades on entry would predict. Achievements in GCE A level computing have improved and, in 1998, they were significantly above the national average. In GCE A level human biology, pass rates have improved to above the national average in 1997 and 1998. Students in human biology are performing somewhat below the levels their GCSE grades on entry would predict. There have been some low retention rates in most GCE A level subjects over the last three years. In chemistry and physics these have improved to around the national average in 1998. In biology and human biology they remain below the national average. Retention and pass rates in GNVQ science are consistently good at all levels. They always exceed the national averages, sometimes

Curriculum Areas

significantly. Those for GNVQ IT are more variable and retention rates for the GNVQ advanced course have been low. Retention rates for some IT courses have also been low. Achievements for all GNVQ IT programmes declined in 1998. Full-time GCSE pass rates in dual award science and technology have declined to around the national average, but retention rates are high. Retention rates for part-time GCSE sciences have declined, sometimes significantly. Achievement rates are good in GCSE human biology, but poor in GCSE biology and GCSE chemistry. Many students each year begin the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) computer literacy and information technology courses but significant numbers of full-time students do not complete the course requirements and this has led to poor overall pass rates.

15 Science and computing courses are well managed. Staff work effectively together to plan and deliver the provision. Computing and science students have good access to high-quality computer resources. Users are well supported by detailed and high-quality instruction manuals. Teaching staff have impressive academic and teaching qualifications. The technician team provides expert support for equipment and stock maintenance. There are sufficient specialist resources to support the curriculum. Laboratories and preparation areas are generally spacious and well equipped. In these respects, inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in science and computing, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
RSA computer literacy and information technology	1	Expected completions	*	*	1,799
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	*	*	24
GCSE sciences	2	Expected completions	*	*	116
		Retention (%)	*	*	60
		Achievement (%)	*	*	54
GNVQ foundation	2	Expected completions	*	*	27
		Retention (%)	*	*	74
		Achievement (%)	*	*	65
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	*	*	71
		Retention (%)	*	*	89
		Achievement (%)	*	*	62
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	*	*	58
		Retention (%)	*	*	74
		Achievement (%)	*	*	70
GCE A level	3	Expected completions	*	*	235
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	*	*	94

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
*incomplete data

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

16 The inspection covered all aspects of electrical, electronic and mechanical engineering and motor vehicle courses. Inspectors observed 22 lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but considered that the report had overstated some of the strengths and failed to identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective individual student planning
- a successful vocational educational training programme
- effective internal verification and monitoring systems
- modern well-resourced facilities

Weaknesses

- some inadequate lesson planning
- some poor class and curriculum management
- poor student retention and achievements on some courses
- ineffective management of data and targets

17 The college offers courses which range from foundation to higher technician level providing good opportunities for progression for students. The vocational education training programme was established in 1995-96 to enable Her Majesty's Forces personnel to convert their experience into BTEC qualifications before leaving the services. This programme has since enrolled more than 900 students who are supported in a manner that recognises individual needs. This strength was underemphasised in the self-assessment report.

18 The self-assessment report identified teaching and learning as a strength. Of the

lessons observed by inspectors, 59% were judged to be good or outstanding, which is slightly below the national average for this curriculum area. In some instances, lesson plans and schemes of work are detailed and shared with students. Lecturers co-operate across curriculum areas to produce multi-disciplinary assignments. For example, students were asked to write a computer programme to solve difficult mathematical problems, which they themselves had then to solve in order to test the programme. In a number of cases, lesson planning is inadequate, a weakness not identified within the self-assessment report. Some schemes of work are merely a list of syllabus headings with little thought given to learning outcomes. In the best lessons, teachers used a range of appropriate teaching and learning methods which promoted frequent interaction between students and teacher. Students were encouraged and motivated to manage their own learning. In one BTEC higher national certificate lesson, students made presentations to their peer group on the current state of their final project. The students displayed a good range of presentational and project management skills. They were then questioned in depth, but supportively, by the group.

19 Course management suffers from unreliable data. Data held on the college management information system are recognised by many staff to be presented in a form that does not facilitate interpretation; a fact not stated in the self-assessment report. Additionally, locally held data vary from document to document. For example, a faculty spreadsheet of information provided to inspectors required analysis and explanation before it could be reconciled with a course review document. Data checked at the time of inspection show that retention and achievement rates for engineering students are poor on some courses. For example, the retention rate for students on the vocational education training programme is well above the national average

Curriculum Areas

but, of the 18 students who started in 1996 on the first year of the BTEC national certificate in mechanical engineering, only eight completed the course, a retention rate of 44%. Of the students who completed the second year of the full-time motor vehicle national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 in 1998, 84% passed whereas only 36% of the students of the GNVQ intermediate engineering course were successful in the same year. Poor achievements on some courses were identified within the self-assessment report but the variation in retention rates, a significant weakness, was not.

20 Although claimed as a strength in the self-assessment report, target-setting and monitoring the extent to which targets are achieved are not well established within the faculty of technology. With the exception of a minimum target for class enrolments, teachers demonstrate little knowledge of college targets. Course review and evaluation documents show no evidence of analysis of student retention and achievement rates or action plans that would arise from such analysis. Internal verification is good, recognised as such by external verifiers and strengthened by a rigorous student monitoring system.

21 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most teachers are well qualified. The specialist laboratories and workshops on the main campus are good and are well stocked with equipment and consumables. As identified in the self-assessment report, resources at the Blackburn Business Technology Management Centre for mechanical and motor vehicle engineering are excellent with modern industrially relevant machine tools and motor cars.

Curriculum Areas

Catering and Bakery

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered all aspects of the college's provision in catering and bakery, which includes NVQs and professional bakery and short courses. Thirteen lessons were seen. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that weaknesses in students' achievements were insufficiently highlighted.

Key strengths

- well-structured programmes with purposeful, challenging and enjoyable lessons
- a range of effective teaching methods
- carefully integrated work experience
- clear assessment strategies underpinned by good, regular marking
- high retention and achievement rates on GNVQ advanced and short courses
- exceptional success of bakery students in external competitions
- good student punctuality and attendance rates
- effective inclusive learning arrangements
- good links with industry

Weaknesses

- ineffective collection of data for NVQ courses
- low pass rates at NVQ level 3

23 The food division responds and relates well to the needs of the local community and the industry it serves. All full-time students have the opportunity to acquire additional qualifications. As stated in the self-assessment report, the teaching is of a high standard. Lessons are well planned and relate to the curriculum aims and objectives which are

communicated clearly to students. Working relationships that develop between students in practical sessions are good. Teachers effectively use a range of different teaching methods to take account of individual students' learning needs. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that work experience is a strength of all full-time programmes and is valued by students.

24 The development and verification of key skills is well established. Robust NVQ assessment structures are in place and are supported by coherent strategies that are understood by students. One NVQ student's portfolio seen was an excellent example of good presentation of evidence. On all programmes, students are aware of the purpose and the requirements of assessments. They are encouraged to complete their assignments on time and are given good feedback on written work.

25 Data held on NVQ courses are at variance with those held in the curriculum area. This makes the analysis of data difficult and is less than helpful in planning and review. Achievement rates for the GNVQ advanced and short programmes are good. At NVQ level 3 pass rates are lower than the national average. Retention rates on most courses are close to or above the national average. The range and standard of students' work are good. As stated in the self-assessment report, in practical areas students produce excellent work under realistic conditions. This encourages the development of sound working practices and teamwork. It also encourages students to evaluate their own work. Students are encouraged to participate in a wide and interesting range of additional activities such as competitions, outside events and work experience abroad. The effective celebration of students' success, both inside the college and externally, stimulates and encourages students in their studies. For example, there is a highly visible display of trophies and photographs. Students are successful in finding employment

Curriculum Areas

within the hotel and catering industry, often as a result of the work experience element of the programmes. Over 50% of students on the GNVQ advanced programme continued their studies in higher education. A number of cake decoration students continue their studies to the most advanced professional levels.

26 The curriculum is managed efficiently and effectively as stated in the self-assessment report. There are regular course meetings and an annual course review. Course documentation files are kept up to date. There is a well-structured induction system for new students. All are assessed on entry to the programme and 42 students receive additional timetabled support which is being delivered effectively. The curriculum area strives hard to achieve the college's objective of inclusive learning.

27 As stated in the self-assessment, all teachers have appropriate qualifications and keep up to date through regular contact with the industry and involvement with professional bodies. The provision has a good range of modern equipment and there is a planned approach to its replacement. The use of a digital camera to record students' practical work is an example of the creative use of new technology. Accommodation is of a high standard, appropriate and in a good state of repair.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in catering and bakery, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Short courses	1	Expected completions	322	500	416
		Retention (%)	97	96	94
		Achievement (%)	86	82	87
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	*	8	9
		Retention (%)	*	63	90
		Achievement (%)	*	80	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*incomplete data

Curriculum Areas

Health, Social Care, Childcare and Hair and Beauty

Grade 2

28 Twenty-five lessons were observed across the range of health care, hair and beauty therapy courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but thought that the college overstated the strengths in teaching and learning and did not identify some of the significant weaknesses in students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good and some outstanding teaching
- high retention rates
- some outstanding students' achievements
- well-planned, well-managed and integrated work experience
- wide range of courses
- strong community links
- effective course management
- good specialist resources and accommodation

Weaknesses

- well below average achievements on some intermediate and advanced level courses
- insufficient use of workplace assessment for full-time hairdressing and beauty therapy students
- failure of teachers to provide sufficiently challenging work in a significant minority of lessons

29 The college identified the wide range of courses at the main college campus and in community centres as a strength and inspectors agreed. Community locations include the 'First Step' centre which provides women of Asian

heritage with the opportunity to gain further education in an all female environment. Courses are well planned, well structured and effectively managed. Students are able to progress from foundation level courses through to higher education. Work schemes on child studies courses include some innovative features. For example, a camping trip enables students to explore the opportunities available in the countryside to support the early years curriculum. Strong community links provide a wide range of work experience for students. Effective marketing attracts a wide range of clients to the hair and beauty salons.

30 The college's self-assessment report recognised the strengths in teaching and learning. Most of the lessons observed by inspectors were good or outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers demonstrate sound subject knowledge and skill in devising learning activities which require students to apply theory to current work practices. In one lesson, the teacher gave small groups of students several job descriptions from which to select and explain examples of discriminatory practice. Each group reported on their examples to the whole class. Their wider understanding of forms of discrimination in recruitment was applied by students when preparing mock job descriptions. These were used by students in the second year of the same course to practise making job applications. In less effective lessons teachers failed to provide work which was sufficiently demanding for the students. For example, in one lesson students spent too much time copying notes from overhead transparencies and, in another, some students spent too much time as 'clients' for others to practise on.

31 Work experience is well integrated with programmes and enables students to apply their learning and demonstrate practical skills in a wide range of work settings. Strong community links provide good work experience opportunities for childcare and health and social

Curriculum Areas

care students. Course assignments reinforce the link between college and work place learning. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students have access to a wide range of clients for skills development, but insufficient use is made of opportunities in work placements for assessing students' work. The college did not identify this weakness in its self-assessment.

32 Students' achievements on the level 3 hairdressing course, the national diploma in beauty therapy and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing courses are outstanding. GNVQ intermediate health and social care students' achievements are above the national average. Achievements on level 2 hairdressing and beauty courses, the national diploma in social care, the national diploma in nursery nursing and the NVQ level 3 in beauty therapy are well below national averages. Retention rates on all courses are in line with or above national averages. On most courses retention rates are good. In lessons the majority of students demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills at appropriate levels for their courses. Students carry out practical activities confidently and competently to professional standards in practical lessons, salons and work placements. Students' work is accurately assessed and constructive feedback provides guidance to students on how to improve. The self-assessment report was insufficiently detailed in its identification of strengths and weaknesses related to students' achievements.

33 Most lessons are taught in rooms which are appropriate for the activities in which students are involved. Hair and beauty salons are equipped to high standards and provide a realistic working environment. As the college identified in its self-assessment, specialist equipment is good. Audiovisual facilities are effectively used to consolidate students' learning. The presence of employed receptionists in the salons adds to the commercial ambience and the realistic working environment which the salons

provide. One specialist hair and beauty room which was regularly used by a group of students was too small for the group.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of achievement and retention rates in health, social care, childcare and hair and beauty, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ hairdressing and beauty	2	Expected completions	*	*	139
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	41
GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	Expected completions	56	58	49
		Retention (%)	88	86	75
		Achievement (%)	75	82	78
BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions	57	39	53
		Retention (%)	95	85	94
		Achievement (%)	85	99	70
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions	26	43	56
		Retention (%)	82	67	88
		Achievement (%)	72	93	100
NVQ hairdressing	3	Expected completions	21	28	16
		Retention (%)	100	79	87
		Achievement (%)	90	95	93
BTEC national diploma in beauty therapy	3	Expected completions	19	*	19
		Retention (%)	79	*	84
		Achievement (%)	80	*	100
NVQ in beauty therapy	3	Expected completions	11	11	36
		Retention (%)	100	91	91
		Achievement (%)	91	100	54

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*incomplete data

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Performing Arts

Grade 1

34 Inspectors observed 23 lessons across the range of provision in art, design and performing arts at all levels offered. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good and outstanding teaching
- high pass rates on full-time courses
- consistently high retention rates on most courses
- well-managed programmes
- good progression to further and higher education
- a wide range of full-time courses
- good specialist staff and resources

Weaknesses

- poor retention and declining enrolments on one course

35 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that a broad range of vocational courses at levels 2 and 3, GCE A level and post GCE A level courses are offered in performing arts, art and design and media. The programme area recruits well to most courses but the uptake by students wishing to study part time is small.

36 Teaching is soundly based on the principle that students should acquire fundamental skills in all subjects. Art and design students learn to manipulate line, tone and colour as a basis for their individual achievement at a later stage. The standard of teaching is high and students genuinely value and appreciate the full contribution staff make to their learning. Members of staff organise many visits and trips. Performing arts students benefit from a busy

performance schedule in college and in the community and regularly participate in local projects. Photographic students carried out an assignment in Amsterdam and the department benefited from a touring exhibition of contemporary black and white photographs on display in the college studio. The student experience is enriched by well-planned work experience and live projects on vocational courses in media and art and design. Using the well-equipped college television studio, post GCE A level foundation media production students worked to a tight deadline to produce a live 'Richard and Judy' format show. The students demonstrated a high standard of group work and technical competence. The process was subject to good review and evaluation by the tutor. Students and staff on the national diploma course in textiles are participating enthusiastically in an inclusiveness project on learning styles. Students were briefed on a project using on-screen, visual and instructional methods. This has resulted in greater awareness in the planning, preparation and delivery of assignment briefs by staff.

37 As stated in the self-assessment report, achievement rates are consistently high and above the national average on the majority of GCE A level and post GCE A level courses. Students of national diploma courses in art and design and media students have achieved pass rates consistently well above the national average. GCE A level dance and music students have achieved 100% pass rates over the past three years. However, the self-assessment report did not highlight the poor retention and declining enrolment of the GNVQ foundation art and design programme. The majority of students progress to further education within the college or to higher education courses. An increasing number of art and design students are seeking employment directly from national diploma courses.

38 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the programme area is resourced to a high standard that ensures that students are

Curriculum Areas

prepared for professional work or progression to higher education. Planning for the move of the 'access to music' course from Bolton has resulted in purpose-built soundproofed music practice rooms being provided on one college campus. Graphics students have access to industrial standard hardware and software. Dance students use the aerobics studio which is equipped to a high standard with a sprung floor and mirrored wall. Specialist staff bring professional expertise and enthusiasm to their teaching. Recently recruited staff in media bring expertise in current technologies to the department. Several staff teaching IT skills in art and design and media have recent commercial experience.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art, design and performing arts, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Expected completions	46	35	45
		Retention (%)	100	94	82
		Achievement (%)	83	82	73
BTEC national diploma in general art and design	3	Expected completions	53	62	54
		Retention (%)	83	87	89
		Achievement (%)	84	97	91
GCE A level art	3	Expected completions	17	40	55
		Retention (%)	100	98	87
		Achievement (%)	94	100	100
BTEC national diploma in textiles	3	Expected completions	20	20	31
		Retention (%)	100	94	82
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level performing arts	3	Expected completions	24	23	31
		Retention (%)	58	83	81
		Achievement (%)	91	100	89
Post GCE A level foundation in media production	4	Expected completions	*	26	21
		Retention (%)	*	88	91
		Achievement (%)	*	96	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*courses not available

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Languages

Grade 1

39 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in English and modern foreign languages covering GCSE, GCE A level and a variety of adult education courses. They agreed with the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good and outstanding teaching and learning
- high pass rates at GCSE with a high proportion of top grades in languages
- good GCE A level pass rates with many students gaining higher grades
- exceptionally good and productive staff student relationships
- thorough, informative assessment
- wide-ranging provision with good opportunities for progression
- well-equipped languages centre and English workshop facility

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

40 Teaching in English and modern languages is usually good and often outstanding. In English, students are constantly encouraged to form their own ideas, in pairs or in groups, and then to test them against their peers and teacher in open debate. In individual tutorials there is often a high level of discussion. Sometimes they are used by teachers to consolidate students' basic skills. In languages, teachers make extensive use of the language being taught and are fluent practitioners. They are particularly adept at combining practice in language skills with progress in knowledge and awareness of topic areas. They use a wide variety of authentic materials and, where appropriate, some differentiated materials to good effect. Lessons in all subject areas proceed at a

challenging pace so that available time is fully utilised. Lessons are invariably thoroughly prepared and well managed. Teachers use homework to ensure continuity of learning and to bridge previous and new learning. The very high quality of the teaching is somewhat understated in the self-assessment report. Students appreciate the teachers' efforts and relationships are exceptionally good. Many students clearly enjoy their lessons and make good progress. Course files contain an unusually high number of thank you cards and letters to staff from former students and from whole class cohorts.

41 Achievement rates are high at GCSE with over half the entry in languages attaining the highest grades. GCE A level results are good with a substantial proportion of students attaining grade A passes. Occasionally, results fall below the usual standard, for example, in German in 1996 and in French and German in 1997 when higher level grades at GCE A level dropped. This is not mentioned or explained in the self-assessment report. Retention rates are generally in line with, or above, national rates.

42 Inspectors agreed that assessment was very thorough and that teachers provide highly informative feedback to students. Pastoral and academic monitoring of individual students' progress is extremely effective. The standard of marking is good; it is careful and conscientious and, where appropriate, it includes helpful, constructive comment which points out to students the way to improvement. The recording of past achievements linked to value-added data plays a central role in student profiles and provides a sound basis for target-setting by predicting realistic examination grades.

43 There is a wide range of provision from courses for beginners to advanced level courses with good opportunities for progression. Good resources for learning, supported by the excellent technical facilities at a large number of local centres, help students' progress. There is

Curriculum Areas

an unusually good choice of GCE A level courses and a good variety of part-time courses.

44 As the self-assessment stated, there is a very good range of resources. The English workshop is a bright, welcoming environment, ideal for private study and for individual tutorials. It also contains a useful selection of texts and reference books. The filing of a variety of unnamed past students' work, is a good idea for purposes of reference and guidance. The adjoining languages centre possesses a modern language laboratory, satellite television with a motorised dish to access all the languages taught and a considerable stock of reference works and audio and video cassettes. It also houses a Comenius centre with its concomitant displays of language learning and reference materials. The library

provision is good in English and satisfactory in languages. The provision for minority ethnic languages is particularly good.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in English and modern languages, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCE A level French, Spanish and German	3	Expected completions	49	47	57
		Retention (%)	*	*	63
		Achievement (%)	87	90	100
GCE A level English language, English language and literature, and English literature	3	Expected completions	185	153	237
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	94	96	87
GCSE English language	2	Expected completions	248	214	224
		Retention (%)	74	87	67
		Achievement (%)	70	72	69
GCSE English literature	2	Expected completions	30	18	14
		Retention (%)	63	72	86
		Achievement (%)	79	69	92
GCSE French, German, Italian and Spanish	2	Expected completions	98	82	79
		Retention (%)	82	75	69
		Achievement (%)	83	80	87

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*incomplete data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

45 Inspectors mainly agreed with the college's self-assessment of the many strengths of support for students and considered that the few weaknesses identified in the report were overstated.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to supporting and developing individual students
- well-managed arrangements for supporting students
- comprehensive support for learning language and basic skills
- extensive links with schools and community groups
- good practical support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- excellent careers guidance

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

46 The college's commitment to developing and supporting individual students pervades all its work and influences all its planning. Students feel valued and there is a strong sense that all staff work in students' interests.

47 Management of support services is tightly structured. Staff teams have a distinct sense of purpose and hold regular and productive meetings. The overarching management team, led by an assistant principal, includes the senior tutors in each faculty to ensure coverage of curriculum areas. Staff from the centres where courses are provided in the community are represented at the weekly meetings of the student services unit to ensure that information and services provided at the main centre are publicised to all students. The self-assessment report recognised that all services are not available to all students at all centres in the

community or at the weekend. Staff receive regular professional development and provide training for tutors, for example in working with students with dyslexia or sensory impairment. They regularly review their work and produce action plans with targets which are monitored systematically. The student services unit is based in a large, attractive area in the college's main entrance. It provides a well-used facility for students and is open to members of the public. Information about the services it offers is clear and well presented. The students' charter and the college's disability statement are published in Braille, large print, community languages and on audio tape.

48 Well-considered pre-entry procedures ensure that most students are placed on suitable courses. Publicity materials are well designed. There are open days and other events for school-leavers and adults. The college has extensive links with schools, locally and further afield. It works with pupils in years 8 to 11, using central and faculty-based staff. The college's year 11 project provides vocational courses for excluded or disaffected school pupils. Inspectors observed a presentation on equal opportunities to year 9 pupils, followed by smaller group discussions. Boys were directed to areas of work such as hairdressing and childcare, and girls to engineering and construction. The college maintains contact with applicants from their first enquiry to their enrolment. Course staff are trained to interview students and detailed admissions procedures are followed. The central programme of induction activities for students is useful. Not all specific course inductions are as effective.

49 There is ample provision for students who need learning support to develop their full potential. New foundation and intermediate students are screened to establish their needs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified on application and at interview. A support worker attends foundation classes for the first three weeks, after which

Cross-college Provision

students are interviewed individually to agree the level and nature of the support needed. Some 200 staff are involved in delivering basic skills and more specialised support. Since all students are enrolled on mainstream courses, much support takes place within lessons, as well as on an individual basis where necessary. Key support tutors co-ordinate provision within faculties. Students with sensory impairments and specific learning difficulties are well supported by specialist staff. Individual support workers act as communicators or note-takers and students are loaned high-quality specialist equipment. Materials, such as transcripts of teaching videos for deaf students and enlarged text for the partially sighted, are produced by the college.

50 Individual personal support of students is exceptionally good. All students have a personal tutor. Full-time students have weekly tutorials, which concentrate on detailed monitoring of students' progress. Ten of the 11 observed by inspectors were judged good or outstanding. There is no standardised tutorial programme, though tutors have a list of suggested themes and an evolving resources pack. The methodical review of tutorial provision has shown that tutorial time is not always used for pastoral support. There is easy access to counselling and welfare guidance, and four chaplains representing the Muslim and Christian faiths offer spiritual guidance. The college acknowledges that it has insufficient private space for individual counselling. Achievements of individual students are celebrated publicly within the college and at the annual awards evenings, which rewards progress and effort as well as formal achievement. Notable achievement is exemplified in the cases of two students from special schools who progressed from foundation level courses to university.

51 Careers guidance is well structured and effective and well integrated with the overall support system. Links between East Lancashire Careers Service and the college are strong.

Up-to-date information about progression opportunities is located in the student services area. Apart from higher education information and prospectuses, there is a noticeboard advertising employment opportunities supplied by the employment service, videos and computer databases for students' use. The welfare officer gives advice on financial issues.

General Resources

Grade 1

52 Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report identified strengths and dealt openly with weaknesses. They agreed with the judgements in the report. Most of the weaknesses in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- a clear, comprehensive accommodation strategy linked to strategic planning
- a safe, welcoming and attractive environment
- well-planned and well-managed site maintenance
- good, networked IT equipment
- well-managed, well-equipped libraries and learning centres
- good sport and recreational facilities for students and staff
- generally good specialist accommodation and equipment

Weaknesses

- limited access to some buildings for people with restricted mobility

53 The college has a central campus adjacent to Blackburn town centre, nine strategically placed centres in the community and the use of numerous local schools and community halls for vocational and basic skills courses. The

Cross-college Provision

accommodation strategy has clear links to the strategic plan and to curriculum needs. It is supported by a planned maintenance programme which is reviewed annually. The college is committed to widening participation and to inclusive learning. Its accommodation strategy reflects this commitment. Acquisition of buildings together with rationalisation and remodelling of the estate has allowed the development of a high-quality main campus of eight buildings that is well maintained, has extensive car parking and provides a safe and secure environment for students and staff. Since the last inspection, the college has carried out major refurbishment of accommodation to a high standard in a number of areas. Leased accommodation in the community is generally of a good quality, is well resourced and provides a clean, stimulating and welcoming environment conducive to learning and well suited to the needs of the adults studying there.

54 The college has improved the quality and accessibility of computers with significant investment in information and computer technology. Good-quality, networked IT equipment with up-to-date software, a campus-wide electronic mail system and internet access is available throughout the main campus. There is a clear network development strategy. Three centres at a distance from the college have recently been connected to the campus through the innovative use of radio frequency links. The college has won an award for its imaginative work on the student intranet. Computer services provide good support to users and there are ample opportunities for all staff to train in the use of new technologies.

55 There are two libraries on the main campus, one for the use of higher education students. The college has strong links with the municipal library situated close by in the town centre. Four IT resource rooms, known as learning centres, supplement the work of the libraries. Together, the library and learning centres form an integrated service which

supports students with their information needs and IT skills. The main library has been remodelled to create curriculum zones designed to encourage students to make use of all resources for their subject studies, including books, journals and IT. A specially-created walkway designed to guide visually impaired students around the library has improved access for all users. The bookstock has been improved by an additional allocation of £100,000 in 1998. There is good access to extensive IT facilities. A new helpdesk in the centre of the main library provides a personal service for reference queries, information skills and IT. In response to the different learning styles of some students and staff a silent study area, rooms for small group work and a larger seminar area have been created. The IT support assistant helps students to develop and improve their skills in using the internet, student intranet and virtual library to support their studies. The learning centres provide extra IT facilities for students to wordprocess assignments and use internet facilities under the supervision of trained staff.

56 As the college's self-assessment report identified, there is insufficient common room space to accommodate current numbers of students at peak times on the main campus. There is a commitment to continue improvements to the social accommodation available to students and staff. Surveys show that the excellent range of high-quality catering outlets dispersed throughout the college are valued by students and staff alike. Good sports facilities include a fitness centre, sports hall and access to high-quality pitches, some with all-weather surfaces, and nearby swimming facilities. The college grounds contain attractive, carefully-planned landscaped gardens and seating for students and staff.

57 The college is committed to enrolling students with disabilities and continuing its efforts to make buildings accessible. Measures taken include the installation of ramps, lifts, automatic doors and signs in Braille on lifts and

Cross-college Provision

toilets. There is limited access to a few buildings for people with restricted mobility, notably a grade II listed building. The college takes appropriate steps to reschedule lessons for students with physical disabilities in more suitable accommodation.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

58 The self-assessment report emphasised the college's strong commitment to quality assurance. Inspectors agreed with these judgements and the majority of strengths identified in the self-assessment. However, they considered that some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses not identified.

Key strengths

- well-established and constantly-refined quality procedures
- whole-college commitment to self-assessment
- staff development closely matched to identified needs
- well-used lesson observations
- successful acquisition of a wide range of external quality accreditation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped target-setting in some areas
- lack of rigour in the completion of some course reviews and action plans
- little use of survey findings in action plans

59 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that college staff show a clear commitment to quality assurance. The college has extensive and well-established procedures for ensuring the quality of its wide range of further and higher education and training

provision. The college has sought to develop self-assessment across the whole range of its work. The processes have fully involved staff at all levels. The college has secured a wide range of quality kitemarks including Investor in People for a second time, the Charter Mark, the Basic Skills Agency kitemark, and BS EN 9002 in the faculty of technology and in its Centre for European and Commercial Operations. The diversity of initiatives presents complex reporting and monitoring requirements. The college is using its self-assessment strategy to identify ways of drawing the various initiatives more closely together and has begun to align the strategic and operating planning cycle with the quality assurance framework.

60 The academic board and its subcommittees for academic standards and service standards have well-defined responsibilities for the oversight of quality assurance. Recently, faculty boards of study have been given more autonomy to monitor curriculum reviews and to scrutinise the self-assessment process. This has improved staff commitment and involvement in the process of course review and self-assessment. Some course reviews lack rigour and detail and the quality of action plans arising from them is poor. The academic standards committee provides a programme of audits of the reviews. The college has developed a useful mechanism for providing detailed reviews of selected courses and services referred to as 'courses in action' and 'services in action'. These provide a strong mechanism for independent review of identified college priorities.

61 As the self-assessment report stated, the college has made good progress in developing the quality monitoring and reporting arrangements for its service areas. The service standards committee has effectively overseen the wider introduction of defined standards and associated performance indicators in such areas as library and learning resources, student services and computer services. This has been accompanied by a stronger customer focus

Cross-college Provision

which has included the training of staff in customer care. The service standards and performance indicators have yet to be formally linked to the college's charter commitments.

62 Inspectors could not fully agree with the college in its self-assessment report that mechanisms for gaining the views of students are a strength. The quality framework includes a range of measures to secure the views of students such as surveys within the course review process and student representation on course committees and focus groups. However, the college does not always make full use of the survey findings to inform action-planning and quality improvement strategies. The college has strong and effective links with employers and external clients across the range of its provision but does not centrally evaluate feedback on employers' satisfaction.

63 Staff development is well planned and coherent. Individual staff needs are clearly identified and prioritised and carefully matched to strategic objectives. A staff development adviser co-ordinates the process and is supported by a network of staff development officers in each faculty. Inspectors agreed that the emphasis given to the training needs of support staff who have their own specialist forum to review and promote relevant staff development activities is a strength. The core budget for staff development of £50,000 is supplemented by substantial additional allocations for specific projects that are linked to strategic plan priorities.

64 The college identified in its self-assessment that target-setting had not been formalised at course team level and inspectors agreed. Enrolment and annual retention targets are set and their achievement monitored but those for students' achievements are not yet in place in all curriculum areas. There is good practice in the application of value-added analysis to GCE A level students' achievements in relation to their previous achievements. Students' GCE A level results are analysed against college targets and national pass rates.

65 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report placed insufficient emphasis on the relationship between quality assurance and identified improvements, particularly in relation to students' achievements. Lesson and tutorial observation is a compulsory component of the college's professional development appraisal scheme for all full-time staff and contributed to the evidence base for the college's self-assessment. The process is well organised and carried out by line managers. Lesson observations conducted by the college included clear judgements but, overall, the grades awarded to lessons by the college were more generous than those awarded by inspectors.

Governance

Grade 3

66 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but found that most were overstated. They considered that the one weakness had been substantially addressed but identified additional, significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the productive working relationship of the corporation and senior managers
- open conduct of corporation business
- effective communications with college staff

Weaknesses

- ineffective monitoring of retention rates
- inadequate arrangements for judging the effectiveness of the corporation
- unsystematic approach to the recruitment, induction and training of governors

67 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors and senior managers work well together. The principal and clerk have regular meetings with the chair and vice-

Cross-college Provision

chair. Senior managers are in attendance at all board meetings and have frequently made presentations to governors on important aspects of the college's work and on national issues affecting the college. Governors find the briefings provided by senior staff, regular press clippings provided by the college and the activities at the residential annual review very useful in updating them on college developments and on regional and national initiatives. Governors take effective steps to communicate with college staff and to inform themselves of the work of the college. A staff and governor liaison committee was established in 1996. Six staff representatives, including teaching and support staff, meet at least twice a year with four governors, including the chair or vice-chair. There is an open agenda and representatives inform colleagues of issues raised and subsequent discussions. The chair has addressed a whole staff meeting and he and other governors attended a middle managers' forum. Governors regularly attend college events.

68 Governors annually review the college's mission. They are involved in setting strategic objectives and contribute to strategic financial planning. They carry out frequent monitoring of the college's performance. For example, governors have set financial and estates targets for the college and they monitor these. The financial and general purposes committee receives management accounts, supported by a detailed commentary, at each of its monthly meetings. This committee is also closely involved in the process of setting the budget. However, the corporation's oversight of franchising, overseas activities and the college company is inadequate in some respects.

69 Inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that governors effectively oversee the quality of provision. Governors do not receive sufficient information to monitor the college's academic performance fully. They are not aware of course and student performance in respect of retention. This makes it difficult for

governors to compare the college's performance overall against national benchmarking data published by the FEFC and to gauge its effectiveness in widening participation. It also limits governors' ability to monitor some strategic objectives, weaknesses not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

70 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.

71 The governing body has 20 members, including the principal who is an ex-officio member. There is currently one vacancy. Between them governors have a wide range of skills and professional experience, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. The corporation has few women governors, a gender imbalance which governors acknowledge and wish to reduce. A search committee was established in 1995. It drew up selection criteria for the recruitment of new governors. However, the committee has not carried out a skills and experience audit since 1995. Appointment procedures have not been systematically drawn up. There is an unsystematic approach to the training of governors and induction arrangements have not been formalised. These weaknesses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

72 The corporation conducts its business openly. Board minutes and papers are available in the college library, together with the register of interests. Their availability is publicised on college noticeboards. The corporation held its first annual general meeting in public in February 1999 and published its annual report for 1997-98. A 'whistleblowing' policy has been approved recently by the corporation board and policies on access and attendance have been revised. As the self-assessment report stated, there are clear terms of reference for the four

Cross-college Provision

committees: finance and general purposes; audit; remuneration; and search. Clerking arrangements are efficient. The conduct of meetings is regulated by a recently approved set of standing orders. Governors are satisfied with the annual calendar of meetings and with the timeliness and clarity of agendas and supporting papers.

73 Inspectors did not fully agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governors now assess their own performance. Governors do not set targets against which to judge their effectiveness. Not all governors were involved in the self-assessment of governance. Following a seminar for governors on self-assessment, the process was carried out by a small group which drew up a draft self-assessment report. This was considered and endorsed by the finance and general purposes committee. The full board then considered and commented on the college's complete self-assessment report. Inspectors did not agree that the arrangements for the appraisal of the principal and other senior postholders are a strength. The remuneration committee's consideration of this appraisal process lacks rigour.

Management

Grade 2

74 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report, but noted that the significant weakness in management information was not recorded.

Key strengths

- strong management
- clear strategic planning process
- effective communications
- good collaborative partnerships
- effective and transparent deployment of resources

- commitment to and promotion of equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- lack of accurate retention and achievement data
- aspects of financial control

75 As noted in the self-assessment report, the college has a clear management structure which is understood by staff. There are well-understood lines of accountability, effective team structures at all levels and a range of appropriate cross-college committees. Inspectors agreed with the college self-assessment that communications are good. Staff consider managers to be open and approachable. Team meetings, cross-college committees and working groups provide appropriate opportunities for staff at all levels to participate in decision-making. A college computer network provides easy access to policy documents and other information. The internal electronic mail system is well used, and includes a weekly newsletter to all staff from the principal.

76 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a clear strategic planning process. Planning is informed by appropriate market research. For example, local area maps are produced showing the recruitment of various categories of students as a percentage of the population. Plans address key issues such as widening participation and inclusive learning. A summary strategic plan is distributed to all staff and there is a shared understanding of aims. Operational plans set realistic objectives and identify responsibilities. The executive group meets with each senior curriculum and cross-college manager termly to review performance. As noted in the self-assessment report the college has been successful in meeting income and student enrolment targets.

77 The college is committed to working in collaboration with partners. There is a close

Cross-college Provision

working relationship with the Blackburn with Darwen local authority which has resulted in successful joint projects. For example, centres have been created in disadvantaged areas to make it easier for adults returning to education. The partnership has attracted government funding and industrial sponsorship to establish a Centre of Excellence for Information Technology. The college works effectively with other organisations in an East Lancashire Partnership which discusses strategic issues for the area. The college is a major provider of higher education courses in the area and has productive links with eight universities. There are useful contacts with employers in several curriculum areas.

78 The clear processes for deployment of resources are understood by staff. Resources are appropriately allocated to meet the needs of students. For example, the consumables budget is allocated on the basis of student attendance. Funds are identified for strategic investments and staff are consulted on priorities. Efficiency of resource utilisation is monitored through appropriate reports on staffing, room usage and financial accounts. Part-time staff are well integrated and supported in most areas. The analysis of unit costs has not been extended to course level which limits the effectiveness of efficiency monitoring.

79 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The financial position of the college is strong. Detailed management accounts are produced each month and formally monitored by the senior management team and the executive group. The key assumptions underlying the current financial forecasts have been clearly defined and understood by senior managers. The finance director, who is supported by an appropriately qualified team, provides budget holders with timely reports of actual but not committed expenditure against budget. Budget holders therefore maintain additional systems

for the monitoring of expenditure. Financial regulations have been revised recently but are not yet supported by revised procedures. Reports from internal and external auditors in 1996-97 indicated serious weaknesses in financial control. More recent reports demonstrate general improvement. Returns to the FEFC have not always been made within specified time limits.

80 As noted in the self-assessment report, equality of opportunity is a key feature of college life. There is an active, committed equal opportunities committee. There is a clear management commitment to recruit students from groups which have not usually entered further education. The college has been successful in recruiting 25% minority ethnic students compared with the local population of 18%. A special centre to facilitate access for Asian women has been established. Data relating to equal opportunities are analysed as part of the course review process but systematic monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy needs further development.

81 A weakness not identified in self-assessment is the analysis of student retention and achievement data. Curriculum inspectors found that often the information used by course teams does not correspond to that held in the central database. This limits the effective monitoring of performance by managers and governors. New internal audit procedures have been implemented and a new computer system is to be installed. Staff have direct access to student attendance information and course lists through the computer network to facilitate data checking. The use of management information for monitoring the efficiency of staff utilisation is effective.

Conclusions

82 Inspectors found that the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. They judged most

Cross-college Provision

of the curriculum and cross-college grades awarded by the college to be well founded. However, inspectors considered that the college was overgenerous in its grading of two curriculum grades and of governance. The self-assessment report grade in one cross-college area was lower than that awarded by inspectors. In this instance, several identified weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Lessons observed and graded by the college resulted in a profile of grades a little better than the grades awarded by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report and a number of the weaknesses. Some weaknesses of governance and the significant weakness in management information were not identified. Several curriculum areas underestimated the importance of weaknesses in retention and students' achievements.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	14
25+ years	65
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	43
Intermediate	16
Advanced	18
Higher education	9
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	14
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	425	1,265	6
Agriculture	20	0	0
Construction	272	1,671	7
Engineering	450	1,928	9
Business	966	1,669	10
Hotel and catering	261	507	3
Health and community care	819	9,895	39
Art and design	582	619	4
Humanities	179	5,160	19
Basic education	32	682	3
Total	4,006	23,396	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 25% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	277	64	0	341
Supporting direct learning contact	40	1	0	41
Other support	296	11	4	311
Total	613	76	4	693

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£21,299,000	£22,412,000	£23,215,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£16.70	£16.59	£16.14*
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	61%	60%
Achievement of funding target	99%	101%	101%
Diversity of income	32%	32%	34%
Operating surplus	-£775,000	£1,057,000	£1,154,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

*provisional data

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