

# Blackpool and The Fylde College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1997-98

THE  
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FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
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## Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement.*  
Sample size: 122 college inspections

## Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

# Summary

## Blackpool and The Fylde College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected February 1998**

Blackpool and The Fylde College is a large general further education college which provides an extensive range of further and higher education programmes. Students are recruited both locally and regionally. Some courses also attract students from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and from abroad. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's comprehensive self-assessment report which was based on the outcomes of a well-established quality assurance system. The report was prepared after full consultation with staff, governors and external observers. Twenty-four separate self-assessment reports, covering both curriculum and support areas, were subjected to rigorous internal validation before being used to produce the final report.

The college offers provision in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Five programme areas were inspected on all the college's five main sites, together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college meets the needs of a wide range of clients. The range of courses offered in the community encourages those people who have not traditionally participated in

education to study at a level that is appropriate and a location that is convenient for them. Opportunities exist for students to progress from foundation level to higher education in many areas of the curriculum. The college has productive partnerships with the local TEC. Employers consider the college to be responsive and supportive to them. The maritime provision has an international reputation. Governors use their wide range of professional experience effectively, are actively involved in the college and are clear on the differences between governance and management. The college is particularly well managed. A restructuring completed within the last year has been achieved with the strong support of staff. There are a wide range of well-publicised support services for students. Strategies to improve and rationalise the accommodation are sound. Students have good access to high-quality resources for IT and learning. Standards of teaching are good in all the areas inspected and some are outstanding. Students' achievements are generally good. The college should: take steps to improve retention and pass rates on some courses; seek to ensure that effective teaching methods are shared across teaching teams; continue to improve the accommodation; and fully implement the tutorial and learning support arrangements across the college.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Construction	2	Support for students	2
Engineering and maritime operations	2	General resources	2
Hair and beauty	2	Quality assurance	2
Health and social care	2	Governance	1
English and modern foreign languages	2	Management	1
Social sciences	2		
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2		

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Blackpool and The Fylde College is one of the largest colleges in the north west of England. It recruits students from its immediate locality, from the region and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and from overseas, to take courses in further and higher education. The college has five main sites located along a 17 mile stretch of The Fylde coastline, from the maritime site at Fleetwood in the north to the site at Lytham St Annes in the south. Bispham is the administrative centre to the north of Blackpool. Ansdell provides specialist provision for hair and beauty. Palatine is in the centre of Blackpool. Approximately 70 smaller centres offer both examination and leisure courses. The college also manages the educational provision at prisons in Preston and Kirkham.

2 Blackpool depends heavily upon tourism, leisure and related services. Approximately 33 per cent of the working population in the area is involved in the service sector and nearly 20 per cent in the manufacturing sector. Several regional and national government agencies are located in the vicinity. The college serves a population of approximately 316,000. One in five of the residents of the South Fylde coast is retired. There is a mix of high prosperity and low unemployment, notably in the South Fylde, and high deprivation and unemployment in Fleetwood and central Blackpool. In July 1997, the overall unemployment rate in the area was 5.3 per cent, compared with 6.4 per cent in the north west and a national rate of 5.9 per cent. However, the rate in the area varies on a seasonal basis due to the local economy's dependence on the tourist trade.

3 Four of the 18 local secondary schools, and five independent schools offer post-16 provision. There are four other further education colleges within 20 miles. Numerous providers of training in the private sector also compete to recruit school-leavers. In 1996, 42.6 per cent of year 11 pupils in Lancashire gained five or more

grades at C or above for the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) compared with 44.5 per cent in England as a whole. Sixty-three per cent of 16 year olds continued in full-time education in Lancashire compared with 65 per cent for the north west and 71 per cent for England. In the last two years there has been an increase in the number of students following modern apprenticeship programmes.

4 The college offers an extensive range of courses in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). These include:

- 23 subjects for the GCSE and 27 subjects for the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level)
- 36 subject areas ranging from level 1 to 5 for the national vocational qualification (NVQ)
- four courses at foundation level and 10 at intermediate and advanced level leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs)
- 21 modern apprenticeship schemes
- 9 national diplomas/certificates
- 14 higher national diplomas/higher national certificates
- 11 degrees
- 450 non-vocational leisure and recreational courses.

In 1996-97 the college enrolled almost 34,000 students. Full-time enrolments increased by nearly 5 per cent between 1996 and 1997. Over 40 per cent of students who follow higher education programmes come from other parts of the United Kingdom to study the specialist courses offered by the college. In 1993, the college became an Associate College of Lancaster University. The college is also a major provider of the training programmes sponsored by the Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

5 In August 1997, a major restructuring of the college led to a reduction in the number of

# Context

senior managers. The principal is assisted by two vice-principals responsible, respectively, for academic services and customer services. Three directors, for finance, personnel and quality support, also report to the principal. The director of learning and information technology (IT) reports to the vice-principal for customer services. The three senior postholders together with the four directors constitute the strategic management team. Eighteen study units reflect distinct vocational areas. Heads of study units and heads of units for customer services comprise the management forum. The college employs 630 full-time equivalent staff.

6 The college's mission is: 'to be leaders in personal development through quality education and training'. In particular, the college commits itself in 1997-98 to:

- become more attractive to customers
- encourage participation by all groups within the community
- invest in the 'curriculum of tomorrow'
- invest in its people
- work collaboratively with others
- maintain financial health and stability through effective management of resources.

# Context

## The Inspection

7 The inspection took place during February 1998. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information on the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. Two inspectors observed the enrolment of students at the beginning of the academic year and one governors' meeting. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. This information was checked by an inspector against selected primary sources, including registers and class lists issued by examining bodies. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision which was to be assessed. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors working for a total of 51 days. An auditor was also part of the team and worked for five days. Inspectors observed 101 lessons and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. Team members met students, college governors, managers, staff, and representatives of local schools.

8 Of the lessons inspected, 75 per cent were considered good or outstanding and only 2 per cent less than satisfactory. The profile of grades

compares very favourably with the average of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 69 per cent, compared with the average for all colleges of 77 per cent for 1996-97 according to the same report. However, attendance rates on some courses were affected by absence of parents of school pupils due to the inspection corresponding with half term for local schools. The highest level of attendance at 83 per cent was in the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the lowest at 61 per cent in construction. The average size of classes that were inspected was 10.4. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	5	7	4	0	0	16
GCSE	4	4	3	0	0	11
GNVQ	1	2	3	1	0	7
NVQ	5	15	1	0	0	21
Other vocational	8	6	6	1	0	21
Other*	9	10	6	0	0	25
Total	32	44	23	2	0	101

\*other includes basic and higher education



# Curriculum Areas

## Construction

### Grade 2

**9 The inspection covered all aspects of the college's provision in construction. Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors broadly confirmed the judgements made in the college's self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- a comprehensive range of courses with good progression opportunities
- well-planned lessons
- an appropriate range of teaching styles
- good pass rates on some technician courses
- effective recording of students' progress
- some well-produced portfolios
- sampling sessions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- excellent training and assessment facilities

#### Weaknesses

- few opportunities to work together for students studying different crafts
- poor pass and retention rates on some part-time craft courses
- no agreed strategy for teaching key skills to craft students

10 The college offers a comprehensive range of both full-time and part-time courses from craft level to higher education. The courses match the needs of both individuals and industry. Opportunities for students to progress within the programme area are well established. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to sample different crafts. In partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board pupils from local schools are able to use the construction resources to study aspects of the national curriculum. Links with

local employers are strong, and have led to the introduction of new courses, including some which are fully funded by industry. However, the links are less successful in ensuring that work experience opportunities are made available to full-time students. Courses are grouped into sections, but there are few opportunities for students of different crafts to work together.

11 Most lessons are well planned and delivered competently. Schemes of work are kept up to date. The self-assessment report notes that a variety of teaching methods are used to suit the needs of particular groups of students. In the better lessons teachers use examples of industrial practice to increase students' understanding of their studies. Teachers give students clear instructions so that work can be undertaken in accordance with the relevant health and safety requirements. The self-assessment report does not identify some weaknesses in teaching. Links with other colleges have enabled staff to work together to produce learning materials, but the language and layout of these materials are not always at an appropriate level for the students who use them. In a few lessons teachers failed to motivate their students and fully involve them in their work. A strategy that enables craft students to develop key skills has yet to be agreed. Most craft courses and all technician courses have well-documented procedures for recording students' progress. Teachers agree achievement targets with individual students and monitor progress against those targets.

12 Students who follow intermediate and advanced level programmes in the plumbing and the technical studies sections produce good portfolios of work. Many use photographs as evidence. Much of the practical work produced by craft students meets the requirements of the lead bodies. Some students show particularly high levels of skill and competence. Students take part in craft skills competitions at a national level. Technician students take pride in

# Curriculum Areas

producing neat and well-organised notes, and many display high levels of skill in the use of IT. Students on block-release craft courses and technician courses often succeed in achieving their primary learning goal. However, groups which comprise students of mixed ability, such as those for craft programmes at NVQ level 2 frequently have poor pass and retention rates compared with national averages for the sector. On some courses students do not achieve their qualification within the time period allocated. The self-assessment report identifies this shortcoming as an issue for the study unit to resolve. Retention rates for advanced technician studies have declined over the last three years.

13 Staff have good industrial experience; most possess assessor awards. There are sufficient numbers of technical support staff, but they are not always deployed effectively. Most construction activity takes place in purpose-built facilities; a new training and assessment workshop opened in 1997. Students have excellent opportunities to undertake their practical activities in realistic working environments. For example, brickwork and carpentry students can work on two-storey structures, and a gas installation workshop enables plumbing students to be assessed to national safety standards. Good quantities of materials and equipment ensure that students can undertake practical work to meet the

requirements of assessment. Workshops and most classrooms are suitably equipped, and are kept clean and tidy. However, there is little use of displays of technical literature which could enhance learning. High priority is given to maintaining safe working areas.

## Examples of students' achievements in construction, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Higher national certificate	Retention (%)	82	84	56
	Pass rate (%)	78	68	88
Advanced vocational (building crafts)	Retention (%)	*	85	80
	Pass rate (%)	*	34	38
Intermediate vocational (building crafts)	Retention (%)	*	45	73
	Pass rate (%)	*	22	38

Source: college data

\*data unavailable

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering and Maritime Operations

### Grade 2

14 The inspection covered courses in the study units of mechatronics, engineering crafts and maritime. Fifteen lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. The report identified a few insignificant weaknesses.

#### Key strengths

- a comprehensive range of courses
- close liaison with many organisations
- detailed schemes of work and lesson plans
- much good teaching
- an extensive range of specialist equipment
- good retention rates
- effective use of IT by part-time students

#### Weaknesses

- poor pass rates in engineering
- teaching methods too narrow in some lessons
- some shortages in equipment

15 The study units offer a wide range of courses. They meet the needs of students whether recruited in the United Kingdom or overseas and of employers at home and abroad. This strength of provision is identified in the self-assessment report. Provision for full-time and part-time students includes: courses from intermediate to degree level; training programmes such as modern apprenticeships; courses which meet the statutory requirements of international bodies, for example merchant vessel operating courses; and short courses designed and run for local companies. There is close liaison with the local TEC, training agents,

lead bodies, companies, and some schools. Students can often attend at times to suit their personal and employment needs. For example, the higher national certificate in engineering is organised so that students can attend college on days left free by their shift patterns. The maritime operations courses have starting dates throughout the year; students can arrange a timetable for attendance that takes account of the differing demands of their sea-going and college-based activities.

16 A strength recognised by the college in its self-assessment identifies the comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans that exist for all lessons. Separate schedules record the work completed. The majority of teachers provides an appropriate variety of activities and stimulates student involvement through carefully-directed questions. Other effective teaching is based on assignments, especially where there is a requirement for group work. For example, small groups of students had generated ideas for driving a reciprocating conveyor belt lift using an electric motor. They had evaluated the ideas using a series of factors and gave a presentation on their preferred method. In the minority of classes there is an inadequate range of teaching methods, poorly-directed teacher questioning, and a failure to review whether or not students are learning. Assignments and tests are generally satisfactory in their design and content. A science assignment used the design of lifts to illustrate the principles of basic mechanics. Most students are encouraged to use the internet to search for further information. Teachers mark work thoroughly.

17 Many part-time students make extensive use of IT to prepare their reports. Retention rates on many courses are above average for the sector. For example, in 1996-97, all of the students on the intermediate engineering GNVQ completed the course. Most students on maritime operations programmes complete their studies and obtain the target qualification.

# Curriculum Areas

However, the self-assessment does not identify that pass rates on some engineering programmes are below average. For example, the pass rate on the national diploma in engineering technology for 1995 to 1997 was 29 per cent. On some NVQ programmes achievement rates within the planned time period are low, for example 44 per cent on the level 1 motor vehicle programme, but subsequent completions increase the pass rate.

18 The self-assessment report justifiably identifies the specialist equipment as a strength. Specialist facilities at Fleetwood include modern ship control simulators, radio equipment, radar simulators and a radar station situated on the nearby coast. Engineering crafts workshops are generally well equipped, but the central stores area is untidy. Some machinery is dated although still suitable for teaching basic skills. A major manufacturer has donated four modern motor vehicles. There is a shortage of diesel-powered vehicles. Hydraulics and pneumatics facilities include a plant operations training rig incorporating modern programmable logic

controllers. The rig is also used by a local manufacturer. Modern industry-standard computer-controlled equipment includes robots, engine gas analysers, and machine tools. Engineering computer suites have industry-standard hardware and software. Motor vehicle students have access to computer-based motor vehicle technical data although information on recent models is lacking. Classrooms used by engineering students are clean and tidy but the general decor is dated.

## Examples of students' achievements in engineering and maritime operations, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year vocational engineering	Retention (%)	75	78	65
	Pass rate (%)	60	79	57
One-year technician engineering	Retention (%)	*	87	95
	Pass rate (%)	*	44	32
One-year craft engineering	Retention (%)	*	88	75
	Pass rate (%)	*	50	45
Maritime operations	Retention (%)	*	98	96
	Pass rate (%)	*	84	87
Other+	Retention (%)	*	95	95
	Pass rate (%)	*	67	64

Source: college data

\*data unavailable

+includes computer-aided engineering courses, non-destructive testing courses, and Royal Yachting Association and radio amateurs courses

# Curriculum Areas

## Hair and Beauty

### Grade 2

**19 The inspection covered courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and related therapies. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. In most cases, inspectors agreed with the college's assessments of its strengths. However, they concluded that the college did not mention some important weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of courses
- some outstanding teaching
- work-based learning and assessment
- practical work of high standard
- some good pass rates
- specialist accommodation
- good progression routes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

#### Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses
- insufficient use of IT
- insufficient emphasis on aims and key points in some lessons

20 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there is an extensive range of full-time and part-time programmes including provision in hairdressing, beauty therapy, media make-up, epilation and sports massage. Courses for aromatherapy and reflexology are particularly popular, while developments in holistic therapy are interesting and innovative. Programmes meet the needs of prospective students and local employers. For example, provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy at NVQ levels 1 to 3 provides opportunities for progression or a route into employment. Most programmes meet the needs of adult students. Local employers provide appropriately varied

work experience for full-time students. Course team meetings are well structured and seek to ensure that emerging issues are addressed. Communications between all staff who are involved in the delivery of the programmes are effective. The unit is well managed and staff are clear on their roles and responsibilities.

21 Much teaching is of high quality and some is outstanding. Schemes of work are well designed. In the majority of lessons teachers use an appropriate variety of methods to help students to understand the work and to maintain their interest. Carefully-designed learning materials are used to complement theory classes and enable students to work at their own pace. These methods are particularly effective in supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; they make good progress in hairdressing courses. Feedback on assignment work is systematic and helpful to the students. Achievement is carefully monitored; students are regularly informed of their progress. Speakers from industry keep both staff and students up to date. For example, manufacturers demonstrate their latest products. However, the self-assessment report failed to identify some of the weaknesses in teaching. In a few instances, the aims of the lesson were not shared with students and teachers did not adequately summarise or reinforce what had been covered in the lesson. In a minority of practical lessons teachers did not sufficiently challenge and extend the skills of the students. Teachers have yet to make sufficient use of the new facilities for IT in their teaching.

22 Students of hairdressing, beauty therapy and media have the opportunity to enter competitions, to demonstrate their skills to outside audiences and to visit places of interest. They work confidently in the salons and develop appropriate professional skills. Many display good levels of knowledge and understanding. Course portfolios show a clear record of progress. On a number of courses pass rates

# Curriculum Areas

are high. For example, the national diploma in beauty therapy recorded rates of 100 per cent and 79 per cent in 1996 and 1997, respectively; NVQ level 3 in aromatherapy and reflexology had 95 per cent pass rates in 1996 and 1997; the sports massage diploma had a pass rate of 93 per cent in 1997; and a new course in holistic therapy achieved a 100 per cent pass rate in the first year. However, in the self-assessment report there was a failure to identify as weaknesses low retention and low pass rates in hairdressing, sports and beauty therapy.

23 The wide range of equipment in the six salons for hairdressing and beauty therapy is mostly modern; the standard compares favourably with provision in industry. Facilities include: a new computer suite; a separate resourced-based learning area for hairdressing and beauty therapy; and a well-equipped sauna and steam area. A specially-designed salon for hair and beauty therapy called Graduations is self-financing and is run by students. It provides the environment of a fully commercial salon. Teachers use their wide-ranging and up-to-date professional expertise to provide excellent support for students.

## Examples of students' achievements in hair and beauty, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational hairdressing	Retention (%)	84	83	63
	Pass rate (%)	68	73	64
Intermediate vocational hairdressing	Retention (%)	82	70	58
	Pass rate (%)	77	79	73
Intermediate vocational beauty therapy	Retention (%)	25	85	100
	Pass rate (%)	40	71	97

Source: college data

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Social Care

### Grade 2

**24 The inspection covered a range of courses in health and social care which included counselling. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the college's self-assessment. In a few cases, actions had recently been taken to remedy some of the weaknesses identified in the college's report.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching
- good retention and pass rates on many courses
- students' work often of a very high standard
- well-managed courses
- opportunities on most courses for the development and assessment of key skills
- good record-keeping for assessment purposes
- well-managed work experience
- good access to up-to-date resources for IT

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient sharing of best practice in teaching skills
- slow development of some internal verification systems
- very low retention and achievement on NVQ programmes
- outdated and insufficient specialist stock in the library

25 A wide range of full-time and part-time courses is available from foundation to higher education level. Care courses are well managed. Regular meetings of course teams focus on curriculum development and issues affecting

quality assurance. The self-assessment report identifies the need to develop strategies to improve the low retention rates of mature students but little progress has been made. Counselling courses are managed separately in the business study unit. Some staff believe this arrangement limits the opportunities in the teaching of care courses to share good practice and experience. Staff are aware of the small number of male students on some courses. They have modified presentations that are made in schools to try to encourage more male students to apply. Working relationships with the local social services department are excellent and have led to the provision of specialist short courses and higher education courses by the college department.

26 Most teaching on courses in health and social care is good and well planned. Schemes of work and lesson plans are uneven in quality and detail, but all ensure that the requirements of awarding bodies are met. In the better lessons imaginative activities are used to encourage students to participate. Teachers produce learning materials which meet the needs of their students. Students speak highly of the individual attention which they receive. The key skills of communication, IT and application of number are taught as discrete lessons, but wherever possible the assessment of key skills takes place in the context of vocational assignments. The assignments are appropriate for the level of study and are marked promptly. Teachers make constructive comments, and correct errors of spelling and grammar. Employers also participate in the assessment of students' work.

27 All full-time students participate in work experience programmes which are well-managed. Students on the diploma in nursery nursing spend alternate weeks in college and in work placements. Students and placement providers receive clear guidelines on the activities that should be included in such work experience. For example, placement providers

# Curriculum Areas

are invited to an annual meeting to discuss curriculum development. The meeting occurs twice, once during working hours and once in the evening, to enable as many employers as possible to attend. Teachers visit students in placement regularly and keep careful records of progress. As indicated in the college's self-assessment report, pass rates for most courses are higher than the national average for the sector. For example, students on the foundation GNVQ in health and social care achieved a pass rate of 60 per cent in 1997. The national average for such provision was 40 per cent. Most care students also take a first aid qualification, and many take additional qualifications in health and safety, and lifting and handling. Progress to employment in the care sector is good; students mostly gain posts that reflect their qualifications. Approximately 50 per cent of students on advanced level courses progress to higher education.

28 Many teachers have direct experience of work in the field of care, but the self-assessment report identifies that there are insufficient staff who have been trained to act as internal

verifiers. There are too few candidates willing to be trained as verifiers in workplaces that provide training leading to NVQs. This lack of qualified verifiers in the workplace contributed to the very low rates for retention and achievement for NVQ candidates in 1996-97. Teaching rooms are comfortable and specialist rooms appropriate for practical work. Equipment for the demonstration of practical care techniques is adequate. Care students have access to their own IT room which has up-to-date equipment. There are attractive displays of students' work in classrooms. Many of the specialist books in the library at the Palatine site are outdated. There are insufficient texts to fulfil the needs of the students who have enrolled on the courses.

## Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational courses	Retention (%)	93	94	76
	Pass rate (%)	85	85	83
Intermediate vocational courses	Retention (%)	*	85	86
	Pass rate (%)	*	70	80
Foundation vocational courses	Retention (%)	*	94	88
	Pass rate (%)	*	60	68
Other vocational courses+	Retention (%)	*	93	98
	Pass rate (%)	*	91	97
National vocational qualifications	Retention (%)	*	*	47
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	2

Source: college data

\*data unavailable

+includes part-time playgroup practice and counselling



# Curriculum Areas

## English and Modern Foreign Languages

### Grade 2

**29 The inspection covered courses at GCSE and GCE A level in English and modern foreign languages and in provision that leads to other qualifications. Twenty lessons were observed which included work at the college's centres in the community as well as on its main sites. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the college's self-assessment of English and modern languages.**

#### Key strengths

- the comprehensive range of courses
- the effective management of modern languages provision
- some good teaching
- good pass and retention rates
- keen participation by students in discussions
- the high standard of students' portfolios
- an excellent languages centre

#### Weaknesses

- the insufficient use of the target language in some lessons
- the insufficient use of modern technology in the teaching of languages
- the failure to make full use of the resources in learning centres

30 The college offers an extensive range of courses in English and modern foreign languages which meet the needs of students. Courses are taught on all the main college sites and in locations throughout the college's catchment area. English is offered as discrete provision and also as the key skill of communication. Discrete English provision includes: GCSE; literature and language at GCE A level; Open College certification; and

linguistics at higher education level. English is taught as a key skill: in language support; on vocational courses; and in adult and basic education. At the time of the inspection there were 1,234 enrolments on part-time day and evening courses in modern foreign languages at GCSE and GCE A level as well as for the Trades Union Congress. Languages offered include French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, English as a foreign language (EFL), Greek, Russian, and sign language. Languages are also taught as part of other courses including: GNVQs in leisure and tourism and business; higher national diplomas in mechatronics; and hotel catering and institutional management. A strength identified in the self-assessment report is that the languages provision is managed effectively.

31 Inspectors agreed that the self-assessment recognised the strengths displayed in the largely successful teaching of English and other modern languages. In the better language lessons teachers use an appropriate variety of visual aids and original materials such as foreign newspapers. Aims and criteria for assessment are clearly explained to students. Teachers often use humour to create a good working environment. They are sensitive to the needs of adult students, many of whom are returning to study after long periods of absence. Students are encouraged to pursue areas of personal interest in their writing. Students with literacy problems ranging from dyslexia to basic self-expression receive good support through the system for individual and small group tutoring. In less successful lessons, however, teachers give too much emphasis to the individual work of students; there is little opportunity for discussions and exchanges of ideas. Teachers of languages do not make sufficient use of the wide range of equipment, for example satellite broadcasting. The college did not identify this weakness in the use of resources. In the poorer lessons opportunities are not always taken to use the target language.

# Curriculum Areas

32 Most students are enthusiastic and hard working. They are eager to express their opinions and engage with the teacher in either question and answer work, or individual discussion of assignments and of work done outside the classroom. Much of their written work is of a good standard. In English students are encouraged to wordprocess their work. Portfolios prepared by students are often of a high standard, and reflect the pride that they take in their work. Some work is creative, for example a poem on the theme of 'time' which was wordprocessed in the form of an hourglass. In the majority of language lessons, students are keen to speak in the target language. Examination results are good in both English and modern languages across most subjects and levels. However, retention rates are poor on modern languages courses. Students who studied at home using materials prepared by the college were particularly successful.

33 Both English and modern foreign languages have well-furnished and well-equipped teaching and technology rooms. The languages centre is particularly well resourced. It includes: IT equipment and access to the internet; CD-ROMs that promote interactive and independent learning; listening and video stations; paper-based work programmes; and

records of students' activities. Students studying on an open learning course at GCSE level spoke positively of the resources that were available to help them with their work. However, the resources in learning resource centres are not used to their full potential. Books are the main resource in English but there is no central bookstock. Arrangements for sharing resources across the college for literacy and key skills are underdeveloped.

## Examples of students' achievements in English and modern languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level English language	Retention (%)	*	74	69
	Pass rate (%)	*	81	92
GCE A level modern foreign languages	Retention (%)	*	44	53
	Pass rate (%)	*	85	67
GCSE English language	Retention (%)	*	66	98
	Pass rate (%)	*	87	67
GCSE modern foreign languages	Retention (%)	*	61	45
	Pass rate (%)	*	89	82

Source: college data

\*data unavailable

# Curriculum Areas

## Social Sciences

### Grade 2

**34 The inspection covered courses in sociology, psychology, criminology and politics at GCSE and GCE A level, together with modules accredited by the Open College Network. Twenty-two lessons were observed. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. However, some important weaknesses were not identified.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- effective marking of students' work
- regular check on students' learning
- emphasis on previous learning
- most students attentive and responsive
- comfortable, well-furnished and well-resourced rooms

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient challenge to students in some lessons
- inconsistencies in the setting and assessing of homework
- insufficient integration of IT with the learning process
- some low rates for attendance, retention and achievement

35 The social sciences are managed by the academic studies unit. Psychology, sociology and politics are taught on three main sites and in a number of centres away from the college. Formal meetings of subject teams are held once a term to discuss teaching and learning, resources, students' achievements, review and evaluation procedures.

36 Most lessons were good or outstanding. Lessons are well planned and well prepared. Most involve a range of appropriate teaching

and learning activities. Regular checks are made to confirm that students understand their work; this practice was noted in the college's self-assessment report. Teachers draw on examples that can increase students' grasp of the subject. Such an example occurred in a GCSE sociology class; the teacher quoted a question from the 11-plus examination to examine the reliability and validity of intelligence quotient tests. Handouts and support materials are of a consistently high standard. Staff help their students; they use humour, encouragement and praise to foster confidence in learning. In the best practice teachers are careful to correct students' work for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. They provide detailed comment and constructive criticism. However, there are no formal arrangements within the study unit for the setting and marking of work that is to be completed outside the lesson. The self-assessment report did not recognise that students are not always challenged in lessons. Most teachers are keen to monitor the progress of their students; they maintain records of attendance, and monitor achievement in lessons and written work. Students are encouraged to take part in external activities, for example visits to political party conferences when they are held locally.

37 Students frequently demonstrate high levels of knowledge of the subject matter. Most develop appropriate skills of analysis, criticism and evaluation in both their written and oral work. In many lessons students are keen to discuss topical issues. Students find group work stimulating and challenging. For example, in one lesson two groups of students prepared questions on the European Union. Each group presented the arguments and raised points using an overhead projector; the tutor then used questions and debate to further develop analysis of the topic. In another lesson, a discussion on gender differences was enriched by four mature women students who spoke of their experiences and gave their opinions on the topic. Although

# Curriculum Areas

students develop the key skills of numeracy and communication, they make little use of IT in the presentation of their work or in the analysis of data. Retention rates have improved in most courses over the last two years. However, while pass rates at GCE A level were at or just above national averages for the sector in 1996 they declined to below national averages in 1997; this weakness was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

38 Staff are keen to take advantage of opportunities for staff development. Resources for the social sciences are of high quality. Students aged under 19 are supplied with appropriate texts. Support materials provided in subject areas include course handbooks, coursework guidelines, syllabuses and comprehensive sets of handouts. Catalogued library resources list approximately 600 texts for the three subjects, but the provision for borrowing books, especially in psychology, is inadequate. Resources based on audiovisual equipment and IT are available for students to use. Accommodation is of a good standard, well maintained and well decorated; the furniture is comfortable. Teaching rooms have relevant subject displays which encourage learning.

## Examples of students' achievements in social sciences, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	67	71
	Pass rate (%)	*	78	65
GCSE	Retention (%)	*	58	72
	Pass rate (%)	*	70	46
Open College A units	Retention (%)	*	69	73
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	100
Open College B units	Retention (%)	*	66	65
	Pass rate (%)	*	94	87

Source: college data

\*data unavailable

# Curriculum Areas

## Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

### Grade 2

**39 Twelve lessons were inspected. The inspection covered a range of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- good management
- an effective induction system
- sensitive and effective assessment of students' needs
- individual learning programmes
- some good team teaching
- excellent adaptation of some learning resources
- the development of appropriate skills

#### Weaknesses

- some inadequate lesson plans
- failure of some teaching to hold students' attention
- some ineffective management of challenging behaviour
- insufficient use of IT to support learning

40 The college makes provision for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is emphasis on the achievement of excellence and staff have high expectations of students. The content of the students' learning programmes is appropriate to their needs. Students are introduced to issues that are relevant to their age, stage of life and particular needs and interests. Effective management is a significant strength of the provision. Close links with a range of external agencies and specialist groups, and effective use

of education support workers are strengths that are included in the self-assessment report. Staff at their regular meetings seek to ensure that issues are carefully considered and that decisions are made collectively. Guidance is provided through a clearly-documented framework for the curriculum. The unit has carefully managed a significant growth in the number of students enrolling on its course on access to further education in the year 1997-98, while at the same time coping with the long-term absence of four full-time teachers. Staff demonstrate a particularly strong team spirit.

41 Students are welcomed to the college through an effective induction procedure. Teachers focus on the development of individual learning plans, agree targets and identify progression routes. The assessment procedure is sensitive to students who have experienced failure; care is taken to discuss their particular aspirations. There were examples of good and outstanding teaching which support the judgements made in the self-assessment report. The most effective teachers plan and structure their lessons carefully. They use an appropriate variety of approaches that help students to enjoy their lessons and concentrate on their work. In a particularly effective lesson, students watched a video on skin burns and then worked in small groups to discuss the key issues that were involved. Teachers and support staff ensured that each student was involved in the discussion and subsequent preparation of a report. Team teaching methods are chosen to match the particular learning styles of the students. They are especially effective when used to support students on vocational courses. Assessment and evaluation is continuous. Students have access to nationally-recognised qualifications but this policy does not detract from the emphasis placed on the importance of the learning process. They are developing a range of skills, achieving success in their examinations and making progress. For example, a practical lesson in horticulture enabled students to acquire a knowledge of the

# Curriculum Areas

subject and to exercise and develop their skills in communication, planning and problem-solving.

42 Teaching and learning is less effective where lesson plans are based on vague and imprecise goals. Some teachers fail to involve students in the work or to make full use of support staff. They do not always have sufficient skills to cope with students who demonstrate challenging behaviour. Not enough use is made of IT and audiovisual aids to support learning. Records of achievement are sometimes used to record outcomes but not to support the learning process. Opportunities are not always taken to celebrate the achievements of staff and students. Most of these weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report.

43 Staff have teaching qualifications and all are fully committed to the provision. However, inspectors were in agreement with the self-assessment report which identifies the need for a strategy to increase the number of staff with specialist qualifications; to support the policy of inclusion; and to cope with the growth in provision.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**44 Since the last inspection the college has consolidated aspects of its work and been receptive to new ideas to improve the quality of support for students. Inspectors agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the college had overstated the effectiveness of its learning support arrangements.**

#### Key strengths

- a wide range of well-publicised support services for students of all ages
- effective arrangements for students to receive pre-enrolment guidance
- strong commitment to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- a well-defined tutorial system
- good careers education and guidance

#### Weaknesses

- uneven quality of students' tutorial experience
- shortcomings in provision for learning support
- insufficient monitoring and evaluation of tutorial and learning support activities

45 Prospective students have ample opportunity to find out about the range of courses and training programmes offered by the college. The self-assessment report refers to strong links between the college and over 20 secondary schools. The college, in a successful initiative, is developing closer working relationships with a network of three associate schools. Information gained at open days and at events specially arranged by study units is supplemented by prospectuses, course leaflets and publicity materials all of which are of high quality.

46 The self-assessment report did not include judgements relating to the quality of initial guidance and the effectiveness of enrolment procedures. All prospective students who are clear about their choice of course are interviewed by course tutors. Students who are uncertain of what choice to make are interviewed by staff from the student services unit. A checklist for interviewers is intended to provide a structure for interviews but, during the enrolment period, not all staff adhered to it. Students speak highly of the quality of advice that they receive from student services staff. In the past, there has been no central database to enable the college to track students from this initial enquiry to enrolment on a course. A central admissions service now operates for students intending to enter the college in September 1998.

47 In most study units, students feel well supported by college staff. Every student has a personal tutor with whom to discuss progress and any worries. The role of the personal tutor and a student's entitlement to the various aspects of tutorial work are clearly stated in the documentation. A comprehensive tutors' handbook includes the tutorial framework, and tutorial policies and procedures; course tutors have the freedom to make adaptations to meet the needs of their students. A framework for induction is also available. In the self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that the quality of induction, and individual and group tutorials, vary significantly across the college. Some students do not receive the level of service to which they are entitled. Procedures to monitor and evaluate tutorial work are not sufficiently rigorous.

48 Staff from the student services unit work collaboratively with teaching staff to support the college's commitment to the personal development of its students. The unit is based at Bispham but staff work at other campuses at specified times and are readily accessible to teaching colleagues and students by telephone.

# Cross-college Provision

Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that students who need help to resolve personal issues have access to and benefit from a broad range of services including professional counselling and advice about accommodation, welfare and finance.

49 Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is given a high priority. Inspectors observed some good examples of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities working side by side with other students in lessons. Procedures to identify students in need of additional help are clear but they are not always adhered to. Arrangements to provide learning support for students with dyslexia and for those who need additional help in literacy or numeracy do not operate effectively in all parts of the college. These shortcomings are acknowledged in an update to the self-assessment report. Evaluation of the effectiveness of learning support is weak.

50 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that appropriate careers guidance is readily available to students. Specialist careers officers work closely with course tutors to ensure that careers guidance is an integral part of programmes of study. Students can also request individual careers interviews. Separate careers bulletins for staff and students include examples of the college's careers resources; details of job vacancies that are available locally; information about open days at universities; and timely reminders about deadlines for applications to higher education. Students speak highly of the quality of advice that they receive when choosing higher education courses.

51 The college records the destinations of full-time students who achieve their intended qualifications. The following table gives destinations as a percentage of those students who completed their courses in 1996 and 1997. The college recognises the need to improve the percentage of students whose destinations are unknown.

<b>Student Destinations</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>
Number of students	2,309	2,110
Higher education	14%	12%
Further education	22%	17%
Employment	20%	17%
Other	8%	6%
Unknown	36%	48%

*Source: college data*

## General Resources

### Grade 2

**52 Inspectors agreed with the findings of the college's self-assessment report. The report covered all areas of general resources and clearly set out the differences between sites. Some weaknesses identified by the college had been rectified by the time of the inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- a clear strategy for rationalising and improving accommodation
- clean and well-maintained accommodation
- some good sporting and social facilities
- a range of realistic working environments in vocational areas
- good facilities for IT
- effective links between the library and facilities for IT

#### Weaknesses

- drab external appearance to buildings
- poor access for people with restricted mobility
- inadequate sections in central bookstock
- underuse of IT facilities



# Cross-college Provision

53 The college has a clear strategy for rationalising and improving its accommodation. At the time of incorporation the college had 49 buildings on nine sites. The self-assessment report demonstrates the college's awareness of the need to rationalise its accommodation in order to make more efficient use of its resources. Since 1996 it has embarked on a programme of closures. The intention is to reduce to two main sites at Bispham and Palatine and two smaller sites at Fleetwood and Ansdell. The accommodation strategy is successful in bringing together accommodation for each study unit. Inside, the buildings are clean and well maintained. Minimum standards specified for classrooms include good decoration and furniture and basic equipment such as an overhead projector. The majority of classrooms meet these standards. Both full-time and part-time staff have appropriate work areas. Industry-standard working environments have been created in vocational areas, for example for art and design and catering. The maritime work at Fleetwood benefits from specialist equipment which includes a tank that simulates conditions at sea, and a radar simulation suite. Room usage is carefully monitored.

54 The external appearance of most of the buildings is unappealing; signposting is poor. Bispham consists of a number of separate buildings constructed in the 1960s; this site would benefit from further landscaping. The main entrance to the Palatine site has an impressive colonnaded facade; inside, the building provides a pleasant learning environment. The college has recently gained approval from the FEFC for major restructuring to Palatine. There are sufficient car parking spaces on all sites. The college provides nurseries on two of its sites, each for 20 children; another nursery is planned at Palatine.

55 The self-assessment report clearly outlines the good sporting facilities available to the majority of students. A sports manager promotes a wide variety of organised events.

The college has been successful in gaining lottery funding for an all-weather pitch and training facilities. Refectories are generally adequate. The self-assessment report describes social facilities as limited though there are common rooms on some sites. There is a students' association suite at Bispham. Fleetwood has good facilities including a gym and refectory, and a common room that is open 24 hours a day. The college is aware that access for students with restricted mobility is poor. Improvements are being made, for example more ramps are being installed. As current access is very limited, the Palatine project includes the installation of three lifts. Bispham has a passenger lift in one block and goods lifts in two other blocks, but there is no lift to the learning resource centre. Ansdell has ramps and a lift. Fleetwood has no easy access to the main building.

56 Learning resource centres are located on all the college's main sites. They provide information in a variety of forms that include multimedia, the internet, video, books, journals, periodicals and newspapers. This strength of provision is clearly reflected in the self-assessment report. Each study unit receives a budget allocation to purchase learning materials for the learning resource centres. Usage of facilities is carefully monitored. IT that is available centrally is of a high standard. The ratio of computer workstations to students stands at 1:5.6. Students are given an electronic mail address at the start of their courses; over 15,000 students use the college system, in addition to 1,100 staff. Students are able to have unlimited access to the internet through links with Lancaster University. As indicated in the self-assessment report, there is an effective induction process to the library facilities that are available in the learning resource centres. The four stages of induction include a tour of the facilities; information on printed materials; the use of CD-ROMs; and the use of the internet. Similar arrangements exist for the IT network. Many GCE A level students use induction to

# Cross-college Provision

achieve accreditation for their new skills. However, some students do not receive a fully effective induction to the systems; they experience difficulties in using the facilities. Some sections of the central bookstock are dated, particularly at Palatine.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**57 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses of the college's procedures and processes for quality assurance that were identified in the self-assessment report. An update to the report showed steady progress towards further improvements to procedures.**

#### Key strengths

- strong commitment to continuous improvement
- quality assurance system clearly defined and well documented
- clear benefits to students from arrangements for quality assurance
- effective arrangements for course validation
- thorough and systematic self-assessment
- staff development

#### Weaknesses

- some underdeveloped aspects of quality assurance in support services units
- no regular monitoring of implementation of charter
- lack of co-ordination in establishing and monitoring performance indicators

58 The college is committed to continuous improvement in the quality of its provision. The strategic plan sets overall quality objectives and provides a framework for their achievement.

Since the last inspection the college has identified areas for improvement, introduced self-assessment and developed a self-critical approach to improving quality. The self-assessment report recognises that some areas have yet to report clear and measurable improvements in performance since they started to follow the quality assurance procedures.

59 The resource file for quality assurance reflects the new college structure and the move to self-assessment. It is clear and comprehensive and emphasises that the assurance of quality is the responsibility of all staff. The director of quality support chairs the college's quality assurance committee, which reports to the strategic management team, and attends termly quality assurance meetings of each academic study unit. Quality improvement teams are established for specific projects and disbanded once they achieve their objectives. They have been successful and are appreciated by staff. A team is reviewing support for students. The college quality assurance committee has clear terms of reference and receives reports from study units, the quality assurance committee for support services, and quality improvement teams. Demanding and imaginative service level agreements now apply to all support services units. However, as noted in the self-assessment report, arrangements for assuring the quality of support services units are not as rigorous as those for study units. Cross-college working groups consider issues that affect the qualifications offered by the college.

60 A quality improvement team has revised the college's charters. Students' views were carefully surveyed. The students' charter clearly reflects the priorities in the *Charter for Further Education* from the Department for Education and Employment and provides some service standards. However, implementation of the charters, including the versions for parents, employers and the community, is not regularly monitored. Some students are not aware of their entitlements under the charter. Inspectors

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agreed with the self-assessment report that commitment by some staff to the charter needs strengthening. Governors receive an annual report on complaints and details of improvements made in response to such complaints.

61 Students contribute significantly to reviews of quality through questionnaires and termly student review meetings. However, some reviews are not sufficiently evaluative and minutes of meetings vary considerably in detail and subsequent action-planning. Arrangements for course validation and internal verification of standards are generally effective. Rapid action is taken in response to external verifiers reports. Monitoring the implementation of the procedures for quality assurance is underdeveloped. The college has a target to introduce standard reporting formats by May 1998.

62 The process of preparing the self-assessment report was delayed until completion of the restructuring of the college. The strategic management team, and heads of support services and study units led assessment activities. Inspection confirmed that other staff were fully involved. The report covers all curriculum areas of the college. The self-assessment reports of study units and support services units were summarised by programme and cross-college areas and formed the college self-assessment report. Moderation was rigorous and involved external groups. The final report was also shared with individuals and groups outside the college that had an interest in its work.

63 The college's self-assessment report is evaluative. The report uses views of students and other customers as part of its evidence base. Lesson observations helped to inform judgements on teaching and learning. An action plan addresses identified weaknesses. There are clear references to sources of evidence but students' achievements are not always

compared with nationally published data. A lack of co-ordination in the setting and monitoring of performance indicators is noted in the self-assessment report.

64 Staff appraisal involves reviews of staff development and performance. Staff speak positively of the reviews of staff development which meet both the needs of the individual and those of the college. Lesson observation contributes to the assessment of staff development needs and also leads to the sharing of expertise. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff development is closely linked to college strategic objectives. The college makes a major commitment to staff development, spending about 2.5 per cent of its total budget on training and development. Each member of staff undertakes on average five days training a year.

## Governance

### *Grade 1*

**65 The findings of inspection confirmed the college's own assessment of the strengths of governance.**

#### Key strengths

- a balance of skills and expertise within the corporation
- governors strongly committed to the college and to involvement in the community
- a clear distinction between governance and management
- active involvement of governors in setting the mission and in strategic planning
- positive monitoring and effective oversight of the college's financial health
- impressive clerking arrangements
- well-informed governors

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- open and thorough self-assessment by governors
- good attendance levels at corporation meetings
- well-established performance measures for the corporation

## Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

66 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. 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. The distinction between governance, management and operational tasks, which is clearly understood and observed, is embodied in all aspects of the corporation's activities; it has been defined in documentation provided to staff, students and all new governors.

67 The corporation has eight independent members, one TEC member, two co-opted members and one community member. The principal is also a member. There is currently one vacancy. A search committee ensures vacancies are filled in accordance with a skills audit that has been determined by the corporation. The process of recruiting new governors complies with currently accepted best practice, including advertising in the local press and at the annual public meeting that has been held for the past three years. New governors receive an effective induction, and a comprehensive pack of information about the college and their responsibilities. A short document, 'the spirit of governance', clarifies and underpins the college's distinctive approach to governance. An ongoing training programme ensures that governors are aware of issues affecting the college and the sector. The

strength of all these arrangements is identified in the college's self-assessment report and is supported by inspection findings. The corporation is well informed on college activities and performance. A cycle of presentations from college managers, external speakers and staff from curriculum areas ensures that governors are kept fully informed. The corporation visits the outlying sites of the college and governors have met with students during lessons. Each term governors invite groups of staff to meet them informally. Governors received, considered and commented on the college's self-assessment. They conducted their own self-assessment report, which was validated by a panel which included external members.

68 Governors demonstrate a high level of commitment to the college. Current governors possess an extensive range of skills and experience drawn from a wide background that matches the profile of the college's work. For example, the expertise of governors was used to enable the establishment of health screening of employees and the development of courses and facilities in engineering. The corporation has approved a comprehensive register of interests which has been completed by all governors and members of the strategic management team of the college. This register is updated annually on a formal basis, and informally on an ongoing basis. The register is available for public inspection.

69 The corporation has nine scheduled meetings each year. There is an average attendance of over 80 per cent. As stated in the self-assessment report, effective clerking ensures that the corporation and its committees are well supported. The cycle of meetings for the corporation and its committees is formally approved before the start of the year and includes key agenda items for the year, for example student enrolment and achievement reports, annual reports on personnel, and issues that involve health and safety and equal opportunities.

# Cross-college Provision

70 Inspection findings confirmed the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, that governors are closely involved in the strategic planning process. The corporation has an annual residential conference. Information to governors is clear and concise. Agenda papers are distributed in good time for meetings. There is no set of standing orders covering the conduct of meetings; when they are needed, they are drawn up, for example for the election of the chairman designate. Minutes provide an informative record of the business of the corporation and its committees. They are produced within appropriate timescales and are available for general review in the learning resource centre. Governors set and monitor performance targets for senior postholders and conduct a staff development review as part of this activity.

71 Governors are clear about their financial responsibilities and devote a considerable amount of time to them at corporation meetings. The corporation has defined sound financial targets within which the college can operate and is committed to ensuring the future solvency of the college. It has acknowledged the need to review the relationship between the full corporation and the finance committee to ensure that the most effective use is made of the committee.

## Management

### *Grade 1*

**72 The self-assessment report includes a rigorous analysis of the quality of management at the college. Inspectors confirmed the strengths and noted that subsequent actions taken to remedy the weaknesses had improved the quality of management beyond that claimed by the college.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a clear rationale for the revised management structure
- an open style of management
- widespread support for the college's values, aims, objectives and criteria for success
- good financial management
- a comprehensive range of policies and procedures regularly updated
- a strong commitment to equal opportunities
- substantial links with the local community

#### **Weaknesses**

- underdeveloped management information systems

73 Major restructuring has been undertaken in the last year, following thorough consultations and discussions that were well led by senior managers. The changes are widely understood and supported by staff. Managers have tried to improve communication and encourage fuller participation in the working life of the college. Examples of improvements include: briefing notes to convey information to all college staff; a regular college bulletin that carries a wide range of articles of general interest; increase in staff use of facilities for electronic mail; and cross-college curriculum networks that enable staff to work in teams and to share good practice. Most staff have responded well to these developments and warmly welcome the new, more open style of management. A survey of staff views conducted by consultants in the latter part of the autumn term 1997 acknowledges that communications have improved. Inspectors, nevertheless, agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a need to improve still further the quality of communications between management and staff.

# Cross-college Provision

74 The college reviewed its mission shortly before the inspection. The governors decided that the existing mission statement was still appropriate, but that an 'ambition statement' should be added in order to demonstrate clearly the college's values. These values place emphasis on participation, partnership and putting the customer first; they are clearly reflected in the new strategic plan. The plan sets out six aims, and a series of objectives which include measurable targets for achievement in 1997-98. The plan is understood by the staff who support the college's values, aims and objectives and criteria for success.

75 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college is at present in a healthy financial position. An appropriately-qualified and experienced director of finance leads the finance team. The budgetary process is clearly documented and comprehensive. Monthly management accounts are reviewed by the strategic management team. Financial targets, which are set as part of the strategic plan, are regularly monitored. Budget holders are provided with monthly statements of expenditure and commitments. Individual members of the finance department are nominated as the point of contact for each of the budget headings. Financial regulations need to be updated and provided to all budget holders. The average level of funding for the college in 1997-98 is £17.67 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £16.72 per unit.

76 There is a comprehensive range of personnel policies and procedures, which have recently been reviewed and updated. Restructuring has led to a review of the college's staffing levels. Teachers have been deployed to the new study units according to a simple formula. The policy on equal opportunities is widely promoted, and is supported both by a significant amount of staff development and by

the production of a detailed action plan for the current year. Inspection findings confirmed the college's view that the equal opportunities committee, chaired by the principal, acts as a challenging monitor of progress.

77 The college has developed its own student information system which produces regular and timely reports about recruitment. Managers at all levels scrutinise the reports with care. The self-assessment report recognises, however, that the college needs to improve procedures, records and access to the information system if it is to be able reliably to track all aspects of student data and provide managers with all the information that they require.

78 The college is successful in developing partnerships with the local community. It is a member of the Blackpool Challenge Partnership which has received funding to develop the skills of local people through the establishment of a multimedia suite at the Palatine site. Lancashire Area West TEC part funded the recent survey of staff views. In partnership with local TECs and with 11 other colleges in Lancashire, the college has received funding to develop an IT network for small and medium-sized enterprises. The college continues to work to extend adult and continuing education classes at a large number of centres in the Blackpool and The Fylde area. It is responsible for education in two prisons in the region, and is currently working with partners in Germany and Italy on a project funded by the European Community to improve the teaching of communication skills to prison inmates.

## Conclusions

79 The college's self-assessment report was carefully and thoroughly prepared. The preparation of the report involved staff at all levels of the organisation as well as certain observers from outside the college who had an interest in the process and the outcome. It followed the production of a new strategic plan

# Cross-college Provision

and used findings from the college's annual quality assurance cycle. Inspectors found the self-assessment report particularly useful in planning and undertaking the inspection. Inspectors found close agreement between the strengths and weaknesses recorded in the report and its update, and those identified during the inspection. A few weaknesses were understated whilst others were occasionally overemphasised. In a few cases the college overestimated some strengths, particularly those that related to teaching and learning, and placed insufficient emphasis on students' achievements. The college had taken actions to remedy a number of weaknesses following its self-assessment, and in many instances inspectors judged that these actions had been effective. In one area inspectors considered the college had underestimated the strengths and awarded a higher grade.

80 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	16
19-24 years	12
25+ years	70
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	20
Intermediate	19
Advanced	14
Higher education	8
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	39
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	329	1,536	13
Agriculture	0	11	1
Construction	133	513	4
Engineering	161	1,643	12
Business	373	1,269	11
Hotel and catering	578	399	7
Health and community care	458	841	9
Art and design	815	259	7
Humanities	534	3,874	30
Basic education	77	758	6
Total	3,458	11,103	100

Source: college data

Note: these figures do not include non-schedule 2 students. These totalled 9223 students for autumn/spring 1998 terms

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (December 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	268	31	14	313
Supporting direct learning contact	51	3	0	54
Other support	244	18	1	263
Total	563	52	15	630

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



# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£21,123,000	£23,017,000	£21,897,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£20.05	£19.99	£17.67*
Payroll as a proportion of income	72%	65%	67%
Achievement of funding target	102%	98%	105%
Diversity of income	48%	41%	43%
Operating surplus	-£1,221,000	£786,000	-£512,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

\*not yet been finalised

### Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	260	232	216
	Average point score per entry	3.3	3.7	3.7
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	232	220	99
	Percentage achieving qualification	86%	84%	83%
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	178	129
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	85%	81%
	Position in tables	*	top 10%	top third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

\*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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