Southport College

REPORT FROM THE INSPECTORATE

2000-01

Contents

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 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
	%	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**
Curriculum areas	*6*	*44*	*44*	*7*	*0*
Cross-college provision	*9*	*45*	*38*	*8*	*0*

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Sample size: 112 college inspections
Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- *as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification*
- *as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification*
- *as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.*

Summary

Southport College

North West Region

Inspected October 2000

Southport College is a general further education college with main centres in Southport and Formby. The college offers courses in all FEFC programme areas. The inspection covered provision in six programme areas. In planning the inspection, inspectors used the college's fourth self-assessment report and its brief update. The self-assessment process involved staff at all levels and included the college's franchise partners. Inspectors awarded grades lower than those in the report update to four out of the six programme areas inspected. Compared with the original report, inspectors awarded lower grades to two areas. Inspectors awarded a higher grade to one cross-college area and a lower grade to another.

Since the last inspection there have been improvements in all aspects of cross-college provision. The college has strong leadership and a clear strategic direction and vision. It has made good progress in improving the support provided for students and considerable investment in improving its accommodation and facilities for students. Governors have been effective in ensuring the financial stability of the college. Quality assurance systems have been improved and now include all aspects of the college. However, they have not been effective in securing improvements in all curriculum areas. While teaching and learning observation grades are above the national average in some curriculum areas there are others where teaching is only satisfactory or poor. Similarly, improvements in retention and achievement have not been uniform across the college. The college should: ensure that teaching and learning is at a high standard across the college; improve retention and achievement in some areas; improve the rigour with which quality assurance procedures are implemented throughout the college; fully implement the introduction of key skills within all curriculum areas; and improve the support for part-time staff.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Computing and information technology	2
Engineering	4
Health and social care	2
Art, design and performing arts	3
Humanities	3
Basic skills	3

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	2
General resources	2
Quality assurance	2
Governance	1
Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1   The college was formed in 1983 as a result of the merger of the School of Arts and Southport Technical College. The college operates from its main site near Southport town centre and a site in Formby. The college also uses eight centres across the borough and six other centres in locations ranging from Wigan to North Cheshire. These 14 centres provide for 14% of its activity. A further 15% of its provision is through franchise arrangements.

2   Southport is a seaside town with a population of 94,000. It lies within the metropolitan borough of Sefton which has a population of about 385,000. The local catchment area for the college, which includes postal codes in West Lancashire, has an overall population of 333,000. Most students come from North Sefton.

3   There is a sixth form college about 3 miles from Southport College and four other further education colleges in the surrounding towns of Bootle, Skelmersdale, Leyland and Preston. There are twelve 11 to 18 schools in Southport, Ormskirk, Formby and Maghull. Sefton Local Education Authority (LEA) maintains two special schools which have students over 16 years old.

4   The college is within the Merseyside objective 1 area and this region has pockets of significant poverty. The staying-on rate post-16 in Sefton was 69.6% in 1999. In Southport it was 75.5%. In Merseyside as a whole, 8% of the economically active population was registered unemployed in July 2000. In Sefton the rate was 6.6%. The college attracts funding to support initiatives aimed at assisting economic regeneration. There is a preponderance of service industries in the area, including leisure, tourism and caring occupations and small to medium-size businesses. The largest employment sectors are distribution, hotels and restaurants, public administration and health. The college is one of the largest employers in the area. It employs 303 full-time equivalent staff.

5   The college offers courses in all programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), including subjects at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) and vocational programmes at levels 1 to 4. It also offers return-to-study and access programmes to adult students some of which lead to progression to higher education. Most higher education courses are franchised from local universities. There have been increases since the last inspection of 6% and 48% in full-time and part-time students, respectively. In 1999-2000, the college enrolled 1,947 full-time and 14,044 part-time students. The growth in part-time numbers has been achieved mainly through increased provision in the community and franchise activity.

6   The college aims to address effectively the needs of the community in Southport, Sefton, West Lancashire and Merseyside, through the provision of high-quality learning opportunities, skills training and other services. The college's mission is to ensure excellence by aiming for high standards across all activities, relevance by ensuring that the curriculum and supporting services address need, and accessibility by encouraging and widening access to promote lifelong learning, inclusivity and participation by the disadvantaged.

The Inspection

7   The college was inspected during the week beginning 30 October 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information held about the college by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors observed a governors' meeting before the inspection. Data for 1998 and 1999 were taken from the individualised student record (ISR). The college submitted data on student achievement for 2000 using kitemarked software and these were checked by

inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection.

8   The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors for a total of 44 days and an auditor working for five days. Meetings were held with governors, college staff, students and stakeholders. The college arrangements for franchised provision were also inspected.

9   The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 64% were good or outstanding and 8% were less than satisfactory. This profile is close to the averages of 62% and 6%, respectively, for all lessons inspected in 1999-2000.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	6	5	2	0	13
GCSE	1	1	2	1	0	5
GNVQ and NVQ	3	3	3	1	0	10
Other vocational	12	20	10	3	0	45
Other*	9	7	7	1	0	24
Total (No.)	25	37	27	8	0	97
Total (%)	26	38	28	8	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Note: percentages subject to rounding

*includes basic skills, access to higher education and tutorials

Context

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Southport College	10.7	76
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

11   Inspectors observed 18 lessons covering specialist courses in computing and information technology (IT). They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but gave greater emphasis to some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of provision

- good teaching

- effective curriculum organisation and management

- high levels of achievement on foundation courses over the last two years

- above average retention and achievement rates on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) and national diploma courses

Weaknesses

- use of insufficiently differentiated resources in some lessons

- poor retention and achievement rates on GCSE and GCE A/AS level provision

- below average retention on intermediate level part-time courses

12   There is a wide range of provision which continues to develop, a strength included in the self-assessment report. Part-time courses meet the needs of a wide range of employers and students. Part-time courses include those for absolute beginners, a wide range of open-college units, telematics courses, the European computer driving licence, provision for disaffected young people and a course run in conjunction with the spinal injuries unit of the local hospital. Full-time courses include a GNVQ

intermediate in IT, GCE A/AS level IT and a choice of two national diplomas, one in computing and one in IT. There is an access to higher education course and a higher national certificate and diploma. Courses are available in centres in the community and through franchise partners. Progression routes exist throughout the range.

13   Inspectors agreed that curriculum organisation and management are effective. Students' progress is regularly monitored and reviewed. Schemes of work, produced in a standard format, are detailed and describe teaching methods. Course teams meet regularly and minutes clearly record actions to be taken. Course reviews are detailed and include students' views. Action plans enable teachers to monitor progress against targets and have led to improvements such as provision for GNVQ intermediate students to take additional qualifications in business or electronics and for national diploma students to take units in telematics and GCE AS IT.

14   Most of the teaching was good or outstanding. The range of teaching and learning methods used has increased since the previous inspection in 1997. Detailed lesson plans now specify learning objectives and teaching methods, and are often shared, for example, with new teachers. There are well-designed handouts, which are increasingly available to staff and students through the college network. In some good lessons, teachers used a variety of methods, provided an appropriate mix of theory and practical work, used visual aids well and promoted class discussion. Students studying computer programming use industrial standard software design techniques. In some lessons, teachers fail to sustain students' interest and use insufficiently differentiated materials. The self-assessment report identified the improvements in teaching and recognised that there are still opportunities for good practice to be more effectively spread. Inspectors agreed with this.

Curriculum Areas

15   Many retention and achievement rates are good. For example, students on most of the part-time foundation courses, which recruit large numbers, have performed well for the last two years. Last year retention and achievement rates on the full-time GNVQ intermediate and national diploma advanced courses were well above the national average, and either equal to or above average in the previous two years. These strengths are identified in the self-assessment report. However, on many of the part-time intermediate level courses retention rates are below average. Results on the GCSE IT and GCE A/AS level computing and IT have been consistently poor. The latter weakness is acknowledged in the self-assessment report and the college has now withdrawn the GCSE course. GCE A level provision is now focused more on IT than computing. Assignments and coursework are appropriately marked. Most students enjoy their studies and mature students quickly gain confidence in using IT. A high proportion of national diploma and access students progress to higher education.

16   Specialist resources are good, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Teachers are well qualified. They are keen to develop their IT skills through courses but opportunities for them to gain recent industrial experience have not been taken up. Specialist teaching takes place in suites with modern equipment. Students have good access to the Internet. However, teaching rooms lack stimulating displays of computer-generated work.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing and information technology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	1,572 78 67	1,657 87 55	1,444 89 71
NOCN IT units and telematics	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	950 83 60	1,376 82 77	990 90 75
NOCN IT units, telematics and European computer driving licence	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	127 64 69	168 61 75	175 82 85
NVQ IT	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	14 86 100	20 100 40	13 92 78
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	28 89 64	40 75 63	31 90 82
GCSE IT	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 62 50	49 45 45	15 53 13
National diploma in computer studies and in IT applications	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	40 80 84	39 67 92	43 77 97
GCE A/AS level computing and IT	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	15 40 67	41 49 39	43 58 46

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Engineering

Grade 4

17   Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering engineering and motor vehicle craft and technician studies. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered the college had overstated some strengths. Additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- good achievement and retention rates on motor vehicle courses

- well-structured and realistic practical and project work

- courses responsive to local employers' needs

Weaknesses

- much ineffective teaching

- low successful completion of some engineering courses

- inadequate and inappropriate key skills teaching

- insufficient use of new learning technology

- ineffective monitoring of students' progress on technician courses

18   The college offers a range of courses in engineering and motor vehicle at intermediate and advanced levels, including craft and technician qualifications. The department has developed provision to respond to the needs of local employers. It provides the students with skills in employment growth areas. For example, a course in microcomputer maintenance is providing students with skills needed by local businesses. Collaboration with industry is increasing. The self-assessment recognises these strengths.

19   The self-assessment report identified some ineffective teaching. Inspectors observed much teaching and learning which was unsatisfactory. The inspectors observed 11 lessons; four were judged to be outstanding or good and three were less than satisfactory. In most lessons the tutors used detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. In some good lessons, case studies were used to demonstrate the application of theory to real situations. For example in a lesson for the national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 gas installation and maintenance, recent incidents were used to demonstrate the importance of good installation and servicing. In less satisfactory lessons, teachers failed to monitor students' progress and understanding adequately, lesson objectives were not explained, and key points not summarised. In one lesson, the teacher did not manage discussion effectively so that over half the class took no part in it. Monitoring of students' work is ineffectual. For example, in one class a student's assessment record book had not been correctly completed, and the student was asked to repeat work done previously. In-class support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is ineffective. The self-assessment report did not recognise, as a weakness, the little use made of information learning technology to improve the learning of students. Students' key skills are inadequately developed. In most key skills lessons, the teaching material is not related to engineering.

20   Students are given opportunities to develop skills through working on real projects. For example, a group of national diploma students built a hovercraft, which enabled them to plan production activities. Students are helped to find industrial placements. Their experience is used in group discussions at the college. Students also benefited from a residential week in a museum restoring industrial machinery. The department arranges for speakers to provide a broader view of developments and employment in engineering. Progression routes

to higher education are offered in collaboration with a local university.

21 Most courses have low successful completion rates. The retention and achievement rates for the NVQ level 1 in motor vehicle have been above the national average for the last three years. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. However, there is low successful completion on other courses. For example, on the national diploma in engineering in 1998, only six students out of 15 who had started the course completed it successfully. In 1999, four students were successful out of 11. These figures are well below the national average. Success rates have been poor on the first diploma in engineering for the last three years. The grading criteria for assignments are given to students but they are not always detailed enough to help the students answer the questions. Most students' work is of an appropriate standard, although few students use IT in presenting it. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that parents and employers are regularly informed of students' attendance and progress.

22 Staff are well qualified and most have recent industrial experience. Development of training courses has enabled staff to update their knowledge. Some tutors in motor vehicle have gained experience through good relationships and placements with garages. The workshops and laboratories are well managed and suitably resourced. Health and safety is monitored closely. The library offers a good range of textbooks and the students have access to 'drop-in' computer facilities and electronic mail accounts.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in engineering, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ vehicle maintenance	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	26 80 95	25 96 92	25 83 94
First national diploma in engineering	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	17 82 57	24 92 45	19 53 70
C&G 4351 in computer-aided engineering	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	10 90 44	22 82 83	16 94 100
NVQ vehicle mechanical	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	† † †	8 100 75	14 86 83
National diploma in engineering	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	15 67 60	11 82 44	26 68 100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

23   Inspectors observed 16 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths had been overstated and some weaknesses understated. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- good pass rates on most courses

- careful response of teachers to the individual needs of students

- effective leadership and strong teamwork

- very good physical resources

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on a few courses

- inadequate key skills development and assessment

24   There is a good range of advanced and intermediate level courses. The foundation level in health and social care has been offered but recruited only last year. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there are good links with external organisations. A strength not identified by the college is the strong leadership and teamwork in the curriculum area which underpins the good organisation of courses and work experience placements. There is effective use of the college's quality assurance systems.

25   Inspectors judged 11 out of 16 lessons observed to be good or outstanding. This is slightly above the national average for the programme area in 1999-2000. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed. Learning objectives are shared with students and their learning is checked regularly during most lessons. Teachers respond well to the individual learning needs of students. They use a wide range of methods to gain students' attention and maintain their interest. In a lesson for advanced vocational diploma students on teamwork the teacher effectively used the interactions of the class throughout the lesson to develop the students' understanding of both theory and skills. Students worked enthusiastically and enjoyed their learning. Learning materials of very good quality help students to learn. In a lesson on story telling for the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma in nursery nursing, students received some excellent handouts and worksheets which summarised and consolidated the learning in the lesson. Teachers make sure that students extend their thinking and develop skills in critical analysis. In some lessons and coursework assignments teachers missed opportunities to develop and assess students' key skills. In a few lessons, the learning activities set by teachers were insufficiently demanding. For example, advanced level students copied notes from an overhead transparency. The values underlying care and child education are practised extremely well by tutors so that students learn this crucial element of the curriculum through example; this strength is understated in the college's self-assessment report. Attendance and punctuality are not mentioned in the college's self-assessment report but they are good. Attendance is 86% against the national average of 77%.

26   Inspectors agreed with the college that achievement rates are very good across many courses. Achievement rates on the national diploma and certificate in childhood studies and the CACHE diploma in nursery nursing have been significantly above the national average for the last three years. The CACHE childcare and education certificate was run in 1997-98 and 1999-2000. In 1998, the achievement rate was 5% but in 2000 with a similar number of students it improved to 100%. On the first

diploma in caring which started in 1998-99 the achievement rate was only 58% against a national average of 80%. Last year this rate improved to 90%. There is declining retention on the diploma in nursery nursing and the first diploma in care. The GNVQ advanced in health and social care fell from 86% in 1998 to 27% in 2000. Some students' work is of a high standard on the early years courses, particularly the national diploma and certificate courses. Concepts are well grasped, there are good levels of analysis and evaluation, and the work is

beautifully presented. However, standards of written work on the health and social care courses are no more than satisfactory and often presentation is poor. Oral and written feedback to students is good.

27   The college's self-assessment report understates the value of the very good physical resources for students' learning. Classrooms are well cared for, and have displays of students' work which make them stimulating places in which to work. The furniture and equipment are of high quality.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and social care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
All short courses	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	2,601 98 97	2,650 98 98	2,346 99 97
Counselling	1, 2 and 3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	105 91 64	101 85 86	93 89 98
Intermediate in health and social care and early years (full time)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	25 76 5	32 75 58	35 69 96
NVQ care and early years	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	196 60 75	82 40 88	25 96 86
Dental surgery assistants	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	22 77 24	13 85 64	15 73 44
Advanced in health and social care and early years (full time)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	120 86 84	67 85 91	116 79 99
Advanced in health and social care and early years (part time)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	30 83 88	30 97 100	11 91 100
NVQ care and early years	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	13 62 100	12 67 75	50 62 36

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Performing Arts

Grade 3

28   Inspectors observed 21 lessons and agreed with some of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report and its update. However, other strengths were overstated and inspectors identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- most achievement above national averages

- good progression

- high standard of students' work in performing arts and general art classes

- excellent resources

Weaknesses

- poor classroom management in some lessons

- low levels of punctuality, attendance and retention on many courses

- lack of student commitment in some lessons

29   There is a good range of full-time and part-time courses offered at different levels by the college and its franchise partners. Most of the teaching was good. As the college identified in the best lessons there is a wide range of practical and theoretical work. In many lessons students were engrossed in their work and inspired by staff enthusiasm. In a performing arts lesson where students were preparing for auditions for *Twelfth Night*, the tutor had high expectations which brought the best out of students. However, over 10% of the teaching and learning was less than satisfactory, a weakness revealed in internal inspection. In some instances, poor classroom management

was evident. There was misbehaviour in class and students failed to work. For example, in one lesson when a lecturer took a student to a separate room for a tutorial, most of the remaining students left. Punctuality was poor in several lessons and late students caused disruption. Some students forgot to bring essential materials to lessons. Attendance was also low. Key skills, especially IT and communication, are integrated with many programmes, and especially well-planned in the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE). However, students found separate key skills lessons boring and undemanding.

30   Students' achievements are good and improving but there remain problems with retention. As the self-assessment report indicates, examination successes are above the national average in most areas. There are particularly good achievements in foundation, national and first diplomas and performing arts courses. GCE A level passes are improving. However, retention is below the national average on many courses. The self-assessment report recognises the good rates of progression; for example, 85% of GNVQ intermediate level students progressed to level 3 courses last year.

31   Some students' work was excellent. For example, entry level students in a part-time ceramics course achieved a good variety of form and decoration in coiled pots. However, on some courses many students were not sufficiently accurate in their drawings. In several lessons students exercised insufficient care. Two students were observed to be drawing a still life without looking at it. Students' progress is thoroughly recorded. Assignments and assessments are cross-marked and internally verified. In performing arts and art and design, assignment briefs were clear but the feedback given to students on their work was sometimes inadequate.

32   Meetings are regular, minuted and actions arising are carried out. The head of faculty

monitors progress. The three annual reviews lead to a self-assessment report produced in the spring term. This indicates a clear action plan. Issues raised from surveys of students' views have been effectively tackled. Reviews are checked by the head of faculty, who has returned two this year as insufficiently self-critical. Franchised courses are monitored through three visits a year. Records show detailed monitoring and careful control.

33   Resources for the programme area are good. The self-assessment report notes the high level of equipment available to students.

Photography, IT, printmaking, ceramics and video resources are particularly good. The library is well stocked with books and journals, which are well-used by students for study and for visual research. For example, a student's exploration of varied line in drawing had been influenced by a book on Picasso. Full-time staff are well qualified. Appraisal leads to staff development plans which are carried through. Part-time staff also have good staff development opportunities. Most accommodation is appropriate with particularly good areas for performing arts, graphics and photography.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design and performing arts, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE	2	Number of starters	118	138	127
		Retention (%)	77	83	69
		Achievement (%)	77	76	78
GNVQ vocational and first diploma	2	Number of starters	36	104	59
		Retention (%)	75	90	90
		Achievement (%)	96	100	87*
GCE A levels	3	Number of starters	129	173	170
		Retention (%)	65	70	73
		Achievement (%)	46	62	85
National diploma courses	3	Number of starters	86	125	137
		Retention (%)	68	76	62
		Achievement (%)	70	86	93
Diploma foundation	3	Number of starters	39	48	44
		Retention (%)	92	91	86
		Achievement (%)	92	95	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
*data may not be reliable

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

34   Inspectors observed 11 lessons in psychology and sociology at GCSE and GCE A/AS level and in access to higher education courses. They agreed with the overall judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses to meet students' needs

- much good teaching

- effective action to improve curriculum planning and teaching

- good resources and support for students

Weaknesses

- many low retention and achievement rates

- insufficient attention in lesson planning and teaching to develop students' skills

35   Inspectors agreed that the department demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning. It offers a range of courses at the main college site and in the community. Sociology and psychology GCE A level are offered as part of a 'Pathways' programme with an emphasis at entry on providing coherent subject combinations. GCSE psychology is offered to full-time students as one of four GCSE subjects. Adult National Open College Network (NOCN) provision is now offered as an access to social science course and a pre-access course. These changes are designed to offer better progression opportunities and more effective support for students of different ages and with different needs and interests.

36   Inspectors agreed that departmental managers have taken steps to improve course co-ordination and planning. Each subject has a

co-ordinator and there is strong support for part-time staff. The college acknowledges that there is sometimes low attendance at team meetings and that minutes do not regularly identify action to be taken or how progress is to be monitored. Teachers have well-maintained course files, incorporating schemes of work, lesson plans and teaching records. The department identifies its strengths and weaknesses honestly and is implementing strategies to improve attendance and retention levels.

37   The quality of teaching and learning is good. Of the 11 lessons observed by inspectors, eight had strengths which outweighed weaknesses which is significantly better than the national figure for the programme area. Inspectors agreed that teachers use an appropriate range of methods to help students learn, including group work, discussion and question-and-answer sessions. In many lessons, discussions were skilfully led by the teacher who explained difficult concepts clearly and made use of students' own experience. Teachers encouraged students to think for themselves. For example, in an access criminology lesson students criticised the reliability and validity of official crime statistics and this developed their understanding of the limitations of positivist approaches. Some lessons incorporated practical activities which engaged students' interest whilst developing their understanding of the topic. In a GCSE psychology lesson on social perception students took part in an experiment to test their own perceptions. Their responses were then used to develop their understanding of how people perceive others. Students' responses in their written work are of an appropriate standard. Completed assignments include competent discussion using appropriate concepts and theories.

38   In schemes of work, lesson plans and lessons, teachers paid insufficient attention to the development of generic skills. Sometimes teachers concentrate on transmitting knowledge

at the expense of developing students' skills. Lesson plans do not identify learning outcomes. Staff have begun to address these issues. For example, they have devised a sociology study skills booklet. The department plans to work more closely with tutors teaching key skills as part of curriculum 2000. The self-assessment report acknowledges that more integration of IT with lessons would improve students' learning.

39   There is a good range of resources. Teachers willingly give of their time outside the classroom to help students. Students have good access to, and make regular use of, the library and the well-equipped learning centre. Comments on written work give guidance for improvement. These strengths were recognised in the self-assessment report.

40   Pass rates in most subjects are below the national average. In psychology and sociology GCSE there was a dramatic decline in 2000. In psychology GCE A level, achievement on the one-year course is 12% below the average for the sector. The achievement rate on the sociology one-year course is 10% above the average, but the retention rate on this course is 10% below average. Retention rates are largely below national averages. Retention on two-year courses is more than 15% below sector averages. Retention and achievement rates on the new access to social science course were good, with 85% of students retained and 86% achieving successful completion. The self-assessment report identified the weaknesses in retention and achievement.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in humanities, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE psychology (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	84 55 72	49 65 72	48 58 26
GCSE sociology (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	52 71 62	24 71 47	22 55 17
GCE A level psychology (one-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	95 66 41	86 55 54	65 68 46
GCE A level psychology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	66 50 52	73 36 59	66 45 72
GCE A level sociology (one-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	36 89 53	34 82 55	14 64 67
Access to social science	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	* * *	* * *	53 85 86
GCE A level sociology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	41 52 50	47 60 62	44 52 65

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

41 The inspection covered basic skills provision, learning support and key skills at level 1. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report, although they considered that some weaknesses were understated.

Key strengths

- much good teaching

- wide range of learning opportunities

- effective use of learning support staff and volunteers

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped management of basic skills across the college

- low levels of students' achievements on most courses

- lack of detailed objectives in some learning plans

42 The college offers a wide range of primary basic skills courses on the main site, through franchised provision and in community venues, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Learning support is offered through the curriculum support workshop and through support in lessons in five curriculum areas. There is a commitment to widening participation. Many students who would not otherwise attend college attend courses offered in the community. The basic skills summer schools have enabled learners to sample 'taster' courses and this has led to enrolment on other college courses. Links have been made with employers, and the development of basic skills for learners in the workplace has been commissioned. Course management is good;

there are clear guidelines for processes such as induction. Action plans are rigorously formulated from team meetings. A comprehensive college policy for basic skills has been devised, and a three-year development plan produced. A basic skills steering group has been established recently. However, the management of basic skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

43 Teaching is good, ensuring high levels of student motivation and participation, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. In one lively session, the teachers used a range of methods using the five senses to develop communication skills. In some innovative sessions, excellent use was made of IT resources. There is a great emphasis on teaching to meet the needs of individual students. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. In some very effective lessons, tutors had produced learning materials for each individual student, geared to their abilities. Good examples of inclusive learning were seen; in one session, a signer worked with a student who had a hearing impairment, enabling him to participate fully in the group work being undertaken. Effective use is made of learning support workers and volunteers, who contribute effectively to students' learning. Where the range of ability in classes is wide, they enable students to perform tasks which they might find daunting without assistance. In some poorer lessons, teachers set tasks without any clear link to previous lessons and failed to make explicit how the learning related to the accreditation being undertaken. Some learning plans lack sufficiently detailed objectives. For example, some contain only a few words, without a clear indication of how learning is to be achieved, or in what timescale.

44 Student attendance is generally good. A wide range of accreditation is available, though a relatively small number of students achieve

awards which are externally accredited. Retention and achievement rates are below the national averages for the sector. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Where students do not undertake external accreditation they have a primary learning goal, which is formulated after initial advice and guidance. In order to assist with the review of students' achievements against their learning goals, learning plans are to be linked to the new national curriculum. Students' achievements are celebrated in an annual award ceremony.

45 Staff are well qualified, and all volunteers undertake a specialist teaching qualification. A comprehensive guide for volunteers clearly defines their roles and responsibilities; in addition, there is a guide for tutors who provide in-class learning support, although not all staff are aware of their role. Learning materials are good, although at some centres in the community there is nowhere to store materials, and staff have to carry them to each lesson. There has been an increase in IT resources since the last inspection, and they are being effectively used in teaching and learning. The curriculum support workshop provides a pleasant and well-resourced place in which to work.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in basic skills, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
AEB achievement tests literacy	Entry	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	24 96 96	44 87 38	9 100 55
AEB achievement tests numeracy	Entry	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	60 83 58	59 76 40	25 96 21
C&G 3750 numeracy stage 1	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	10 90 11	44 66 59	6 100 33
AEB basic test in numeracy skills	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	3 33 0	66 100 12	† † †
C&G 3794 Numberpower	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	49 96 36	30 87 0	15 60 0
C&G 3615 in QCA key skills	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	† † †	† † †	33 100 0

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

46   Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned activities for students joining from schools

- comprehensive induction programmes

- effective tutorial arrangements

- rigorous monitoring of the attendance and progress of full-time students

- strong personal support networks

- high-quality careers education and guidance

Weaknesses

- shortcomings in the promotion and take-up of learning support

- few opportunities for extra-curricular activities

47   There is a comprehensive cycle of activities to support students joining the college from schools. These are customised to meet the needs of individual schools. School staff spoke positively about the arrangements. Pupils in both year 10 and year 11 can sample courses at the college. Four departments provide link courses. A colourful and informative magazine for school-leavers has been produced this year. The pen portraits included are cleverly aimed at school pupils.

48   High-quality guidance is provided through the admissions process, and this is recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. All full-time students are interviewed by subject specialists using common standards. Applicants who are unsure about their choice of course are

offered an impartial guidance interview. The information, advice and guidance processes were accredited in October by the Guidance Council. Students with poor attendance patterns or with personal problems that might put them at risk of not completing their course are not identified and supported at the pre-entry stage. The college has successfully overcome the weakness in induction arrangements identified at the last inspection. All students, including part-timers and late starters, benefit from a well-planned introduction to both the college and their course.

49   Significant improvements have been made to tutorial arrangements. Inspectors agreed that high-quality tutorial support is offered to full-time students by the 38 specially appointed tutors. Effective training is provided regularly. The programme is supported by materials which the tutors have helped to develop and evaluate. Nearly half the tutorials observed were outstanding. In a well-planned session using a guest speaker, motor vehicle students were engaged in activities that broadened their understanding of the effects of alcohol on physical well-being and behaviour. Part-time students have progress reviews with a tutor. Tutors have received special training in conducting review sessions and full-time and part-time students value the process.

50   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that individual students' progress and attendance is closely monitored through the 'maintaining student responsibility' process. Each teacher makes a weekly report to the pastoral tutors on the attendance and achievement of each of their students. Case conferences, attended by both academic and pastoral staff, are held if an attendance or work problem persists and the student is required to sign a learning responsibility agreement. Over 100 such conferences were held in 1999-2000 and 58% of the students supported completed their course.

51   Students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well assisted on courses by support workers. Inspectors observed two sessions where a hearing impaired student was given good support and also one less successful theory session where the support did not enable the student to grasp the key elements. Tutors and teachers receive a useful booklet which advises them on how to support students with a range of needs. There remains, however, generally poor take-up of the learning support available to all students. At the time of inspection, only 37% of the full-time students identified through the initial assessment as in need of support had received it. Absences from sessions are not always followed up. Learning support is not promoted well in the student diary. It is described as a service for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and students view it this way. As part of an enrichment programme, all full-time students follow an eight-week course in study skills using an excellent booklet devised by the college.

52   Students spoke warmly of the strong network of personal support available to them. For most students their pastoral tutor is their first contact. There is a team of well-trained staff available in student services for those who need more specialised advice, guidance or counselling. Two youth workers provide a useful additional source of welfare advice.

53   There are productive links between the careers services and college staff. Advisers from Careerdecisions Limited have briefed tutors on good practice in careers action plans and on the use of careers software. There are good arrangements for students applying to higher education and employment to receive appropriate information and guidance from their pastoral tutors. The careers library is well stocked with booklets, videos, interactive computer programmes, and has Internet access. Students are given website addresses during careers education sessions. Both full-time and part-time students can book guidance interviews with an adviser or the careers guidance staff in student services. Students confirmed that these appointments are readily available.

54   Students have few opportunities to take part in cross-college extra-curricular activities. There are no opportunities, for example, for competitive sport, for playing in an orchestra or singing in a choir, or taking part in a drama production, except for performing arts students.

General Resources

Grade 2

55   Inspectors agreed closely with the strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective investment in premises and equipment
- well-designed and well-equipped learning centres
- well-organised library provision
- high specification of IT facilities and good ratio of computers to users
- responsive technical support for IT
- good access for students with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- inadequate sports and recreational facilities
- low space utilisation

56   The college has a clear accommodation strategy. Sustained developments have been made despite the age of the buildings. The emphasis has been on improving facilities for teaching and learning. Minimum standards for classrooms have been defined and are met by a

high proportion of rooms. A complete rebuild of the former Formby Adult Education Centre has created a purpose-built centre with spacious classrooms, a modern IT suite, attractive art rooms and full access for those with restricted mobility. A well-appointed student services area has recently been developed adjacent to the library. Much of the accommodation and physical resources in the Pennington Building is of high quality. There are isolated instances of poor accommodation on the main site. For example, some rooms in the Church Street annexe are too small and in need of decoration. The college, in general, is well maintained and clean. Site management is good. The self-assessment report did not identify low space utilisation as a weakness although reference is made to this issue in the college's accommodation strategy. Surveys are undertaken to monitor room utilisation. The college has yet to fully adopt its own recommendation of introducing centralised timetabling.

57   IT facilities have been substantially improved since the last inspection. There has been significant improvement in the ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers and the current ratio is now 5.1:1. Students have good access to computing facilities. All students' computers are networked and have Internet access. The college experienced operational difficulties with the network in the last academic year. This problem has been resolved. The quality of support provided by the IT helpdesk is a distinctive strength. A well-qualified team provides a responsive service to staff and students. The helpdesk provides assistance over the telephone and face-to-face on a wide range of IT issues. Comprehensive guidance on computer access and facilities is provided in a helpful pamphlet.

58   The library is attractive and spacious. Inspectors agreed that it is well stocked and that it responds to students' needs. The library has been extended and the layout effectively zoned to permit quiet study, group discussion and access to computing resources. There is good access for students who use wheelchairs. A screen magnifier is available for the visually impaired. There is a wide range of texts, periodicals and videos. In total, there are 28,000 items of which 23,000 are books. The library has 10 computers, a comprehensive selection of CD-ROMs and full Internet access. Students speak positively about the library support and the relevance of the resources. Liaison between library staff and teachers in subject departments is good. There are clear procedures for the requisitioning of new texts. The library orders texts for departments in order to maintain a comprehensive overview of book purchases in the college. The college has installed a new computerised library cataloguing system and staff are undergoing training in the software. Surveys of library use are undertaken but computerised monitoring of the service is at an early stage of development.

59   There has been a major investment in the learning centres. These are modern and well designed. There is an excellent range of software and learning resources which include study packs and helpsheets. These are well displayed and easily accessed. Students can buy a wide range of study packs and CD-ROMs. The centres have specific areas for key skills, information skills, learning support and open access. Attendance records are maintained manually at present. Students make good use of the facilities. There is some criticism from students of the noise generated during busier periods. Opening hours for both the learning centres and the library in the evening are too restricted for the students.

60   Access to teaching rooms on the main site by students with restricted mobility is good. The college has maximised accessibility through ramps, additional lifts and automatic doors. There is ample signposting in the college but directions through the complex of buildings are not clear. The present main entrance and

reception facilities are sited in the older main building and are not of as high a standard as those in the newer areas. The attractive entrance and foyer to the student services area are planned as the new reception location but there is no connecting thoroughfare to the main college. There is a lack of car parking space for students during the day at the main site. The college identified in the self-assessment report that sporting and recreational facilities are inadequate, an issue reported at the last inspection. The use of the Drill Hall property is recognised as unsatisfactory and the college is currently exploring alternatives. Refectories have been upgraded, although these are often crowded as alternative social spaces for students are not available.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

61   Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They judged some weaknesses to be overstated and identified one additional weakness.

Key strengths

- well-managed, comprehensive quality assurance system

- effective lesson observation programme

- thorough review of support services

- use of students' and employers' views to improve learning

- effective oversight of franchised and community provision

- good arrangements for staff development

- exemplary arrangements for dealing with complaints

Weaknesses

- lack of impact of quality assurance systems on some curriculum areas

- insufficient rigour of some course reviews

62   Since the last inspection the quality assurance framework has been developed to include all business, student support, community and franchised provision. Quality assurance systems are well managed. Useful handbooks give clear explanations of procedures. Documentation for review meetings includes set agenda items for meetings and useful prompts to guide staff. They have a clear understanding of systems, procedures and responsibilities for quality assurance. Checks ensure that procedures are followed. Franchise partners also follow the procedures. Although there have been measurable improvements in students' experiences and achievements and whole-college statistics for students' achievements have improved, they mask some curriculum areas with poor results. Of the four curriculum areas also inspected in 1997, one has been awarded an improved grade and three programme areas received the same grade in this inspection.

63   Inspectors agreed that the quality of course reviews is not uniform; some are poor. Teachers meet regularly to review courses. Lesson observations, views of students and comparisons between achievements and national averages are used to reach judgements. Some course reviews and action plans arising from them are insufficiently detailed. Aims rather than actions are identified. No specific responsibilities are allocated or timescales set for actions to be completed. Course teams do not systematically compare students' results at the end of their courses with their qualifications on entry. Constructive feedback from the quality assurance manager has resulted in improved reviews only in some curriculum areas. The

senior management team and the quality standards committee receive and consider departmental reviews.

64   The comprehensive lesson observation programme is effectively managed. Franchise partners are included. Heads of department observe and grade lessons. Teachers with lessons graded as satisfactory or below receive support from two teaching and learning advisers. The internal inspection team validates observation grades by carrying out unannounced observations. Since the last inspection, the percentage of lessons graded good or outstanding has increased, although that of unsatisfactory lessons remains unchanged. Lesson observation reports are used in staff appraisal, staff development and for judgements on the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report recognises these strengths.

65   Views of students and employers are sought and acted upon, as noted in the self-assessment report. A number of surveys evaluate levels of satisfaction with college services and facilities. Most curriculum areas regularly seek students' feedback on course modules. Students receive clear information about how the college will address the issues identified. Trained student representatives present students' views at focus group meetings attended by the college principal, the quality services manager, a governor and managers of student support services. Employers' views are obtained through surveys and meetings. Courses have improved as a result. Feedback from employers is also used to develop new courses.

66   Inspectors agreed with the college that support service teams rigorously review their services. Standards and targets for improvement are set. Performance indicators are used to measure improvements. Teams meet twice yearly to identify strengths and weaknesses and develop action plans. Views of

service users are analysed. The quality standards committee and senior management team consider and respond to reports on the quality of services.

67   As noted in the self-assessment report, staff development is well planned and well managed. Needs are clearly identified, prioritised and matched to strategic objectives. A comprehensive induction programme ensures that new staff are introduced to the college and their area of work. An extensive internal staff development programme includes those working in community centres or on franchised courses. Annually, 2% of the college's budget is spent on staff development. All activities are carefully evaluated. Targets set include numbers of staff receiving industrial updating and the numbers of part-time staff completing training needs analysis surveys. A few part-time staff who had changed their role in the college had not been adequately prepared for their new area of work.

68   The college has developed a straightforward system for reporting complaints. Forms encourage staff and students to record suggestions, compliments and complaints. All complaints are recorded and acted upon within specified timescales. The number of positive outcomes from comments and complaints has risen from 64% to 90% in the last two years. Reports, with details of action taken, are presented to governors.

69   All staff and governors are involved in the self-assessment process. Franchise partners are also involved. The internal inspection team validates the grades. A brief update to the self-assessment report was provided shortly before the inspection. Inspectors found that they agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified strengths that had been overemphasised and weaknesses that the college had not recognised. Inspectors agreed with four out of the six curriculum grades in the original report and three out of five grades for aspects of

cross-college provision. Inspectors did not agree with four of the curriculum grades in the updated self-assessment report.

Governance

Grade 1

70   Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some weaknesses were overstated. An additional strength was identified.

Key strengths

- effective use of governors' experience and expertise

- productive working relationships of governors and senior managers

- systematic approach to the recruitment, induction and training of governors

- effective oversight of the college's finances

- thorough process for monitoring own performance

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped monitoring of academic performance

71   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 corporation meets six times a year. There are five committees: finance and general purposes; personnel; remuneration; search; and audit. They meet regularly and each has approved terms of reference which include details of membership, levels of quoracy and frequency of meetings.

72   A strength identified in the self-assessment report is the broad range of skills and experience of governors. Their experience is used effectively. The membership numbers 16, including independent, co-opted governors and community representatives. Six are women. Governors give time freely and enjoy their involvement. They have productive relationships with senior managers. Attendance at meetings is good, averaging 81% over the past 12 months.

73   There is a systematic approach to the recruitment, induction and training of governors, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. A search committee carefully identifies needs before filling vacancies. An appointment procedure has been approved. Recent changes to recruitment include advertising in the local press and ensure that the process is carried out openly. There is currently a waiting list for new governors. A job description is available and an individual's performance is reviewed before re-appointment. New members are allocated a mentor and follow a documented induction programme. Attendance at training events and briefings is good. Governors make considerable efforts to identify training opportunities. Training needs are identified through the self-assessment process, but there is no formal analysis of individual training needs.

74   Governors pay close attention to financial matters and this is recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. Governors receive monthly financial accounts. The finance and general purposes committee met nine times a year to consider the management accounts. The corporation also reviews the management accounts at joint meetings with the finance and general purposes committee. Both the corporation and the finance and general purposes committee were appropriately involved in the financial and risk management planning process. The audit committee has operated in accordance with its terms of reference and has

responded well to the requirements of Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. This committee produces a comprehensive audit report annually.

75   The corporation approves the strategic plan and regularly monitors the progress made towards its achievement. They are less involved in setting the strategic direction of the college. Information on student recruitment, retention and achievement rates is regularly reported to the corporation. On occasion, the governors have asked for explanation of poor results. A governor is allocated responsibility for standards and sits on the quality standards committee. Reports related to academic performance are not considered or monitored with the same rigour as financial matters. A recent development has been the linking of governors with curriculum and cross-college areas. The corporation recognises that curriculum links are underdeveloped and have yet to have an impact on student experience.

76   The independent clerk is directly accountable to the chair of the corporation. Clerking arrangements are efficient and much appreciated by the governors. There is a published schedule of meetings, which specifies key agenda items, and the topics of the pre-meeting briefings. Agendas and papers are sent out in good time, in advance of the relevant meetings. Minutes are prepared and distributed promptly. Minutes clearly record decisions and action but the quality of debate and discussion is not always reflected in the published document.

77   The corporation conducts its business openly. Minutes of corporation and committee meetings, except confidential items, are available in the college library. Their availability is advertised. The college holds an annual meeting for customers and clients, including employers and representatives of the local community. The last meeting identified shortfalls in the college's marketing activities aimed at business and the community. The

corporation has not yet received a report on actions in response. The corporation has adopted a code of conduct and formal standing orders to guide the conduct of corporation and committee meetings. It has approved a 'whistleblowing' policy. The register of interests is updated regularly.

78   A strength not identified in the self-assessment is the thoroughness with which the corporation monitors its own performance. Governors set clear targets and performance indicators for their attendance at meetings, social events and committees at the college. These targets help governors to evaluate their effectiveness. Governors have completed individual questionnaires for two years as a contribution to their self-assessment. Governors helped by the quality assurance manager produce their own self-assessment report. The college panel validates this. It is approved as part of the whole-college self-assessment report by the full corporation. Appraisal of the principal and clerk by the chair and vice-chair of the corporation takes place annually. Appraisal of the other senior postholders is delegated to the principal.

Management

Grade 2

79   Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered that progress had been made to rectify some of the weaknesses but also identified further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong strategic direction and vision
- good systems for managing college operations
- effective use of management information to set targets and performance indicators
- good financial management

Cross-college Provision

80   The college has extensive links with the local community and employers. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that these links are well developed. Thirteen different organisations are involved in franchised provision which amounts to approximately 15% of the college's provision. There are well-established arrangements for managing this work. A meeting with representatives from a wide range of bodies identified issues relating to marketing and ensuring that the college had a higher profile in the town. There remains a lack of knowledge in the area of the provision offered by the college and how it can help local employers with their training needs.

81   The college is well managed and there is strong leadership. The executive team comprising the principal and the three vice-principals is easy to approach. The management structure is well understood by staff. The senior management team comprises the executive team and the two heads of faculty and the head of client services. Clear agendas contain standing items, such as 'core items' which are those identified for dissemination to other parts of the college. Minutes are in a format that allows easy checking of key issues and action points. The latter are followed up rigorously. There is a well-devised calendar of meetings publicised throughout the college. Heads of faculty hold meetings with their heads of department. However, there is no facility for staff across departments or faculties to meet to share common concerns and good practice. This has led to a strongly held view amongst some departmental staff that they are isolated.

This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

82   There are significant differences in the quality of the management of the curriculum across departments. Monitoring of teaching and learning is central to the college's activities. The teaching and learning strategy group and the curriculum planning group are key committees. These have been established as separate groups in the last 12 months. Although the lesson observation profile has improved since the last inspection there are areas where teaching is still poor. Full-time staff workloads are carefully monitored centrally. The teaching loads are calculated on an annual basis. There are examples where part-time staff, who form 39% of the teaching staff, have inappropriate timetables and where there is insufficient support for those teaching subjects or topics that are new to them. This contradicts a judgement in the self-assessment report.

83   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has achieved an operating surplus each year since incorporation and surpluses are predicted over the period of the current three-year financial forecast. There are positive general reserves. The college has considered the impact of the potential loss of franchise income on its financial position. A detailed risk assessment plan to address this risk has been prepared. The college's financial plans contain clearly defined financial objectives against which performance is monitored each month. The comprehensive financial regulations were recently updated. Budget holders receive timely monthly reports on actual and committed expenditure. Governors and the executive management team review the monthly detailed management accounts which contain an appropriate commentary. The internal and external auditors did not identify any significant weaknesses in the most recently available annual reports.

Cross-college Provision

84   Inspectors and the self-assessment report agreed that strategic planning is based on good needs analysis and evidence from a variety of sources. Staff are invited to give their views on an early draft of the plan. There is a well-established planning cycle. The strategic plan is translated into annual operating objectives. These are then converted into actions for inclusion in the curriculum area and business support area plans. The implementation of these is monitored and evaluated through a regular review of departmental performance. This process works well. Computerised management information is available at most levels in the college. This has only been available since 1999. All departmental heads and many curriculum leaders are confident in the use of the software and it has become an integral part of their management processes.

85   Communication across the college is generally good. The principal reads minutes of all the important committees and uses this information to follow up themes or key issues. Members of the executive management team frequently attend departmental meetings. A caring atmosphere exists within the college. There are five overarching policies for quality assurance, resources, equal opportunities, health and safety and curriculum, respectively. The implementation of each of these is the responsibility of a committee. Some departmental review documents indicate that the monitoring of the implementation of equal opportunities is not sufficiently detailed. Operating policies are well documented; the responsible person, the date of approval, the review date and the link to the overarching policy are clearly identified.

Conclusions

86   The self-assessment report provided an effective basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Strengths and weaknesses and supporting evidence were clearly laid out. The college provided a brief update to the self-assessment report shortly before the inspection which increased the grades in four of the six curriculum areas to be inspected. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report but considered that strengths in some areas had been overstated. Additional weaknesses were also identified. Inspectors agreed with two of the grades in the update, and with four in the original report. They agreed with three out of five grades for cross-college aspects. Lessons observed by inspectors were found to be 64% for grades 1 and 2 compared with those observed and validated by the college at 61%.

87   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 (May 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	12
19-24 years	11
25+ years	77
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (May 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	40
Level 2 (intermediate)	27
Level 3 (advanced)	17
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Level not specified	14
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (May 2000)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	249	2,762	19
Agriculture	2	86	1
Construction	7	175	1
Engineering	186	344	3
Business	170	1,839	13
Hotel and catering	279	1,599	12
Health and community care	265	2,596	18
Art and design	310	1,211	9
Humanities	450	2,795	20
Basic education	29	637	4
Total	1,947	14,044	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 22% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (May 2000)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	103	68	0	171
Supporting direct learning contact	34	3	0	37
Other support	78	17	0	95
Total	215	88	0	303

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£9,705,000	£9,698,000	£9,976,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.58*	£17.12*	£17.50
Payroll as a proportion of income	57%	59%	63%
Achievement of funding target	102%	102%	103%
Diversity of income	21%	24%	19%
Operating surplus	£912,000	£562,000	£294,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)
Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	794	844	813	1,993	2,185	2,098
	Retention (%)	88	87	87	80	75	80
	Achievement (%)	68	63	71	65	65	59
2	Number of starters	1,412	1,244	1,331	2,270	2,084	1,762
	Retention (%)	77	78	82	75	77	76
	Achievement (%)	44	69	72	65	73	67
3	Number of starters	1,065	1,123	1,152	1,341	1,373	1,126
	Retention (%)	64	69	67	77	75	75
	Achievement (%)	53	62	66	49	57	62
4 or 5	Number of starters	4	n/a	n/a	40	63	28
	Retention (%)	50	n/a	n/a	93	71	93
	Achievement (%)	50	n/a	n/a	44	42	56
Short courses	Number of starters	326	401	512	4,918	11,246	9,971
	Retention (%)	89	94	93	94	94	92
	Achievement (%)	67	84	78	81	79	79
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	262	308	508	2,705	2,232	4,302
	Retention (%)	78	84	88	79	77	79
	Achievement (%)	64	43	70	69	62	74

Source: ISR
n/a not applicable

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