

# Winstanley College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1999-00**

THE  
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EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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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.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

## Student Achievements

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

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

# Summary

## Winstanley College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected December 1999**

Winstanley College is a sixth form college near Wigan with almost 1,400 students aged 16 to 19 years on roll and with a small provision for adult continuing education. The college offers courses in six of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Each department and area in the college as well as extensive internal inspection contributed to the self-assessment report which was moderated by a committee that included governors and external representatives. The inspection team found the report to be honest and accurate in identifying the college's many strengths and its few weaknesses. The inspectors found that significant progress had been made in carrying out the action plans to address weaknesses.

The college provides a welcoming and stimulating environment for its students. There is a high concentration on success. Standards of teaching are high. Of the lessons observed, the number judged outstanding was three times greater than the national figure. Appropriately qualified staff teach well-planned and well-organised lessons. They set, mark and monitor students' work with care. The quality of provision across all curriculum areas inspected was outstanding. The majority of examination results and retention and attendance figures are considerably above national benchmarks. The college has excellent

arrangements for supporting students and a system for monitoring their progress that is clearly understood. Leadership is strong and communications are good at all levels in the organisation. The buildings are well maintained and contain attractive displays, but are overcrowded at peak times. The college should review its arrangements for the management of governance and further develop its accommodation strategy.

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>
Science	1	Support for students	1
Art	1	General resources	2
English, history and geography	1	Quality assurance	1
Economics, politics and general studies	1	Governance	3
		Management	1

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Winstanley College was established as a sixth form college in 1978. It is situated 5 miles from the centre of Wigan and operates on a single site in buildings that date from the 1950s. The college attracts students from a wide area: 62% of its students are from the metropolitan borough of Wigan; 24% from Lancashire; and 10% from St Helens. Unemployment in the area is higher than national and north west averages. The college receives applications from more than 50 schools and competes with a large number of post-16 providers. There are two schools for pupils aged 11 to 18, two Roman Catholic sixth form colleges and four further education colleges in the area.

2 The college provides 41 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, two general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced courses and an art foundation course. Courses are offered in six of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). In November 1999, 1,390 full-time 16- to 19-year-old students were enrolled. This represents an increase of 23% since 1993. About 360 adult students take evening courses, mainly in information technology (IT) and sporting activities.

3 The college senior management team comprises the principal and vice-principal. They work together with the college development committee to form the key decision-making body. The committee consists of 10 managers for curriculum and cross-college functions. Subjects are grouped within three curriculum divisions. This structure was established in 1998 following the appointment of a new principal. In November 1999, the college employed 66 full-time equivalent teachers and 42 full-time equivalent support staff.

4 The college's mission is 'to provide high-quality advanced level courses for full-time students aged 16 to 19' and 'is dedicated to their welfare and continuing personal and social development'. It also 'seeks to enhance students' careers and training opportunities and their preparation for higher education, within an environment that encourages a sense of community amongst staff and students'.

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in December 1999. The inspection team had previously examined the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the individualised student record (ISR) for 1997 and 1998. The college provided data for 1999. These were checked against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists provided by examining bodies, and were found to be reliable. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 10 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 41 days. The inspectors examined documents provided by the college to support its self-assessment report and held meetings with college governors, managers, staff and students.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 91% were judged good or outstanding and none were less than satisfactory. This profile compares very favourably with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected during 1998-99. Two-thirds of lessons were outstanding; this is three times greater than the national figure.

# Context

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	32	12	3	0	0	47
Other*	3	4	2	0	0	9
Total (No.)	35	16	5	0	0	56
Total (%)	62	29	9	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

\*includes GNVQ advanced, art foundation and tutorials

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

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Winstanley College	16.9	90
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Science

### Grade 1

**8 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the many strengths and some of the few weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some weaknesses acknowledged in the self-assessment report had been rectified prior to inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- effective and enthusiastic teaching
- meticulous correction and marking of students' work
- excellent achievements in all five GCE A level subjects
- outstanding pass rates by GNVQ advanced students
- good progression to science-related courses in higher education
- well-resourced and well-managed provision
- careful regular review of individual students' work and progress

#### Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory standard of some laboratories

9 Science teachers contribute to carefully prepared schemes of work and effective learning resources which they share with their students. They work to clear lesson plans that define objectives and link each lesson to the subject's scheme of work. Teachers are confident enough to depart from a lesson plan in order to meet students' needs or build additional, relevant material into the curriculum. As stated in the self-assessment report, teachers use an appropriate range of methods, including effective practical work and demonstrations. They regularly and effectively probe their students' knowledge and understanding. In one

second-year GCE A level lesson, students responded well to the teacher's questions about an earlier practical session. They demonstrated a thorough grasp of the background knowledge, a quantitative approach to the topic and good recall of their previous studies.

10 As stated in the self-assessment report, students' work is carefully and fairly marked and returned promptly in line with the requirements of a homework policy. Teachers often confine their written comments on manuscripts to key formative and summative points. These comments are supported by regular review of marked work in lessons. Students are encouraged to use these lessons and additional work at home to develop their marked assignments into model answers that can subsequently be used for revision purposes. The work and progress of individual students are effectively and regularly reviewed to encourage each student to optimise academic performance. The self-assessment report highlights this good practice.

11 Students' work is often of high quality. Some essays reviewed by inspectors included complex and sophisticated arguments that covered both biological and ethical aspects of medical topics. The college's self-assessment report refers to the good and often excellent examination results that students have obtained. Inspectors agreed with this assessment. In biology, chemistry, environmental science and physics well over 90% of students sitting the GCE A level examinations in the last three years have been successful. Pass rates in geology have been over 80% for the last three years and one cohort of geology students attained a 100% pass rate. In the last three years some of the pass rates at GCE A level grades A to C have been above the national average in all subjects. The college's self-assessment report fairly acknowledges instances where retention in GCE A level biology fell below college targets, but students not completing GCE A level were successful in gaining a GCE advanced



# Curriculum Areas

supplementary (AS) qualification. Overall retention rates in all science programmes are good. All students who completed the GNVQ advanced health and social care programme in the last three years were successful. Over 90% obtained awards at merit or distinction level, the majority being distinctions. The self-assessment report indicates that last year over 60% of GCE A level science students and 80% of GNVQ students progressed to related courses in higher education.

12 Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and their students' progress. They are appropriately qualified and experienced. There is high-quality technical support. Health and safety is given a high priority. Teachers and physical resources are effectively deployed and managed. Textbooks and a range of high-quality course materials are provided for all students, as noted in the self-assessment report. Good use is made of posters and wall

displays to create subject identities in many laboratories and corridors close to subject areas. Thoughtfully chosen materials help students with career choices and show where former students have continued their studies. Computers, relevant programmes and other IT equipment are readily available in rooms close to some of the laboratories. Access to science-based software is also available, some on the college computer network. Some laboratories are of a good standard, but others, as stated in the self-assessment report, are in need of a degree of refurbishment. Benches are old and projection facilities, screens and chalkboards require attention.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	134	218	195
		Retention (%)	82	83	86
		Achievement (%)	98	95	94
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	88	113	122
		Retention (%)	74	83	88
		Achievement (%)	97	91	90
GCE A level environmental science	3	Number of starters	35	37	40
		Retention (%)	93	81	77
		Achievement (%)	100	95	93
GCE A level geology	3	Number of starters	15	20	12
		Retention (%)	100	90	92
		Achievement (%)	100	94	82
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	43	49	65
		Retention (%)	91	78	78
		Achievement (%)	100	95	100

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Art

### Grade 1

**13 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with the main findings of the self-assessment report. The report includes strengths that are no more than normal practice, and insufficiently addresses some weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- outstanding teaching and learning
- a well-structured and well-communicated curriculum
- meticulous development of students' working processes
- wide and effective enrichment of the curriculum
- highly-developed assessment procedures
- retention well above national figures
- outstanding achievement rates
- very high level of student commitment and confidence

#### Weaknesses

- impact on skills' development of resource shortages

14 GCE A level and foundation art are taught together in the one department and are increasingly well co-ordinated. The self-assessment report emphasises that a prime concern is how effectively students plan their work and notes that teachers provide 'structured guidelines that give a clear focus for students' development'. Inspectors agreed with this assessment. There is a coherent and lively programme of departmental meetings that includes students and staff. Minutes show that action plans are regularly carried through and improve curriculum arrangements. The early stages of the course equip students for subsequent independent work. Students

enjoyed the thorough induction that included a 'finding-out' quiz and a wide-ranging project on how to use materials. In the first term all students drew up individual study plans and used them to guide their progress through a demanding project. At the time of the inspection many students were using skills, such as felt and paper-making that they had learned in earlier workshops, in their current work. Students' ability to organise their work is carefully monitored. Students are given increasing freedom to interpret project briefs.

15 Most lessons begin with a group discussion in which students take a full and active part. The discussions are designed to evaluate progress and define targets. Students then work independently with great enthusiasm. There is evidence of intensive research and a wide variety of ideas being developed in each student's project. One student used most of an A4 sketchbook in preparing a textiles piece. In one lesson, all students were employing different media. Students are able to gain help by joining additional practical classes.

16 Critical studies classes are used to increase understanding of studio skills and to develop students' capability to evaluate work. Teachers set work in connection with annual visits to London, Paris and local galleries. Visiting speakers and displays of degree students' portfolios help students to judge the content of their own folios. The college's 'minimum acceptable grade' system helps students to make progress. Records show careful use of additional work and tuition for underachievers. Assessment includes cross-marking by staff but also involves students in self-grading and group evaluation. Students confirm the college's claim of thorough assessment and particularly value the quick return of their work and the constructive feedback that they receive. Foundation students benefit from effective and relevant work placement.

# Curriculum Areas

17 The self-assessment report draws attention to a very high level of achievement; inspectors agreed. All foundation students have completed their course and achieved examination success for the last three years. Students from both courses have gained high grades over that period. Both rates were well above the national average for achievement in 1999 for sixth form colleges. Portfolios and displays show a rich variety of ideas that are thoroughly explored and carried through to an effective conclusion. Communication skills are developed through essays and critique sessions. IT skills are developed in a college workshop. There is less concentration on the development of numeracy and applied IT. Progression of students to higher education destinations in 1999 was excellent; 23 out of 24 foundation students gained a degree place. Progression was also good for GCE A level; 34 of 49 students moved to a higher level of education or to related employment.

also short of equipment such as art and design, IT, photography and silk screen printing which can all contribute to the development of skills that are valuable in preparation for higher education and employment. Staff are, as the college self-assessment report states, well qualified and suitably experienced. The artist in residence works productively alongside students, giving advice and demonstrating techniques.

18 Accommodation is overcrowded for some classes. The self-assessment points to inadequacy of space for necessary storage and exhibition. Some ceilings are too low. Lively display of art students' work does, however, enhance the departmental environment as well as the college as a whole. The department is

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Foundation	3	Number of starters	17	21	24
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level	3	Number of starters	96	99	64
		Retention (%)	77	85	80
		Achievement (%)	97	100	100

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

# Curriculum Areas

## English, History and Geography

### Grade 1

**19 Inspectors observed 17 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report. They noted that some issues required further development, and that most weaknesses had been addressed.**

#### Key strengths

- outstanding teaching
- consistently high retention rates
- pass rates significantly above national figures
- impressive standard of students' written work and assessment
- excellent range and use of resources
- efficient organisation and planning of courses
- extensive enrichment programmes
- effective improvement in use of IT to support learning

#### Weaknesses

- over-reliance on informal management in history

20 Inspectors agreed that teaching and learning is of a high standard. In most lessons teaching was good or outstanding. All lessons have clear objectives. Students have many stimulating opportunities to learn. In a geography lesson students experimented with anemometers and whirling psychrometers in the measurement of atmospheric properties. Another geography class used an Ordnance Survey map of Marlborough to identify evidence of long-term occupation as part of their work on rural landscapes. In a history lesson, a teacher effectively used peer assessment techniques to develop a critical analysis of each student's essay on the reign of James I. In English, good

planning promotes independent as well as collaborative learning among students. Staff enthusiasm for their subject is infectious. Students become accustomed to providing evidence to support their views. They are highly motivated in lessons; their interest is well maintained. Assignments are set regularly. Assessment is thorough and accurate, and contains highly detailed comments. In English, additional sources are referenced such as video and websites for comparative and extension work. Students' work is of a high standard; outstanding examples in English are stored on the intranet. In history, written work is good but oral competences and note-taking skills are less well developed. Self-assessment does not refer to these shortcomings. In English, all students' coursework is wordprocessed and good use is made of the Internet and intranet for the retrieval of information.

21 The self-assessment report identifies high retention and pass rates as a strength and inspectors agreed. Retention is consistently above national benchmarks. In English overall pass rates and the proportion of higher grades at GCE A level significantly exceed the national average for sixth form colleges. In history and geography pass rates have been consistently high. Compared with predictions based on their entry qualifications, students make considerable progress in all subjects. There is significant progression to subject and subject-related courses in higher education. Attendance rates are well above the national averages for sixth form colleges.

22 In English, lesson plans and schemes of work promote independent study. History and geography course documentation is comprehensive, but schemes of work in history are underdeveloped. History and geography departmental meetings are not used effectively. Communication among staff in history is a weakness that is acknowledged in the self-assessment. Curriculum enrichment is varied and interesting. Medieval history classes

# Curriculum Areas

visit Skipton Castle. Geography visits include urban development sites in Salford and Manchester. English students benefit from theatre visits and poetry and writing workshops. The curriculum itself offers a good range of choices with modular and linear courses in geography and three options, medieval, early modern and modern, in history. Key skills including IT are not yet integrated with all course programmes.

23 Inspection confirmed the judgement in the self-assessment that courses are well resourced. There is a good supply of reference books, works of literary criticism, examples of students' work and video material. Displays in corridors and rooms are attractive, informative and stimulating. Increasing use is made of the Internet. Geography students receive a guide which helps them to make good use of the Internet as a resource. Intranet sites have been established. However, IT software is inadequate and departments do not have networked computers. There is a good stock of up-to-date

books in the library. Accommodation is attractive and rooms are allocated to match group sizes. Groups are taught mainly in specialist rooms. Pressure on classroom space in history restricts teaching styles. Well-qualified staff are well informed of subject developments.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, history, and geography, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCE A level history (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	139	137	124
		Retention (%)	83	89	90
		Achievement (%)	90	89	94
GCE A level geography (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	117	134	120
		Retention (%)	88	90	92
		Achievement (%)	97	94	96
GCE A level English language (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	176	160	179
		Retention (%)	81	81	88
		Achievement (%)	96	95	94
GCE A level English literature (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	98	83	106
		Retention (%)	83	86	89
		Achievement (%)	98	100	98

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Economics, Politics and General Studies

### Grade 1

**24 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- good, often outstanding, teaching
- effective curriculum organisation and management
- excellent planning and preparation of lessons
- resources of high quality
- good rates of achievement, retention and progression in politics and economics
- improved retention and achievement rates on general studies
- excellent working relationships with students

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient classroom space in some lessons for fully effective teaching

25 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is much high-quality teaching and learning. All but one of the lessons observed were judged to be good or outstanding. Lessons are well planned and involve a range of appropriate teaching methods. Teachers use various questioning techniques to encourage students to think analytically and to assess their learning. In a politics GCE A level lesson, students delivered presentations on constitutional issues based on individual research. They demonstrated high levels of understanding and good communication skills and made excellent use of Internet resources. In a general studies session students were shown a video clip as an introduction to formulating arguments for and against the cancellation of

third world debt. In all observed lessons students played an active part. In general studies students made well-informed contributions to discussion. In politics and economics, students demonstrated a high level of subject knowledge. Staff integrate the key skills of communication, IT and numeracy with class work, data analysis and research. Homework is set regularly. Marking is clear and effective. Students' progress is carefully monitored.

26 As indicated in the self-assessment report, achievement rates are excellent and usually significantly above national averages for sixth form colleges. As a matter of policy, college managers encourage all students to take the general studies examination. Restructuring of teaching for the examination has led to a significant improvement in the retention figure for 1999. Achievement rates are around the national average for sixth form colleges and have increased by 10% between 1997 to 1999. Retention rates have doubled in the same period. Students' progression to higher education is consistently high.

27 As identified in the self-assessment report, staff are well qualified and manage the curriculum effectively. Documentation is extremely comprehensive. Lesson plans are clear, and relate closely to the schemes of work. Staff show high levels of commitment to their work. There is evidence of effective staff development and of good practice being identified and shared. Student questionnaires are used to evaluate the provision and departmental planning takes account of their views.

28 In all subject areas there is outstanding support for students. Students are very positive about the support they receive before entry, during induction and on programme. As documented in the self-assessment report, staff provide support activities including extra lessons, lunchtime tutorials and self-supported

# Curriculum Areas

study packages. Students across the ability range are well supported. Tutorials for high achievers prepare them for the entrance examinations to Oxford and Cambridge universities. Economics students hoping to study the subject at university and/or expected to gain a grade A, are encouraged to take the special level examination. Visits to conferences, such as the one organised for economics students to Westminster Hall to hear talks by Members of Parliament, enrich the students' experience. Speakers invited to the college include politicians. General studies is enhanced by a programme of visiting lecturers and by linking course topics with theme weeks that involve the whole college.

sources of information such as the intranet and Internet. In general studies, all students receive common core resources on such topics as crime and punishment and drugs awareness. The library keeps a good stock of relevant books, journals, newspapers and CD-ROMs. Departmental staff liaise with the librarian to ensure appropriate provision.

29 Accommodation is generally of a good standard. As identified in the self-assessment report, some rooms are small for the size of groups. In a minority of lessons, restricted classroom space reduced the effectiveness of some group activities. Teachers produce excellent resources to support teaching and provide students with up-to-date materials. Students are given appropriate guidance so that they can pursue independent research. In lessons they were usually directed to additional

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in economics, politics and general studies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCE A level economics	3	Number of starters	44	43	21
		Retention (%)	73	88	94
		Achievement (%)	88	95	94
GCE A level politics	3	Number of starters	26	25	33
		Retention (%)	81	84	84
		Achievement (%)	100	95	92
GCE A level general studies	3	Number of starters	445	537	659
		Retention (%)	42	53	91
		Achievement (%)	71	72	81

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

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### *Grade 1*

**30 Inspectors agreed with most of the self-assessment report although the college had failed to identify one strength. By the time of the inspection most weaknesses had been largely remedied.**

#### Key strengths

- effective processes for entry and induction of students
- a supportive tutorial system
- strong focus on guidance for entry to higher education
- excellent individual support for students
- outstanding programme of enrichment activities
- the effective range of services at 'student reception'

#### Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

31 The college rightly prides itself on its commitment to supporting students. It promotes high achievement through a wide and rich learning experience. In a number of subjects students with modest general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) qualifications are welcomed and well supported. Students enjoy their time at the college and identify individual help from tutors as particularly effective. The atmosphere is stimulating and encourages students to play a full part in college life and do well.

32 Entry procedures include effective marketing strategies as identified in the self-assessment report. Publicity materials are detailed and informative. Staff visit many schools. Their presentations are well received. Open evenings are well planned. The evaluation of open evenings indicates high satisfaction and

results in improvements each year to the arrangements. All potential students are interviewed before they have taken GCSEs and immediately after receiving the results. These interviews provide high-quality guidance. Induction systems are well developed and operate effectively. Student surveys indicate strong satisfaction with induction procedures. At the start of their course students are given mentors from within the existing student body. Mentors provide up-to-date information about the college and support students during induction. Students are inducted in small groups over a period of three days. The programme allows frequent contact with personal tutors, though the size of tutor groups sometimes limits its potential impact. Opportunities for transfer between subjects are a strong feature. The first half term is regarded as an introductory period and changes to subject choices are thoroughly discussed.

33 The tutorial system is a major strength. Two senior tutors, with co-ordinators for each group of five personal tutors, guide and monitor the team. Clear guidelines and baseline requirements reflect firm standards, though there is some variation in the quality of the tutorial sessions. Students have weekly group tutorials as well as opportunities for individual sessions. Attendance by second-year students at tutorials was identified as a weakness by the college but this attendance rate has now increased to 80% overall. All students are encouraged to take GCE A level general studies, which is taught by personal tutors. Dedicated tutorial rooms and resources enhance the programme. Careers advice and guidance are delivered at appropriate points in the year and are supported by the local careers service. A major aspect of the guidance is sound support for individual students for their higher education applications using the electronic application system. Workshops on job-related information and skills are also offered. All students receive IT tuition, but arrangements for tuition in other



# Cross-college Provision

key skills vary in quality across subjects. The college is preparing a policy to comply with curriculum 2000.

34 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is excellent individual support for students. Academic monitoring has a high priority. Attendance is closely monitored. The use of a 'minimum acceptable grade' calculated from a student's GCSE grades provides the baseline below which students are not expected to fall. Failure by a student to achieve this minimum level of achievement triggers support which is provided in the first instance by curriculum areas. This approach is part of the inclusive learning strategy that seeks to increase subject area responsiveness to students' needs. Personal tutors may refer students to specialised learning support. Staff, student and parent opinion indicates that the process is effective and raises the student's level of achievement. A notable aspect of the system is that it applies to all students. Those making good progress are formally praised for their success. Individual progress reviews occur regularly. Some subject areas provide 'drop-in' workshops, particularly at examination times. The college is developing training opportunities for staff so that they can find ways of giving each student that degree of appropriate personal attention that can develop the individual's learning potential to the full. Specialised learning support is provided for those who need it at any stage. At the time of inspection, 50 students were receiving support for a range of needs that included: deficiency in study skills; dyslexia; stress; and physical disabilities. While the 'minimum acceptable grade' system identifies underachievers and results in an appropriate action plan, specific targets that could pinpoint the individual student's needs are not consistently identified. Support for students in departments which have conducted a curriculum skills audit is more effective than that in departments which have not yet completed such an audit.

35 Student reception is well situated near the library and provides a range of services which includes college information, welfare and financial support, counselling, and careers information. The area is well used as a base for a swipe card system that allows attendance in college to be monitored, and offers a means of daily contact between staff and students. The availability of computers helps students to use materials that are of benefit to their academic work and development of study skills. Staff respond effectively to students' requests for help.

36 Enrichment activities are wide ranging and stimulating. There is a broad programme of curriculum-linked visits. Sports activities are timetabled so that they are available for all students. Members of staff also take part. There are many opportunities for academic and creative activities. During inspection the performance of a musical was evidence of the high level of student ability and enthusiasm. Students are involved in theme weeks that link to general studies topics. These raise awareness of current affairs such as health, crime and one-world issues. Two students are involved in subgroups of the governing body. The student council has been successful in increasing the involvement of first-year students in college activities.

# Cross-college Provision

## General Resources

### Grade 2

**37 The self-assessment report is comprehensive. It details the improvements to resources and accommodation that have been made since the last inspection. Inspectors' judgements corresponded closely to those in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- effective matching of accommodation and IT strategies to curricular needs
- the enhancement of well-maintained and clean buildings by good wall displays
- attractive grounds and good sports facilities
- a well-managed and well-used library
- good IT facilities

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate access for students with restricted mobility
- overcrowding in several areas of the college

38 Since the last inspection the college has improved the quality of its buildings and general resources. It offers an attractive and welcoming environment for staff and students. The buildings are located in well-landscaped grounds. A key priority is the continuing adaptation of a building designed for a grammar school of 600 pupils to provide accommodation to meet the needs of nearly 1,400 students. As a result of a planned maintenance programme and further investment in the site, recent improvements include: new cladding and insulation to walls; window replacements; rewiring of the building; and the addition of a toilet for those with restricted mobility. Additional classrooms were created in a former corridor in a major project undertaken in 1998.

Other changes include: a new art foundation area; the use of the pavilion block as a guidance tutorial centre; an IT 'drop-in' facility; and a training suite. These improvements to the college's building stock were clearly outlined in the self-assessment report. The recent appointment of a finance and facilities manager strengthens links between estates and IT developments and the overall strategic objectives of the college. Further changes are planned to accommodate the increase in teaching hours that will result from the implementation of curriculum 2000. A planned maintenance programme accompanies the accommodation strategy. The premises are managed effectively.

39 As indicated in the self-assessment report, buildings are kept clean and in a good state of repair. Photographs of students' activities and displays of students' work enliven classrooms and corridors. The variety and quality of displays in some areas are exemplary. Most teaching is in subject-designated areas which is an arrangement that fosters subject identity. Most are well decorated and suitable for purpose. Room allocation is effectively managed. Departmental needs are reviewed annually and rooms allocated accordingly. Several parts of the building, including visitors' and students' reception areas, need modernising. Circulation spaces in the college are overcrowded at peak periods. Overcrowding in the student centre has been partially alleviated by an additional temporary extension.

40 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there are high-quality IT facilities available to staff and students. In the last three years there has been substantial investment in IT. The ratio of workstations to students is 1:7. There are currently four rooms equipped for the teaching of computing and IT, a large 'drop-in' centre, an IT training suite and facilities in the library. There are additional computers in subject areas and the staff room. Large areas of the college are networked with intranet and Internet access available

# Cross-college Provision

throughout the network. Use of the Internet is carefully monitored. Several subjects have contributed to the college intranet, which is well used and valued by students as a means of improving their learning. A college-wide IT strategy has been approved recently by the college development committee. Implementation includes the establishment of a multi-disciplinary steering group. The development of computer systems is being carefully planned to match curriculum requirements.

41 Inspectors agreed that the college benefits from a well-managed and well-used resource centre. There is a good range of books, music CDs, videos, journals and daily newspapers and 20 computer workstations. The library has a computerised catalogue and issue system designed in-house that is used effectively to monitor usage. It holds a central record of learning resources, guiding students to appropriate departmental resources. The library is no longer large enough to accommodate the number of users. Additional study spaces and small resource areas are located around the college. Library staff are working increasingly closely with subject tutors to ensure that students have access to the books and materials they need. They order books through the inter-library loan scheme.

42 Students have access to good sports and leisure facilities on site. As the self-assessment report observes, there is a modern, well-equipped sports hall and extensive playing fields that are used for GCE A level physical education and enrichment programmes including team games. The large sports hall, upstairs activity area and well-equipped fitness room are used by students during the college day and by the community in the evenings and at weekends. The bright, modern student centre incorporates a refectory which offers a wide variety of food and drink.

43 The self-assessment report recognises that access to many areas of the college is denied or severely restricted to those with mobility

problems. An accessibility survey has been carried out and the intentions are to implement it as soon as possible. The installation of a lift linking the ground and first floors is planned for the Christmas holidays 1999-2000. However, certain specialist areas will remain inaccessible.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 1*

**44 Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the self-assessment report and judged the college had addressed the few weaknesses identified.**

#### **Key strengths**

- a self-critical culture and strong commitment to continuous improvement
- thorough monitoring and review of courses and support services
- outstanding teaching and learning
- a well-understood and effectively monitored charter
- effective use of the views of students and parents
- rigorous internal inspection system
- good staff development
- accurate self-assessment

#### **Weaknesses**

- there are no significant weaknesses

45 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement demonstrated in the college mission, strategic objectives and comprehensive framework for quality assurance. Arrangements for quality assurance are clearly understood and well supported by members of staff. Since the inspection in 1995 there have been consistent, measurable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and in student retention and achievement rates.

# Cross-college Provision

46 Monitoring and review processes for all courses are thorough. They include rigorous analysis of student attendance, retention and achievement rates and take account of students' views and the outcomes of lesson observations. All aspects of students' experiences are monitored against quality standards. There are clear links between course review, self-assessment and planning. Actions identified from course review are monitored by heads of department and have led to improvements in accommodation and facilities for students, for example, the improved accommodation for media studies courses and revised strategies for teaching and learning for computer studies. There is effective monitoring of departmental action plans by divisional heads. However, there is a lack of consistency between departments in their approach to recording targets that are set against quality standards.

47 The inspectors' overall judgement on lessons matched the grade profile resulting from the college's internal lesson observations and represents a 10% improvement in lessons graded good or outstanding since the last inspection. The results of lesson observation are used to share good practice, contribute to judgements on teaching and learning and identify staff training needs. Teachers exchanged places with staff in another sixth form college to extend their range of teaching strategies and share good practice. Student retention and achievement rates show consistent improvement over the past three years from a platform of high achievement.

48 A team of internal inspectors carries out rigorous inspections every two years. Lesson observations are graded, students' work is scrutinised, achievements against target grades are analysed and students are interviewed. Inspection of departments or student support services result in a report identifying key strengths and weaknesses. Actions to address the weaknesses are identified and taken. Outcomes of internal inspection contribute to

judgements on the effectiveness of courses and support services and in developing departmental plans.

49 Inspectors judged that the college has taken effective action to improve reviews of support services. Monitoring performance against quality standards and using service users' opinions to inform judgements are part of course review. Targets are set to drive forward improvements. Monitoring of work activities and tutorials ensures quality standards are met and actions to address weaknesses are taken. For example, following an analysis of library users the librarian contacted any student who had not made use of library facilities to identify the reason.

50 Students understand the charter and its commitments. Service standards clarify exactly what the entitlements are in practice. Performance is carefully monitored against the standards. Formal and informal complaints procedures are clearly understood. To date, no formal complaints have been made. Informal complaints are monitored and reported to senior managers and governors. Feedback on complaints received and action taken are reported on college noticeboards.

51 Inspectors agreed that the college proactively seeks out students' views on all aspects of their experience at the college through course questionnaires, focus groups and the student council. The principalship meets with groups of students to share information and exchange views. Parents' views are obtained through focus groups. Action taken as a result of such soundings includes extending refectory facilities and the resolution of an issue about bus times to college.

52 Effective arrangements help to identify the professional development needs of staff. An appraisal process provides the opportunity for staff to meet with line managers to discuss training needs. The individual needs of staff together with college training objectives are

# Cross-college Provision

collated and given an order of priority in a college training plan. Induction for new staff is comprehensive. They are allocated a mentor and their progress is reviewed regularly during their first year. Staff who attend external courses share what they have learnt with their colleagues. Staff development activities in college are evaluated immediately following the event and after a further six weeks has passed. The college has recently been re-accredited with the Investors in People award.

53 The self-assessment process to which all staff contribute is well understood and linked with arrangements for planning in the college. The outcomes of course or departmental reviews and internal inspection also contribute to the process. Self-assessment grades are validated by the quality assurance group that includes managers, staff, students and a vice-principal from another college. The validation process is rigorous and includes sampling of evidence. Inspectors judged that the self-assessment report was accurate. All curriculum self-assessment grades and four of the five cross-college grades were confirmed by inspectors.

## Governance

### *Grade 3*

**54 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but found that many were overstated. They considered that weaknesses had been partially addressed, and identified additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective monitoring of students' achievements
- effective use of governors' expertise in oversight of curriculum matters
- effective attention to the financial health of the college

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements for management of governance
- lack of formal induction and training
- insufficient evaluation of governors' performance

55 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The board 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.

56 The corporation has 20 members, including staff and student members. There are currently four vacancies. There is a high level of commitment to the college and its mission, as stated in the self-assessment report. Governors have a wide range of experience, which includes accountancy, education, banking, estates and personnel. Their skills are effectively used within the finance and quality assurance committees. They are involved in the strategic

# Cross-college Provision

planning process, and receive reports on college performance against stated objectives. The average level of attendance at corporation meetings between January and December 1998 was 80% but the figure for the last 12 months is 72%. Attendance is monitored and appropriate action taken where required. All board and committee meetings, except one, have been quorate in the last 12 months. The terms of reference of the search committee were revised recently and procedures for nomination and appointment of new governors have been approved by the board. The search committee has not undertaken a formal skills audit.

57 Governors monitor the quality of college provision effectively. The board receives regular detailed reports on examination results and retention. Members are kept informed about curriculum developments through presentations at board meetings by heads of department, and by their informal involvement in areas of the college's work. A quality assurance committee meets approximately six times each year and examines elements of cross-college provision, such as student services, as well as curriculum departments. In addition two governors join the college quality assurance group, which comprises teaching and support staff, students, senior managers, and an external member. The college draft self-assessment report was discussed at a meeting of this group and evidence that was offered to support judgements was scrutinised.

58 There is no procedure to identify and analyse individual governors' training needs for use in planning a training programme. Governors who have been some years in post have not received any formal training. Recently appointed governors have attended an external induction course and the board approved the introduction of a mentoring system in December 1999. It also recognised the need to formalise induction arrangements.

59 Inspectors and auditors partially agreed with the college's judgement that the board operates openly. Board minutes are available to the public on request but this provision is not publicised. Governors have adopted a code of conduct, a 'whistleblowing' policy and a register of interests. The conduct of meetings is regulated by a recently approved set of standing orders. Governors considered a fraud policy in November 1998 but at the time of the inspection a policy had not been approved.

60 Overall arrangements for the management of governance are inadequate. The designated clerk has one day a week to carry out the duties; this is sufficient time for the main activities of the board but not all of the committees. The finance and facilities manager clerks the finance and estates committees, which leads to a potential conflict of interest. There has been little training for staff undertaking clerking duties. Board and committee supporting papers and minutes are not always distributed in good time; this shortcoming was not recognised in the self-assessment report. In a board meeting attended by inspectors the meeting was adjourned after nearly four hours without completion of the agenda. There are several examples of papers being tabled at meetings, sometimes on significant issues, and agenda items being deferred as a result. Decisions have sometimes been taken when papers are tabled which is contrary to standing orders. Minutes are not always clear and informative. The 1999 strategic plan update, annual budget and financial forecast were approved by the board after the beginning of the financial year. This action contravenes the requirements of the college's financial memorandum with the FEFC. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

61 There are clear terms of reference for the committees: finance, audit, remuneration, remuneration benchmarking, search, quality assurance and estates. The finance committee closely monitors the quarterly management

# Cross-college Provision

accounts. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors pay close attention to the financial health of the college. Over the last five years governors have successfully overseen a substantial reduction in the college's average level of funding per unit, whilst maintaining the financial health of the college. The average level of funding fell from £19.99 per unit in 1995-96 to £16.98 per unit in 1999-2000.

62 The board reviews its own performance, but the process is not sufficiently rigorous. There are no formal targets and performance indicators to help governors evaluate the effectiveness of governance. Governors have completed individual questionnaires for the past two years as a contribution to discussions on self-assessment, but the board is not sufficiently aware of what constitutes good practice in governance arrangements. Senior postholders have been appraised but not against formal targets. A new college-wide system of appraisal, which includes performance against targets, was introduced in the summer of 1999.

## Management

### *Grade 1*

**63 The self-assessment report was thorough and well referenced to sources of evidence. Inspectors agreed with the judgements.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective attention to teaching, learning and students' achievements
- good and improving levels of retention and achievement
- clear lines of communication and accountability
- strong leadership and effective management of change
- effective use of resources
- support for good planning processes from strong management information system
- good links with external organisations

#### **Weaknesses**

- there are no significant weaknesses

64 There is a clear focus on teaching and learning, student retention and achievement which is also noted in the college self-assessment report. The principal observed lessons given by all teachers when he took up post in 1998. Emphasis is placed on an inclusive learning approach, which aims to ensure that all students reach their potential. There is sufficient appropriate staff training. There is an effective appointments procedure for teachers to ensure that standards are maintained.

65 The college benefits from strong leadership. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are clear lines of communication and accountability. There has been significant change to the college's management structure since the last inspection. The college now operates with one

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vice-principal. Duties have transferred to senior teachers and support staff who sit on the college development committee. The role of the college development committee has been clarified and it is now operating well with the senior management team. Three members of the college development committee manage subject departments, and other members manage cross-college functions such as: finance and facilities, student services and quality assurance. Adult education is integrated with college structures. There is a well-documented system of meetings throughout the college. Staff understand the management structure and are clear about roles and responsibilities. One weakness identified in the self-assessment report regarding co-ordination of IT had been addressed by the time of the inspection. An open style of management has been developed. There are many opportunities for staff and students to be consulted, including a short daily meeting for all staff. The college surveys the views of parents through questionnaires and the principalship has informal meetings with groups of parents. The principalship is very accessible to students.

66 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of the review, the college's financial management is adequate. Management accounts are produced quarterly and reviewed in college development committee meetings. The accounts do not include a commentary and are not in line with recognised good practice. Budget monitoring reports include details of committed as well as actual expenditure. They are clear and easy to use. The college has recorded operating surpluses for the past three years. The college's financial regulations were reviewed recently for the first time since 1994. They had not been approved at the time of the inspection.

67 Resources are used efficiently. Staff are well deployed and morale is high. Good attention is paid to creating viable class sizes. Despite budget cuts necessitated by a

descending average level of funding per unit, inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report that the quality of the students' experience at the college remains at a high level. For example, the enrichment programme is extensive.

68 Strategic planning is well established. Departments and service areas produce detailed self-assessments, feeding into the college self-assessment report from which priorities for the strategic plan are established. Departments and service areas draw up operating statements to reflect college priorities. Inspectors found staff were clear on the mission and main objectives of the college, and had confidence in their own plans, which are well used as working documents throughout the year. In some departments there is insufficient formal documentation of processes. This shortcoming was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

69 Planning is underpinned by a reliable management information system. Staff find data produced by the central management information system to be accurate. Comprehensive data sent to departments, student services and senior managers are used for planning student numbers, target-setting and value-added measurements. For example, staff are using the information given to departments to help them monitor whether students are achieving their 'minimum acceptable grade'. The collection of information on destinations was cited as an exemplar of good practice in a recent FEFC study.

70 The self-assessment report recognised there was no formal system to review and update policies. This situation has now been addressed by the quality assurance committee. The equal opportunities policy was revised last year. There is an equal opportunities co-ordinator, and the functions of implementing and monitoring equal opportunity practice are increasingly established in college structures.



# Cross-college Provision

Students have their own equal opportunities group which is advised and assisted by the co-ordinator. The main development in terms of equal opportunities issues in the last 12 months has been linked with the inclusive learning initiative. There is also good analysis of data from an equal opportunity perspective.

However, the college is insufficiently pro-active in promoting all aspects of equal opportunities. There are clear policies and structures to implement health and safety requirements. The college uses an external consultancy. In addition, a member of the college development committee is responsible for health and safety. A health and safety committee meets regularly and an annual report goes to the board.

71 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that external liaison is good. There are effective links with schools and the careers service. The principal and vice-principal sit on various external bodies, such as the Wigan Learning Partnership. To facilitate collaboration, meetings took place with senior staff in local post-16 institutions. An association of Wigan college principals has been formed and meetings take place monthly.

## Conclusions

72 The college's self-assessment report was comprehensive and formed a good basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. It was based on a rigorous process and was evaluative and clearly presented. The judgements which it contained were supported by a range of evidence including material drawn from the application of performance indicators and comparisons of course retention and achievement rates with national averages for the sector. All sections contained an action plan. An updated report provided shortly before the inspection contained evidence of good progress in addressing weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses in the report. They agreed with all curriculum grades and with all but one of the cross-college grades.

73 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 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	89
19-24 years	1
25+ years	10
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	11
Level 2 (intermediate)	0
Level 3 (advanced)	89
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	442	172	39
Engineering	19	0	1
Business	63	0	4
Health and community care	10	0	1
Art and design	207	0	13
Basic education	649	0	42
Total	1,390	172	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 9% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	64	2	0	66
Supporting direct learning contact	11	2	0	13
Other support	26	3	0	29
Total	101	7	0	108

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£3,980,000	£3,738,000	£3,869,854
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.40	£17.37	£16.98
Payroll as a proportion of income	76%	70%	70%
Achievement of funding target	109%	104%	106%
Diversity of income	5%	4%	5%
Operating surplus	-£3,000	£229,000	£324,000

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

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

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

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

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

### 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	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Number of starters	90	64	59	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	77	88	93	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	68	100	78	0	0	0
3	Number of starters	2,586	2,804	2,904	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	75	76	86	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	89	91	91	0	0	0
4 or 5	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Short courses	Number of starters	383	682	651	359	390	407
	Retention (%)	70	95	92	74	83	80
	Achievement (%)	75	44	67	94	98	98
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Retention (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Achievement (%)	0	0	0	0	0	0

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

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