

City College, Manchester

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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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

City College, Manchester

North West Region

Inspected March 2000

City College, Manchester is a large general further education college on four main sites, three in the south and one in the north of the city. The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report. Staff from across the college were involved in the production of the report. Inspectors were able to use the report in planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report but considered that some strengths, especially in teaching and learning and students' achievements, were overstated. The college was jointly inspected by teams of inspectors from the FEFC and the TSC. The college offers a wide range of provision in nine of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Six of these areas were inspected leading to seven curriculum grades and a grade for basic skills. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected. Inspectors agreed with five of the curriculum grades and four of the cross-college grades that were awarded by the college. They also identified some additional weaknesses.

The college benefits from clear and purposeful leadership. Managers and staff understand the mission of the college and the priority it attaches

to widening participation. Most of the teaching and learning in the curriculum areas inspected is good. Students' achievements have improved in some curriculum areas but remain below the national average in others. Attendance rates are poor. The action taken by the college to improve retention rates has yet to make a significant impact. Students and work-based trainees receive good support. There is extensive and high-quality support for students with disabilities. The college makes good use of links with external organisations to research and provide for the needs of the communities it serves. There have been major improvements in accommodation and equipment since the last inspection. There are clear and comprehensive procedures for quality assurance although they have yet to have a clear effect in some areas. Governance is particularly good. Corporation members are fully involved in strategic planning and undertake a thorough review of the work of the college. The college should improve: student attendance and retention rates; the reliability of the data available to managers; provision in care; the implementation of some quality assurance procedures; and the achievement rates of students in some subject areas.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and computing	3	Support for students	1
Agriculture and floristry	2	General resources	2
Leisure and tourism	3	Quality assurance	3
Hairdressing	2	Governance	1
Care	4	Management	2
Performing arts and performance technology	2		
Humanities	3		
Basic skills	2		

The College and its Mission

1 City College, Manchester is a large general further education college operating on four major sites; three in the south of the city, at Fielden in Didsbury, Arden in Northenden and Wythenshawe and the Abraham Moss Centre in Crumpsall. It also has a learning centre in Wythenshawe Civic Centre. Formerly the South Manchester College, it was established in 1990 after the reorganisation of further and community education in Manchester. Each of the three main sites in the south of the city specialises in different curriculum areas. The Abraham Moss Centre offers a broad range of provision. The college has links with 19 franchise partners and provides courses in 26 community venues. In February 2000, the college had 19,873 students on Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded programmes. Of these students, 19% were studying full-time courses, 70% were aged over 24 and 21% were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college has over 500 students on higher education programmes. In 1998-99, the college increased the number of prisons for which it has responsibility for education from 13 to 22. It has several contracts with public and private employers to provide education and training. In 1999, the college was awarded a contract with the Employment Service to deliver specialist music courses across the North West region.

2 City College, Manchester serves the education and training needs of a city which has seen a shift away from being a centre of manufacturing to one in which the service, leisure and media industries are increasingly prominent. The unemployment rate in the Greater Manchester area is 6.8% compared with 5.7% nationally. Within the area from which the college draws most of its students there is considerable variation between areas of relative prosperity such as Didsbury and Trafford compared with wards such as Hulme, where the

adult unemployment rate is 19.7%, and Cheetham where the youth unemployment rate is 21.8%. In Manchester, the unemployment rate of 8.3% is accompanied by a major skills shortage in the city. A third of the economically active population have no formal qualifications, compared with the national figure of 19%. In 1999, 30% of young people in Manchester left school with five or more passes in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) at grades A to C, compared with the national average of 48%. Only 59% of 16 year olds in the area stay on in full-time education. The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas.

3 In some curriculum areas such as printing, horticulture and floristry, hairdressing and beauty therapy and some specialisms in art and design and performing arts, the college is a regional and national provider. The number of international students attending the college has more than doubled in the last two years to 220. There are 25 institutions providing courses funded by the FEFC within a 12-mile radius of Manchester city centre together with almost 500 private training providers.

4 The college offers a wide range of provision in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. The curriculum is organised through 28 curriculum teams which are grouped into seven clusters, each line managed by a senior curriculum manager. Provision ranges from pre-entry to postgraduate level. In November 1999, the college corporation approved an accommodation strategy which will concentrate its provision in the south of the city on two major sites.

5 The college revised its vision and mission statements in 1999 to strengthen its commitment to local communities and inclusive lifelong learning. The college vision is 'to be recognised as a provider of educational excellence, principally for the communities of

Context

Manchester and the north west, and will help shape the development of inclusive lifelong learning'. The college mission is 'to widen participation in high-quality education and training provision that will help drive social, economic and cultural development'.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 20 March 2000. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data for students' achievements for 1999, which were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies, and were found to be mostly reliable. However, during the inspection, some aspects of data were found to be inaccurate. The data which inspectors regarded as reliable were used to compile the tables in curriculum area reports. In hairdressing the data were not reliable enough to publish. The college was notified of the sample of work to be inspected two months before the inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by 17 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 58 days. Inspectors observed lessons and examined samples of students' work and a variety of college documents. Team members met students, governors, managers, staff, and representatives of local organisations, schools, the careers service, Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Manchester City Council and Manchester Adult Education Service. Six inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training supported by the college in agriculture,

business administration, media and design, foundation for work and hair and beauty. They interviewed 120 trainees and visited 17 placements. In relation to judgements contained in the self-assessment report they interviewed employers and their staff and reviewed evidence in the workplace and in the college. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 107 lessons inspected, 72% were judged to be good or outstanding and 3% were less than satisfactory. These judgements compare favourably with national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	3	3	0	0	7
GCSE	1	3	2	0	0	6
GNVQ	2	3	1	1	0	7
Access to further education	1	2	1	0	0	4
Access to higher education	0	0	3	0	0	3
NVQ	5	15	8	0	0	28
Other vocational	8	19	6	2	0	35
Other*	3	11	3	0	0	17
Total (No.)	21	56	27	3	0	107
Total (%)	20	52	25	3	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 basic education

8 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 (%)
City College, Manchester	7.4	60
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Computing

Grade 3

9 The inspection included general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCSE mathematics courses, numeracy and computing at levels 1 to 3 and an access to higher education certificate. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses and several strengths that were overstated.

Key strengths

- a broad range of courses
- flexible arrangements for teaching and learning in mathematics
- high-quality learning resources

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement on many courses
- gaps in the arrangements for the co-ordination of mathematics across the college
- some inadequate monitoring of students' attendance in workshops

10 The college offers a broad range of courses in computing, a strength partly identified in the self-assessment report. Basic level courses are available through workshops in the learning centres. More advanced courses are offered as timetabled courses. A variety of specialist part-time courses are available. Mathematics is taught through learning centres on two sites and by the humanities team on the others. Flexible arrangements at workshops allow students to attend at times which suit them and to study the subject at a level appropriate to their ability. Students can study numeracy, GCSE, foundations of mathematics and GCE A level. This was recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. Self-study materials and

teacher support in workshops are of good quality. Students' progress is closely monitored, but individual target-setting needs further development. The monitoring of students' absence is not dealt with consistently at different sites. Teachers do not always know whether students on their register are continuing with the course or not. Students' punctuality is often poor.

11 Schemes of work clearly indicate progression routes for students. Some lesson plans are only a list of topics to be covered. Lessons are generally well prepared and some make appropriate use of industrial exemplars. For example, in a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) information technology (IT) lesson students prepared documents and advertisements for the small businesses with which they were linked. In some lessons, teachers do not adequately check at appropriate stages that individual students understand what they are expected to learn. Some teachers make insufficient use of students' previous subject knowledge. In most lessons students are involved in the planned activities and respond well to tasks set. In one mathematics lesson a deaf student was supported effectively by a signer.

12 In computing, course specifications, materials, assignments and student progress sheets are available on the network. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Assignments are well designed, although formats differ. The criteria for achieving grades is not always made clear. Key skills are assessed through the vocational assignments. Students' work is accurately assessed. In some instances, the feedback students receive lacks detail. Internal verification systems are in place and external verifiers' reports are good, a strength identified in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

13 Student retention and achievement figures have fluctuated over the last three years. In GCSE mathematics retention figures are below the national average for the sector for the last three years but have improved. A revised college strategy to allow students to choose between GCSE mathematics or numeracy has contributed to this improvement. Achievements in GCSE mathematics are now above the national average. Retention in GCE A level mathematics is below the national average for one-year and two-year courses but achievement rates are now above. GNVQ intermediate IT programmes have retention and achievement rates below national averages. Recruitment to GNVQ advanced programmes has increased and, although retention and achievement rates have improved, they remain below national averages. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report. On the Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) diploma in IT, achievement has improved and is now significantly above the national average. On access courses in IT, retention rates are above, and achievement rates are in line with the national average. On the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numeracy at stages 2 and 3, achievement is significantly above the national average but retention is below.

14 Most courses are well managed. As indicated in the self-assessment report, retention and achievement data are available on the college network and are discussed at course meetings. Course reviews are carried out, although there are some differences in format in the two areas. It is not always clear, however, if actions identified had been completed. Cross-site teams meet regularly to discuss curriculum matters. Those responsible for implementing the co-ordination and development of mathematics or numeracy across the college have too few opportunities to share good practice or to develop common methods for teaching the curriculum. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

15 Inspectors agreed with the strength in the self-assessment report that students have good access to high-quality computer resources. There is a good range of books, videos and CD-ROMs on all sites. Teaching staff are well qualified and have industrial experience. The difficulty of keeping industrial experience up to date was recognised in the self-assessment report. Although staff are making efforts through employer links and courses to remedy this, there is no structured plan to ensure it happens.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G stage 2 numeracy	2	Number of starters	30	53	113
		Retention (%)	63	73	60
		Achievement (%)	68	66	34
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	325	318	136
		Retention (%)	60	51	65
		Achievement (%)	21	20	32
OCR diploma in IT	2	Number of starters	*	136	124
		Retention (%)	*	77	80
		Achievement (%)	*	38	82
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	45	35	39
		Retention (%)	62	71	59
		Achievement (%)	27	82	43
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	6	18	28
		Retention (%)	100	50	57
		Achievement (%)	83	43	53
GCE A level mathematics (one-year and two-year course)	3	Number of starters	20	67	44
		Retention (%)	70	37	50
		Achievement (%)	31	76	44
C&G stage 3 numeracy	3	Number of starters	48	27	23
		Retention (%)	94	67	67
		Achievement (%)	35	69	85

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

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Agriculture and Floristry

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed lessons in horticulture, floristry and environmental conservation. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and most of the strengths. Some of the strengths were overstated. Inspectors from the TSC observed training in horticulture and floristry for six work-based students.

Key strengths

- provision responsive to local needs
- good links between theory and practice
- high standard of teaching in practical sessions
- good retention and achievement on many of the horticulture courses

Weaknesses

- key skills not an integral part of the curriculum
- insufficient attention to meeting the learning needs of all students
- low retention and achievement on national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 floristry and Royal Horticultural Society courses

17 Provision in horticulture and floristry caters for a broad range of local needs with courses from foundation to level 3. There is also an NVQ level 2 in environmental conservation but enrolments are low. The college is responsive to the needs of students and industry. There are good opportunities for students wishing to enter the industry for the first time, and these attract students with a broad range of age, experience and ability. For many of the qualifications students can choose between different patterns of attendance. There are good links with industry. The college has modified the curriculum to meet the needs of industry and students use local facilities for their

practical work. An advisory group keeps industry representatives informed about the college's work, but attendance is low. The self-assessment report overstates the strength of student progress review and action-planning. Although there are good opportunities for students to regularly review progress with their tutor, some of the reviews and action plans are of poor quality. As the self-assessment report identifies, the integration of key skills with the curriculum is weak. Improvements are taking place but arrangements for developing and monitoring these skills are underdeveloped. TSC inspectors identified that key skills are not yet effectively integrated with the work-based programmes and that the trainees were unaware of key skill requirements.

18 Most of the teaching is good. In practical lessons students develop their competence as well as their understanding of topics. The practical tasks are effectively linked to the related theory and students are given clear guidance on how to improve their performance. In NVQ level 2 floristry lessons, students were able to work at a pace suited to their needs and could receive assessment on request. Teachers gave them good guidance and carefully reviewed their work with them to highlight areas for improvement. The self-assessment report did not identify that in some lessons insufficient attention is given to meeting the needs of individual students. Some teachers fail to check regularly the level of understanding of all students. Students spend too much time copying notes at the expense of paying full attention to the teacher's exposition. In a few practical lessons not all students are effectively involved in the work.

19 Many of the specialist resources are good. The curriculum section has a contract with the college's estates department for maintenance of the extensive grounds on two campuses. This provides realistic sites for practical work. There are sufficient turf areas for students to gain initial practice in managing grass areas and these are supplemented by using local golf courses. There is a good supply of hand tools

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and machines for routine maintenance work. There is ample bench space for floristry work and sufficient storage, including a large cool store. Appropriate use is made of part-time teachers to complement the range of expertise of the full-time staff. The self-assessment report identifies that the full-time staff lack recent industrial experience. The college has now provided a programme of short industrial secondments for teachers.

20 Retention rates for many horticulture courses improved last year. All students completed the vocational foundation course and the retention rate for the NVQ level 2 amenity

course is well above average. The retention rate for the Royal Horticultural Society general course has increased significantly and is now comparable with the national average, but the achievement rate has remained low. The proportion retained on the NVQ level 2 floristry has declined and is relatively low. Last year all of the vocational foundation students were successful. Achievement rates improved last year for the NVQ level 2 in amenity horticulture and NVQ level 1 commercial horticulture and were high. They have declined and are low for the NVQ level 1 in amenity horticulture; the numbers enrolled on this course have dropped significantly this year.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Vocational foundation certificate	Entry	Number of starters	*	*	36
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
NVQ amenity horticulture	1	Number of starters	44	60	22
		Retention (%)	84	63	77
		Achievement (%)	50	69	50
NVQ commercial horticulture	1	Number of starters	14	5	26
		Retention (%)	100	100	69
		Achievement (%)	77	25	94
C&G horticulture skills	1	Number of starters	35	56	44
		Retention (%)	74	80	93
		Achievement (%)	69	83	68
NVQ floristry	2	Number of starters	53	66	62
		Retention (%)	75	68	60
		Achievement (%)	45	70	67
NVQ amenity horticulture	2 and 3	Number of starters	46	37	50
		Retention (%)	87	65	90
		Achievement (%)	55	88	85
Royal Horticultural Society general and diploma in horticulture	2 and 3	Number of starters	45	51	48
		Retention (%)	64	33	58
		Achievement (%)	39	38	29
Certificate of competence	3	Number of starters	77	220	147
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	82	80	79

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

*course not available

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

21 The inspection covered all full-time courses in leisure and tourism. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the aspects identified as strengths were no more than examples of routine practice. Some weaknesses, particularly those related to students' achievements, were given insufficient weight or were omitted.

Key strengths

- a broad range of courses and good opportunities for progression
- well-planned external visits to enrich the curriculum
- effective use of travel and fitness centres
- excellent use of IT
- good community links

Weaknesses

- inadequacies in management of some courses
- poorly planned assessment on advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism courses
- low levels of punctuality and attendance
- poor retention and achievement rates on many courses
- insufficient emphasis on retention and achievement in course reviews

22 The college offers a broad range of courses, with good progression routes from foundation to higher education courses. Good community links with Manchester Airport Fire Service, Manchester City Council and extended links with Oldham Council have led to the development of bespoke courses and well-managed franchised provision. There are excellent opportunities for full-time students to study for additional vocationally specific qualifications. Some

courses are less well managed than others. Schemes of work vary from the excellent to the very brief. Course teams are scheduled to meet regularly; they do not always do so. Some team minutes are incomplete; actions are not adequately recorded and monitored. Some course reviews lack rigour and do not give sufficient emphasis to retention and achievement. Internal verification procedures on some courses are not effective.

23 The quality of most teaching and learning is satisfactory. Although there are examples of good and, in some cases, outstanding teaching, inspectors considered that the self-assessment report overstated this aspect of provision. A well-planned visits programme for GNVQ courses enriches the curriculum. There is excellent use of IT on NVQ travel services and GNVQ leisure and tourism courses. Good use is made of both the travel and fitness centres for work-based assessment. In the best lessons, teachers sustain students' interest, extend their knowledge and skills and use an appropriate variety of learning methods to meet individual needs. In one lesson on teamwork, students had to imagine their plane had crash landed in the desert. The practical survival exercise they then completed incorporated teamwork and problem-solving skills very effectively. In some weaker lessons teachers did not always make lesson aims and objectives clear to students. The attendance and punctuality of students is a significant problem recognised, but understated, in the self-assessment report. In some lessons students have to wait for the session to start to allow latecomers to arrive. Practical activities do not always involve all students and are not always concluded effectively. Teachers do not provide sufficient comments on marked work to guide students towards improving their performance. Students' assessment on GNVQ programmes is excessive and the assignment designs often result in student submissions in excess of 50 pages.

24 Achievement and retention is poor on a significant number of courses, a weakness omitted from the self-assessment report. For

Curriculum Areas

example, in 1996-97 on the NVQ travel services course, achievement was 32% below the sector average and retention 14% below. Retention on the GNVQ intermediate course in 1997-98 was 11% below the sector average and achievement 13% below. In 1997-98, retention rates on the GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism course were 14% below the national average and fell by a further 10% in 1998-99. Some courses have made significant improvements in students' achievements between 1997 and 1999. On the GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism course achievement has improved by 53% and retention by 10%. Both achievement and retention have improved on the NVQ travel services course.

25 Significant improvements to the quality of accommodation have been made over the last 12 months by removing an old mobile classroom, upgrading two others and creating new classrooms. The department has benefited from the addition of a large computer suite, which is extensively used by students. Some excellent Internet self-study packs have been developed for students to use. Learning materials used in lessons are of a high quality. Teachers have a wide range of vocational expertise and experience and all have a formal teaching qualification.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism	1	Number of starters	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	56
Travel Training Company/Lufthansa ticketing (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	*	27	45
		Retention (%)	*	81	80
		Achievement (%)	*	26	6
Royal Life Saving Society national pool lifeguard (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	22	117	47
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	95	42	2
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	19	22	11
		Retention (%)	63	64	73
		Achievement (%)	33	57	86
NVQ travel services	2	Number of starters	51	26	29
		Retention (%)	65	81	83
		Achievement (%)	18	89	83
NVQ sport and recreation operational services	2	Number of starters	25	19	11
		Retention (%)	84	84	91
		Achievement (%)	38	25	50
NVQ sport and recreation exercise fitness	2	Number of starters	25	37	28
		Retention (%)	72	67	75
		Achievement (%)	39	76	85
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	Number of starters	24	16	18
		Retention (%)	46	56	44
		Achievement (%)	36	67	83

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing

Grade 2

26 Inspectors observed lessons at levels 1 to 3 in hairdressing. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. They identified some additional weaknesses and considered some strengths to be overstated. Inspectors from the TSC observed off-the-job training in hairdressing for 40 work-based students.

Key strengths

- good range of provision
- integration of key skills in specialist lessons
- high standards of fashion and competition work
- good support for students within main specialist lessons
- efficient curriculum management
- effective assessment and internal verification processes

Weaknesses

- insufficient emphasis given to health and safety issues
- declining retention rates on some courses
- adverse effect of inaccurate data on assessment of provision

27 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a good range of full-time and part-time courses which meet the needs of students and industry. Courses range from entry level to higher national diplomas. The provision is flexible and responsive. Short courses are offered in complementary studies to improve students' skills. Inspectors agreed that the curriculum is well managed. Course teams meet every four to six weeks to discuss students' progress and course developments. Courses are well organised and well planned. Course

documentation is thorough and regularly reviewed. TSC inspectors agreed that an effective system of assessment and internal verification has been developed.

28 Most teaching is good or better. In the best lessons, teachers used a variety of activities to motivate their students and make learning enjoyable as recognised in the self-assessment report. There is good integration of key skills in specialist lessons. In one NVQ level 1 lesson, students participated in a bridal style competition to design, plan and create a style on a mannequin head. The students worked in teams and were assessed in communication and teamwork. Students responded enthusiastically and were highly motivated. In most lessons there is good student interaction and teachers regularly check students' understanding. In classes of mixed ability, team teaching ensures that all students receive appropriate attention. In a minority of lessons, teachers fail to alert students to instances of poor practice, and health and safety issues. Students' portfolios are well organised and feedback from teachers on assignment work is constructive and clear. This had been an area of weakness in the previous inspection report, as was the lack of work placement opportunities. All full-time students now attend a work placement.

29 NVQ level 3 students produce excellent written work and presentations. There is a high level of competition work developed in practical lessons. Students have won a national competition for African-Caribbean hair styling for three consecutive years. In one lesson, January starters on an NVQ level 1 were encouraged to participate in fashion work at an early stage of their course. The standards achieved were good and equal to that expected of level 2 or 3 students. Most students are up to date with their assessments. TSC inspectors agreed that in some practical lessons a lack of clients prevents the development of a commercial environment. Data on retention and achievement provided for inspectors proved to

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be incomplete. This led to some overstatement of the strengths of students' achievements in the self-assessment report. Most courses have achievements in line with the national average for the sector. However, retention is declining on some courses and is below the national average on some courses. A procedure to address student absence has been implemented which is beginning to have a positive impact. FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed that there is a high level of support for students in specialist lessons. Over 100 full-time and part-time students receive additional support with language, numeracy and communications.

30 Teachers have relevant teaching and vocational qualifications. All staff participate in professional updating. In 1997, a fire at the Abraham Moss Centre resulted in a major refurbishment to update facilities and equipment. At the Wythenshawe centre, a further salon was opened to accommodate increased student numbers. There are aspects of salon hygiene at the Wythenshawe site which would not be acceptable in a commercial environment. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. All salons have a computer with Internet access and there are a number of portable computers on both sites. Learning resources and work packages are of a high standard.

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Care

Grade 4

31 Inspectors observed lessons in health and social care. They agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report but identified additional key weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good use of students' experiences in teaching and learning
- closely monitored work experiences
- wide range of provision

Weaknesses

- low achievement rates on many courses
- poor retention rates on most courses
- poor collection and collation of data
- ineffective action-planning and target-setting to address weaknesses
- poor quality of some schemes of work

32 As identified in the self-assessment report, the college offers a wide range of provision, from foundation to advanced levels in childhood studies, health care and access to social work. In response to new government initiatives, the college is working in partnership with the National Childminding Association and has also become an assessment centre offering NVQs in playwork and early years education.

33 Inspectors judged that the college had overestimated the quality of its teaching and learning. Most lessons are well prepared but lesson plans do not indicate how the teaching will take into account the differing learning needs of students. Teachers make effective use of stimulus worksheets and handouts. These relate well to students' experiences, promote useful discussions and enable students to apply theory to practice. In one lesson, the teacher distributed some 'good practice' guidelines to assist students in planning a range of activities

for children. Discussions centred around the educational and social purposes of such activities in a multi-cultural setting. There was effective assessment and reinforcement of learning throughout the lesson. The development of key skills is effectively integrated with the work in most lessons. Many schemes of work lack detailed reference to the expected learning outcomes; a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Students are not always made aware of the aims and objectives of lessons. Work experience opportunities are available on all courses and are effectively monitored. Students' progress is regularly reviewed and integrated with coursework. Individual students receive sufficient support during work placements where individual action-planning is common. The setting of specific targets and action plans for academic work is less rigorous. A communication support worker and additional support worker are effective in assisting students to complete their studies.

34 The self-assessment report acknowledges that the reporting and recording of data on students' achievements is inadequate, resulting in inaccurate publication of students' achievements data. Inspectors agreed with this judgement and considered that insufficient attention is being given to address this. Course reviews are held for each course and targets are set for enrolment, retention and achievement. In the 1999 course reviews, there are clear discrepancies between the data held at course team level and that held centrally by the college. Collection and collation of data is poor. Course co-ordinators are not always clear about retention or achievement rates. There is insufficient analysis of retention and achievement when setting targets. As a result, targets for 1999-2000 appear to be unrealistic.

35 Students' work is well presented and displays an appropriate level of understanding and application of skills. Assignment work is sufficiently demanding and students appreciate

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the constructive feedback that they receive from teachers. Full-time students have the opportunity to achieve additional relevant qualifications in first aid for childcarers, basic food hygiene and IT. As noted in the self-assessment report, some students and staff have participated in European exchanges with partners in Germany.

36 Centrally held college data show poor retention and achievement rates on many courses. For example, of the 52 students who started a GNVQ advanced health and social care course in 1997, only 24 completed it in 1999 and only 12 achieved the qualification. In the previous two cohorts, no student achieved the qualification. There are ineffective strategies to address weaknesses in students' achievements. The self-assessment report understates weaknesses in retention and achievement. Attendance is poor on some courses. There was a 61% attendance rate in the lessons observed by inspectors.

37 All staff are appropriately qualified and, as stated in the self-assessment report, have professional qualifications and expertise in their vocational area. All teachers hold assessor awards. Two members of staff have recently undertaken short placements in health visiting and in a local school. The learning centres have an adequate stock of relevant books and journals. Class sets of texts are retained in the curriculum areas. Accommodation is generally fit for purpose. Wall displays of students' work are of a high quality and help to provide a stimulating environment for most courses. There is a good supply of audiovisual equipment.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
CACHE certificate	2	Number of starters	39	38	38
		Retention (%)	59	55	53
		Achievement (%)	43	95	*
GNVQ intermediate health and social care (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	58	55	23
		Retention (%)	59	55	70
		Achievement (%)	0	17	22
GNVQ advanced health and social care (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	49	35	52
		Retention (%)	33	37	47
		Achievement (%)	0	0	50
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	99	136	57
		Retention (%)	66	57	64
		Achievement (%)	61	68	*
National diploma in childcare and education	3	Number of starters	31	77	38
		Retention (%)	97	70	65
		Achievement (%)	67	65	90

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

*data unreliable

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Performing Arts and Performance Technology

Grade 2

38 Inspectors observed lessons in performing arts, music and music technology. They agreed with the majority of the judgements identified in the self-assessment report. However, inspectors considered that the conclusions drawn from the college's lesson observations were too generous and that insufficient weight was given to weaknesses relating to poor retention and achievement.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- exciting performance opportunities
- good range of courses and extensive internal progression routes
- relevant industrial experience of teaching and support staff
- extensive, well-resourced music and music technology provision

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates in performing arts and theatre studies
- low retention rates on some courses in performing arts and theatre studies
- ineffective assessment in performing arts (drama)

39 The college offers full-time courses at levels 2 and 3 in a range of subjects. Part-time provision is available in music, sound recording and drama. Higher education courses are available in music and drama providing good internal progression opportunities. Courses are taught at two sites. Careful planning makes best use of the facilities at each site. A first diploma in performing arts is offered at a local school to encourage progression to post-16 education.

The college also offers courses in carnival skills in the community in preparation for the local 'Streets Ahead' festival. There is a fast-track national certificate course in popular music offered as part of New Deal provision.

40 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there is much good teaching. In a music technology lesson the teacher gave a clear explanation of stereo microphones in a well-equipped room. Good examples of recorded music were used to illustrate the theory. The assignment which followed was well related to industrial practices. In performing arts (drama) courses, assessment activities are not always well planned. Students on these courses complained about the late return of marked assignments.

41 Teachers make good use of their knowledge and experience to offer advice to students on career opportunities in the field. A music technology teacher provided unbiased careers advice based on a thorough knowledge of the student's needs and abilities. A wide range of performance opportunities are available to students, including organising and playing gigs in local music venues, performances in the college theatre and on tour to local schools. The college's 'Raw Fish' record label enables music students to take part in record production. Part-time students on the evening music technology course recorded a student band from the popular music course as part of their assignment on multitrack recording.

42 Inspectors observed a consistently good standard of work in lessons. Students demonstrate competent technical and computer-based skills in music technology and sound recording and good general musicianship skills on popular music courses. They are confident in their application of acting skills in drama. In theatre studies and performing arts lessons students develop good teamworking skills and sound practical knowledge and understanding of their subject. Achievement rates on music

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technology courses have been good for the past two years. Those on performing arts and GCE A level theatre studies are low. Retention rates on the first diploma in performing arts have improved to above the national average for the sector but are low on many other courses. The self-assessment report understated the importance of low retention and achievement rates.

43 Teaching and technical support staff are well qualified with up-to-date industrial experience. Staff are effectively deployed. Music and music technology equipment and accommodation are of an excellent standard on both sites. The 'Cook/Freeze' studio, as noted in the self-assessment report, is a result of major investment by the college. It has purpose-built music rooms to complement the older 'Cutting Rooms' studios. There are good performance facilities for all courses.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First diploma performing arts (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	42	49	45
		Retention (%)	67	73	81
		Achievement (%)	43	57	68
National certificate music technology (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	32	37	56
		Retention (%)	88	78	82
		Achievement (%)	69	90	86
GCE A level theatre studies (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	18	16	11
		Retention (%)	50	56	60
		Achievement (%)	57	44	50
National diploma music technology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	39	38	42
		Retention (%)	59	42	67
		Achievement (%)	61	87	82
National diploma performing arts (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	109	90	93
		Retention (%)	46	39	72
		Achievement (%)	78	82	71
National diploma pop music (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	*	18	45
		Retention (%)	*	50	52
		Achievement (%)	*	89	68

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

*course not available

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Humanities

Grade 3

44 The inspection included GCSE and GCE A level social science and access courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but considered that the college's definition of strengths lacked clarity. They agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but noted others.

Key strengths

- much good teaching on access courses
- effective support of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- key skills effectively embedded in access courses
- successful use of target-setting for GCE A level students

Weaknesses

- poor attendance, retention and achievement on many courses
- lack of appropriate variety in teaching methods on GCE A level and GCSE courses
- inefficient development of key skills on GCE A level and GCSE courses

45 This provision is managed by two operations managers across four teaching teams. Most students are aged over 19 and studying part time. The college has structured the timetable of humanities courses to enable students to attend while meeting their other responsibilities. The cultural studies access course has been remodelled to ensure that the content is related more closely to the experience of students who take it.

46 Communication within and between the teams is too informal. There is a lack of standardisation of key documentation in course management. These weaknesses were not

identified in the self-assessment report.

Although there is a recognised system of course and subject team meetings, decisions made are not clearly recorded and actions are too often left to the discretion of individual members of staff. Schemes of work vary greatly in quality from simple lists of topics to detailed programmes which relate resources and assessment to teaching and learning methods.

47 Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Profoundly deaf students are given excellent assistance both by signers and teaching staff. A GCSE lesson with a group which included profoundly deaf students made use of a clip from the television show 'Friends' with the sound removed. This successfully helped to develop students' understanding of non-verbal communication. Records of support needs of students are well kept. Two adult students reported that their dyslexia had been diagnosed for the first time by the college and that they were receiving effective support. This strength is not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

48 The inspectors broadly agreed with the college's overall assessment of teaching and learning as a strength. The teaching on access courses is consistently good. In most lessons teachers took care to respond to individual students' needs. At its best the teaching was stimulating, varied and well structured. On an access course, excellent use was made of a project involving the planning for a residential visit to a Lake District village for the purpose of an investigation into the decline of a rural community. However, in several lessons observed, there was a lack of variety in the teaching methods used. This is a particular concern in relation to class management given the long length of lessons required by the timetable structure. Key skills are effectively integrated with access courses but not with GCE A level and GCSE courses.

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49 The self-assessment report recognises weaknesses in retention, attendance and achievement. The overall retention rates show a continuing decline on many courses.

Attendance and punctuality continue to be a problem with less than 50% of students on register being present for some lessons during the inspection. Although levels of achievement are improving, particularly on GCSE and GCE A level courses, on most courses students' achievements are below the national average.

50 Teaching staff are well qualified and a number are continuing to update their qualifications. Several staff are external examiners or moderators in areas relevant to their work at the college. The base rooms have a stock of suitable audio-visual equipment but they lack proper blackout facilities.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	141	83	54
		Retention (%)	67	51	46
		Achievement (%)	20	52	63
GCSE social studies (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	39	10	10
		Retention (%)	75	38	42
		Achievement (%)	23	50	50
GCE A level (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	71	76	33
		Retention (%)	72	58	40
		Achievement (%)	31	35	48
GCE A level (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	18	39	25
		Retention (%)	33	29	41
		Achievement (%)	44	41	48
Access certificate in adult access to further and higher education (multi-subject)	3	Number of starters	21	11	12
		Retention (%)	81	50	86
		Achievement (%)	81	55	0
Access certificate in vocational access (social work/teacher training)	3	Number of starters	19	15	13
		Retention (%)	86	65	72
		Achievement (%)	89	87	69

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

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Basic Skills

Grade 2

51 Inspectors observed lessons which included separate specialist literacy and numeracy sessions, provision for students in vocational areas, and one-to-one support sessions. They agreed with the overall judgements in the self-assessment but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good course documentation
- high achievement on numeracy courses
- excellent provision for deaf students
- good systems for internal verification

Weaknesses

- poor attendance and punctuality in some lessons
- limited range of methods in the teaching of literacy

52 The college offers a range of opportunities in basic skills provision, as described in the self-assessment report. There are lessons that focus specifically on literacy or numeracy. Students can attend college for one or both skills and many combine this with attendance at IT lessons. Students on other programmes in the college can also attend these lessons. In addition, basic skills teachers work in vocational areas, such as hairdressing and horticulture, to address the basic skills needs of students on those courses. Students also obtain individual support through the learning centres. There is a college co-ordinator for basic skills, who has direct responsibility for work organised through the learning centres. There are other teams involved in teaching literacy and numeracy, for example, mathematics staff and staff working with students with learning difficulties. There are appropriate links between teams. The

amount of basic skills work in the college is growing. There is a clear strategy at college level for the development of this work. For example, the college has recognised the need to develop further links between basic skills and vocational areas and the need for more entry level provision. There is no operational plan showing how the different teams involved in basic skills will contribute to the strategy.

53 Schemes of work and other course documentation is good. Sound procedures have been developed for internal verification across teams and across sites. Teaching is generally sound. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that tasks are well suited to the abilities of individual students and the work set takes account of students' interests. For example, one lesson was structured around a case study on the allocation of a council house. Students had to discuss the merits of a number of applicants and decide which would be successful. Each student was then allocated individual follow-up work, such as sending a letter to the unsuccessful applicant or sending an internal memorandum within the housing department. There is good practice in numeracy lessons; the materials available enable students to work at their own pace and teachers are skilful in helping students to understand concepts. In a few literacy lessons, students were given work that was not appropriate to the level they had reached. Attendance and punctuality are poor in some lessons. Students' work folders are not well organised. Students have their progress reviewed more frequently on some courses than others.

54 There is outstanding provision for students who are deaf, as described in the self-assessment. One numeracy session contained a number of deaf students and one blind and deaf student. The teacher was also deaf. The way the learning was structured and the thought given to materials and support requirements was thorough and effective. The

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level of work was demanding but so well structured that it enabled students to make progress. Students were in good control of their learning; for example, in work being carried out on angles, there was a good rapport between the teacher and the student to ensure that each point was understood before they moved on.

55 There is too much emphasis on students working on their own in workshops and too few opportunities for students to work together. The curriculum concentrates too much on the requirements of an accreditation system and in so doing, prevents teachers from making time to consolidate students' development of basic literacy skills. There are no specific short courses which focus, for example, on spelling or oral skills.

56 For students taking qualifications in literacy, achievements over the last three years have been close to the national average. Numeracy results are well above the national average. Retention is similar to national averages on literacy and numeracy programmes. In most lessons, students are developing confidence and skills. For example, students on hairdressing and catering courses are making better progress in their assignments as a result of basic skills support. Adult

students report improved skills that help them with jobsearch or with their children's homework. There are examples of students progressing to more advanced provision within the college and with other providers.

57 Most teachers are well qualified. Resources are adequate and there is good sharing of learning materials between staff. Students are encouraged to wordprocess their work, where appropriate, but there is little use of IT as a teaching aid. Much of the work takes place in the learning centres so that learning materials are easily accessible. However, some lessons took place in rooms that were too hot or too small or which suffered from extraneous noise from other areas of the learning centre.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 3793 in communication skills foundation (Wordpower)	Entry	Number of starters	41	25	34
		Retention (%)	68	80	76
		Achievement (%)	21	41	45
C&G 3793 in communication skills stage 1 (Wordpower)	1	Number of starters	132	144	151
		Retention (%)	83	73	75
		Achievement (%)	51	50	49
C&G 3750 stage 1 numeracy	1	Number of starters	30	184	141
		Retention (%)	70	83	79
		Achievement (%)	71	70	85

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

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Support for Students

Grade 1

58 The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. Action has been taken since the self-assessment report was written to address identified weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-organised enquiry and admissions system
- strong commitment to provide a wide range of support
- effective and well-developed mentor scheme
- outstanding support for deaf, blind and partially sighted students
- extensive support services for a diverse student community
- effective tutorial and induction programmes
- extensive and productive external links

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

59 The college makes a strong commitment to support students on all its sites. Additionally, it provides support services to those studying at other locations, a judgement supported by the TSC inspectors who found that the 140 trainees received good support. Student support is managed by a vice-principal and is organised into three clearly defined teams. An operational manager leads each team. Support across the college is co-ordinated by the student support group.

60 Publicity materials are clear and attractive. One publication is in magazine format, with interesting articles relating to programme areas. It includes a wide range of student profiles

reflecting diversity. There are effective systems for dealing with students' enquiries. Trained admissions, advice and guidance staff provide high-quality services to students on all sites. Targets are set for these services and progress made in achieving them is monitored regularly. Inspectors agreed with the college that this is a strength.

61 The schools liaison team work with 87 partner schools. They visit schools and hold open evenings. The college has developed particularly strong links with 15 mainstream and special schools. The work involves pupils from year 7 to year 11. Specific projects are undertaken for pupils across the whole range of abilities. Schools value the partnerships. The work is enhanced by the mentor team. This team was set up to work with Black and Asian heritage students. It is now working with schools and community groups to encourage recruitment as well as supporting current and past students. The team is currently working one-to-one with around 200 students and with 500 students through group work. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that this is a strength.

62 The college has a well-planned and clearly documented induction programme. This is complemented by course specific activities and information. There is a good induction handbook for deaf students. Students generally find induction helpful. Part-time students follow a shorter induction programme. Inspectors agreed with the college that induction is a strength.

63 There is extensive support for deaf, blind and partially sighted students. Students are fully involved in the thorough assessment arrangements. There are regular reviews of individual support involving the student and staff. External agencies are invited to these reviews, where appropriate. Students with learning difficulties receive particularly good support. There is a wide range of support for

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students with physical disabilities. Students benefit from additional support for mathematics and English. Specialist assessment and support is available for dyslexic students. Over the last four years the numbers receiving study support through the learning centres has increased from 2,292 in 1996-98 to 3,690 in 1998-99. The student support group evaluates the effectiveness of student support through a case study approach. This has already led to adjustments being made to the ways in which support is given to improve its effectiveness. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that this is a strength.

64 All full-time students have group and individual tutorial sessions. There is a tutorial policy and guide which allows tutors flexibility to vary arrangements according to the needs of students. There are varied but appropriate arrangements for the tutorial support of part-time students. Distance learning students receive tutorial support through electronic mail, by letter or by telephone. All tutorial sessions observed by inspectors were good or outstanding. College support services make inputs to the tutorial programme. Students spoke highly of the support they received. Inspectors agreed that tutorials are a strength. The college has a system for recording the achievements of students and gaining accreditation for them through a scheme validated by a local university.

65 Inspectors agreed with the college that students benefit from a wide range of support on personal and social issues. These services are well promoted through the induction pack, leaflets and posters. Part-time students receive a card with relevant staff names and telephone numbers. Services are available on all college sites and off-site students have an equal entitlement to them. Counsellors are trained and operate to British Association for Counselling standards. Accommodation services are available for both home and international students. The college offers subsidised childcare facilities on each site. Financial advice is

extensive and includes help in applying for access funds and help in searching for other financial support. Students receive assistance with their higher education applications. The college has promoted this service to part-time students. There is a productive partnership between the college and the local careers company. The company values the high level skills of the college careers advisers. The college identified as a weakness the lack of specialist support for students with mental health problems. It has started to develop this service with the recent appointment of two trained and experienced co-ordinators.

66 Support services are enhanced by the additional skills offered by specialist staff. These skills include community languages, British Sign Language and knowledge of disability issues. The support team has provided a wide range of relevant training for teachers and business support staff. Despite the wide range of support for students, the college has poor and below average attendance and retention. Various strategies to remedy this are being tested, but there is no evidence of any significant improvements across the college as yet.

General Resources

Grade 2

67 Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified an additional key weakness.

Key strengths

- improvements in accommodation since the last inspection
- well-researched accommodation strategy
- substantial investment in IT resources
- well co-ordinated learning centres
- excellent resources for visual and hearing impaired students

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Weaknesses

- underutilisation of space and high running costs
- underdeveloped systems for monitoring use of the learning centres
- few social and recreational facilities for students

68 The learning environment provided by the college's accommodation on its four main sites is of a good standard. The sites have been developed to respond to changing curriculum priorities and to achieve a stronger sense of corporate identity. The college's self-assessment acknowledges the substantial underutilisation of space and high running costs associated with its multisite operations. It has undertaken a detailed evaluation and consulted widely with the communities it serves to inform its accommodation strategy.

69 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that good progress had been made to improve accommodation since the last inspection. At the Fielden centre, temporary classrooms have been replaced with upgraded teaching accommodation in the main building. Car parking at this site has been extended by 75 spaces to address longstanding parking difficulties. At Wythenshawe, a high specification media centre has been established. Following severe fire damage at the Abraham Moss Centre in 1997 the college has very successfully redeveloped the site to create a more distinctive learning environment. The ground floor reception area has been refurbished to provide a more attractive and welcoming foyer with adjacent registry, admissions and guidance service.

70 The self-assessment acknowledges that there is a lack of adequate social and recreational facilities for students across all sites. Inspectors agreed with this judgement. The college has established fitness centres at

some of its sites and created designated smoking zones for students. However, progress on establishing other social areas for students has been slow. The college has made good use of income from commercial sources to subsidise refectory and childcare facilities which, in general, are of a good standard and meet students' needs. There is, however, a shortage of crèche places at the Abraham Moss site. Refectory times are restricted at the Wythenshawe and Arden sites. Students with restricted mobility have good access throughout the college. At the Fielden site there is restricted access to the top floor corridor but there are plans to install new lifts. The college recognises the deficiencies in the toilet facilities on each of the sites and there is an action plan to address these shortcomings.

71 There are good-quality learning centres on each site. They are well equipped and well used and are effectively co-ordinated by a team that operates as a cross-site service. Each learning centre incorporates the college library service, access to computers and the Internet, mathematics and IT workshop provision and audiovisual services for the site. The centres have a wide range of resources. Expenditure on resources for the learning centres, other than computers, has increased from £93,000 in 1997 to £145,000 in 1999. The college collects statistical data on student usage of the facilities. However, systems for computerised monitoring of use are underdeveloped and do not enable timely and detailed analysis. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The resources to support students with visual and hearing impairment are a particular strength and include specialist software and computer-based audiovisual equipment and customised learning materials. The materials are prepared and converted to the individual students' preferred medium, for example, Braille, large print, disk or tape. The college's use of technology to support these students was recognised with a national award in 1999.

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72 The college has made substantial investment in its IT equipment. There is a well-considered IT strategy and developments are co-ordinated through a representative steering group. Over the last four years the average annual expenditure on IT has amounted to approximately £450,000. This has ensured that the specification of the majority of equipment is up to date. There are 737 workstations for students' use across the sites in learning centres and specialist areas. There is an overall ratio of one workstation to seven full-time equivalent students. Access to IT at each of the sites is good and the equipment is well used. A fast Internet access to all networked computers caters for the growing demand for student research through the Internet. There is an impressive range of specialist and general purpose software to meet curriculum needs. The college website is used as a resource for the curriculum and good use is being made of the intranet for staff information and teaching materials. An 'on-line' team are developing a technology-based curriculum for use in the college.

73 In some curriculum areas earnings from commercial income have made a valuable contribution to improving resources. For example, the college recently won a national contract to write open learning materials for the New Deal for musicians scheme which provided additional funding to support the sound recording, music technology and multimedia facilities. Support services are enhanced by the additional skills offered by specialist staff. These skills include community languages, British Sign Language and knowledge of disability issues. The support team has provided a wide range of relevant training for teachers and business support staff. Despite the wide range of support for students, the college has poor and below average attendance and retention. Various strategies to remedy this are being tested, but there is no evidence of any significant improvements across the college as yet.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

74 Inspectors agreed with most strengths in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong management commitment to quality improvement
- comprehensive, clear procedures for quality assurance
- a wide range of staff development activities well linked to planning

Weaknesses

- insufficient emphasis on students' retention and achievements in the self-assessment report
- incomplete implementation of some quality assurance procedures
- lack of progress to improve some retention and achievement rates

75 As the self-assessment report asserts, the college has made good progress towards developing a self-critical commitment to quality improvement. The senior management team takes responsibility for quality assurance. It draws on the work of the academic board, the curriculum standards committee and the customer services committee. Senior managers take a leading role in quality assurance initiatives and make clear to staff the priority they attach to continuous improvement. The comprehensive annual self-assessment process involves all teaching and business support teams in assessing their strengths and weaknesses.

76 The profile of lesson observations as judged by inspectors has improved since the last inspection. In 1996, 63% of lessons were judged to be good or outstanding compared with 72% in 2000. The percentage of unsatisfactory lessons declined from 6% to 3%. Inspectors

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agreed that the college triennial system of inspection, called internal assessment, is a strength as noted in the self-assessment report. Small teams drawn from across the college, and normally including a member from outside the college, conduct assessments of both teaching and business support areas. Reports are scrutinised by a management review group.

77 As stated in the self-assessment report, the college charter is readily available and students are aware of the charter commitments, complaints and comments procedures. A wide range of methods is used to evaluate students' opinions. Their representatives are members of many course and other teams. Students' views are used to inform course reviews.

78 Inspectors agreed in part with the self-assessment report that there is a rigorous quality assurance system for monitoring the curriculum. The system is well understood by staff. Courses are reviewed on a regular basis using a framework agreed by the college's curriculum standards committee. However, inspectors noted several instances where procedures are not fully implemented. For example, a few course reviews lack rigor and performance indicators are not always used appropriately to inform judgements. Action plans arising from course reviews do not always identify clearly the action to be taken or the person responsible for implementing it. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the use of employers' perceptions is underdeveloped, though the college has worked to improve this situation since the last inspection. In some business support areas the range of service standards has not been implemented or evaluated fully. The internal verification process has a clear policy, guidelines and reporting structure. In some curriculum areas the system is not fully applied across all courses.

79 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college's arrangements for staff development are a strength. There is an

extensive programme of activities that is well matched to the college's strategic objectives, particularly for widening participation and inclusiveness. Managers and staff evaluate the usefulness of events and disseminate the outcomes, as appropriate. Individual staff development needs are identified through the appraisal process and through classroom observations and contribute to team training plans. Participation in staff development activities is high. The staff development budget is 1.57% of payroll, though this is augmented by additional college-arranged activities. New staff are effectively inducted to the college and to their area of work. The college makes thorough arrangements to support promoted staff and those who change their roles.

80 Although the college's self-assessment report for 1998 identified weaknesses in retention and achievement, they were not identified as weaknesses in the latest report. Inspectors acknowledge that the college is making strenuous efforts to improve attendance and retention, and there are examples of effective strategies in some curriculum areas. However, their impact is as yet limited in the college as a whole. There is no consistent trend across the college of improving retention and achievement and several courses have rates significantly below national averages. These weaknesses are judged by inspectors to remain as key issues for the college to address.

81 The self-assessment process is firmly based on the college's quality assurance system. Evidence supporting judgements was clearly referenced and progress made since the last inspection was highlighted. The length of the report far exceeded the limits suggested in Council Circular 97/13, *Self-assessment and Inspection*. The report drew on strengths and weaknesses identified by course and business support teams and governors. Curriculum area evaluation frequently failed to give sufficient critical attention to weaknesses in teaching and learning and to students' retention and

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achievements. The profile of lesson observation grades derived from internal inspection was more favourable than that awarded by inspectors. Grades awarded to three out of the eight curriculum areas inspected were worse than those given in the self-assessment, including one area judged by the college to be good, where an unsatisfactory grade was awarded by inspectors.

Governance

Grade 1

82 The college is well governed. Inspectors agreed substantially with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- full involvement of governors in strategic planning
- thorough and systematic review of college performance
- effective recruitment and induction procedures
- good use of the wide range of governors' skills and expertise
- effective conduct of corporation and committee business
- systematic arrangements for monitoring the performance of the corporation

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

83 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.

84 The corporation has 19 members. It has achieved its new determination under the modified instrument and articles, with the exception of the TEC governor who is serving out her remaining term of office. There are no vacancies. Between them, governors have a wide range of skills, professional expertise and community knowledge, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. For example one governor, who is a chartered surveyor, has made very useful contributions on strategic accommodation issues. Average attendance at corporation and committees is good, although attendance specifically at corporation meetings has not achieved the target agreed by governors of 80%.

85 Clerking arrangements contribute to the efficient and effective conduct of corporation and committee business. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. The highly experienced clerk, who is also a senior postholder and director of the college's subsidiary companies, has a separate job description and is appraised by the chair of the corporation, in his clerking role. The corporation has not, however, considered some aspects of the independence of the clerk. Minutes are prepared and distributed promptly; agendas and supporting papers are sent out in good time and are to a high standard. There is a standing item on the agendas of all committees and the corporation to review actions arising from previous meetings.

86 Committees work closely within their terms of reference and they make an annual report to the corporation. The financial position of the college is reviewed quarterly at meetings of the finance and general purposes committee. The search committee has been effective in monitoring the corporation's transition to the new determination and has successfully recruited new governors to meet the needs identified by the skills audit. A student services committee has recently been established to develop further links with students.

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87 The corporation seeks to make information on its business widely available. Corporation and committee minutes are available in the four learning centres; other documents including the register of interests are available on application to the clerk. There is minimal use of confidentiality in corporation and committee business. The corporation has an approved 'whistleblowing' policy. The governors' handbook, recently re-issued to all governors, is a useful document incorporating the corporation's standing orders and the code of conduct updated to include Nolan's seven principles of public life. The college recently held its fourth open annual general meeting.

88 As recognised in the self-assessment report there is a good relationship between governors and senior college managers, based on a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. The corporation is well briefed on relevant national issues and has a clear understanding of, and commitment to, the community served by the college, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Governors take an active part in developing the strategic direction of the college. There is a well-established and successful annual residential meeting which focuses on strategic planning and governor training. In November 1999, having initiated a review of the college accommodation strategy, governors debated and approved a new accommodation strategy, ensuring that it linked closely with the overall college strategic plan.

89 Auditors and inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that the corporation's review of the performance of the college is thorough and systematic. Governors receive reports according to an approved annual schedule. Each corporation meeting receives summaries of the financial position, unit achievement, franchise arrangements and accommodation issues. Annual reports are presented for a range of college activities including students' achievements, curriculum quality, the annual curriculum plan, IT strategy,

health and safety and sales and marketing. Governors prioritise their monitoring of student and curriculum targets at corporation meetings, having decided that they will not delegate standards issues to a committee.

90 The governors are committed to self-assessment as the key to continuous improvement and apply this to their own activities, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. A framework incorporating performance measures has been approved by the corporation as the basis for this process. Governors in their search for measures of good practice are currently exploring the possibility of using benchmarking data as part of the process of monitoring their performance. A further strength of the systematic monitoring of effective governance is the induction and review process established for governors. Reviews with the chair or vice-chair are scheduled after one and three years of membership, prior to any consideration of re-appointment.

Management

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- purposeful and open leadership
- innovative performance monitoring system
- positive and active response to national and local initiatives
- effective communications across the college
- comprehensive strategic planning process
- effective promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- some inadequate curriculum management
- aspects of management information

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92 The college has recently reviewed its vision and mission and re-established a number of core values which are reflected in its strategic plan. These highlight a clear commitment to equal opportunities, widening participation and to serving the needs of the local community. Inspectors agreed that the values are given a high priority by managers and are reflected in the strategies they pursue. A clear strategic planning calendar and a three-year planning and consultation process means that all staff are able to make a contribution to the future direction of the college. Key strategic issues are derived from the mission. The college has extensive links with the community it serves and is involved in regeneration projects in the city. It has actively sought opportunities to work with other agencies which have attracted European Union and British government funding. A particularly effective marketing team undertakes a range of research and promotional activities. They have produced a student postcode analysis and have carried out a local household survey in order to identify potential needs more effectively. The information is widely disseminated and used throughout the college to develop provision to meet students' needs. These strengths were identified in the college's self-assessment report.

93 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that it is managed effectively. The senior management team provides strong leadership and sets a clear framework for planning. Targets for teams and individual managers are derived from the strategic objectives. They are updated twice a year and they are published for all to see. Individual targets are monitored through an innovative system of supervision. This operates through the line management structure and serves as a regular forum for monitoring progress made against targets. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that communications are effective and that the college is managed in an open and transparent manner. A deliberate strategy of involving staff from different levels in

the organisation on working parties and committees aids communication. Fortnightly senior management team meetings are followed by a series of cluster meetings which bring together staff from different sites. College policies and minutes of senior management team meetings are published on the college intranet.

94 Inspectors identified weaknesses in curriculum management. The quality of some course documentation was poor and the use made of it less than adequate. Lesson plans and schemes of work for some courses lacked detail and the use made of target-setting to identify and monitor improvements was not always effective in some curriculum areas. Absence rates are very poor in some subjects and poor student punctuality is not always addressed effectively. Although a computerised registration system is currently being piloted at one of the college centres, strategies to improve attendance have yet to make an impact across the college.

95 Since the last inspection there have been significant developments in the computerised management information system. All managers have access to the central database of student records. However, inspectors considered that the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that effective management information systems are in place was premature. Inspectors found examples of unreliable information being used by course teams. In these curriculum areas, the lack of accurate data on retention and achievement prevents the college from monitoring trends in students' performance over several years.

96 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has generated historic cost surpluses in the last three years, it has significant cash balances and income and expenditure reserves. The management accounts are considered monthly by the senior management team, and quarterly

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by both the finance and general purposes committee and the corporation. The financial regulations, which have been recently reissued, are reasonably comprehensive. The college's internal auditors, in their 1998-99 annual report, concluded that the college had adequate systems of internal control, although some concerns regarding the student records system were identified. The college has detailed budgetary procedures and monthly monitoring reports are issued; on-line access to these reports is being developed for budget holders.

97 As noted in the self-assessment report, equality of opportunity is well promoted and effectively managed in the college. A strategy group meets twice a term to monitor and review actions and policies and also to develop new areas of work. Progress towards achievement of the college's staff equality targets is monitored by the employment policy committee of the corporation. The corporation receives an annual report on student service issues which includes an analysis of complaints relating to equal opportunities issues. In addition, complaints are analysed by age, disability, gender and ethnicity.

Conclusions

98 The self-assessment report provided a useful basis on which to plan the inspection. Staff from across the college had been involved in its preparation. It built upon the college's well-established quality review procedures. Its length, however, far exceeded the guidance provided by the FEFC to colleges. The way in which some strengths and weaknesses were expressed did not always enable inspectors to discern clearly the judgement being made. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the cross-college grades where they awarded a worse grade. In five of the curriculum areas, inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment grades. In two curriculum areas, inspectors awarded a grade one below

those given by the college. In one curriculum area inspectors awarded a grade which was two below the college's grade. The self-assessment had not fully taken into account weaknesses in students' achievement and overstated strengths in teaching and learning.

99 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 (February 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	11
19-24 years	8
25+ years	70
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (February 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	45
Level 2 (intermediate)	34
Level 3 (advanced)	17
Level 4/5 (higher)	3
Non-schedule 2	1
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	337	4,293	23
Agriculture	171	672	4
Construction	34	0	0
Engineering	69	146	1
Business	358	2,152	13
Hotel and catering	170	481	3
Health and community care	716	4,891	28
Art and design	1,000	772	9
Humanities	545	2,103	14
Basic education	299	664	5
Total	3,699	16,174	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 56% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	201	368	0	569
Supporting direct learning contact	74	30	0	104
Other support	256	152	0	408
Total	531	550	0	1,081

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£25,159,000	£26,193,000	£28,700,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.46*	£16.23*	16.22*
Payroll as a proportion of in	66%	65%	71%
Achievement of funding target	102%	99%	99%
Diversity of income	43%	45%	52%
Operating surplus	£751,000	£1,100,000	£215,000

Sources: Income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Payroll - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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

Diversity of income - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	667	1,030	1,113	4,513	4,093	3,574
	Retention (%)	83	79	80	84	78	75
	Achievement (%)	48	50	45	60	54	57
2	Number of starters	1,128	1,256	1,005	3,347	3,736	3,173
	Retention (%)	63	63	66	76	74	76
	Achievement (%)	33	53	59	51	62	56
3	Number of starters	664	718	682	2,552	3,630	2,557
	Retention (%)	63	62	69	72	77	77
	Achievement (%)	51	62	52	37	66	65
4 or 5	Number of starters	*	14	*	299	259	256
	Retention (%)	*	86	*	81	76	75
	Achievement (%)	*	45	*	26	31	45
Short courses	Number of starters	836	1,188	1,409	7,213	10,053	11,341
	Retention (%)	95	87	94	96	91	96
	Achievement (%)	44	69	68	61	76	72
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,158	1,415	1,137	2,789	2,962	2,764
	Retention (%)	85	81	76	82	82	80
	Achievement (%)	11	58	60	22	50	51

Source: ISR

*less than five students

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