

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

City of Liverpool Community College

May 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council 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 every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 64/97

CITY OF LIVERPOOL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected May 1996-February 1997

Summary

City of Liverpool Community College is the largest college in the north west region. It was formed from the amalgamation, over a period of five years, of eight general further education colleges and has made good progress in consolidating these into a single college. It offers a broad range of vocational and general education courses and a large number of programmes for students who have not usually entered further education. Governors and senior managers work well together. An effective equal opportunities policy has been implemented across the college. There are extensive and productive relationships with a wide range of community groups. Relationships between managers, teachers and students are positive and supportive. Many students on vocational courses and on access to higher education programmes achieve good results. On GCE A level courses adults do well but results for 16 to 18 year old students are generally poor. The college is working hard to improve its attendance and retention rates which are poor on many courses, particularly among full-time students. The college should: develop courses to meet the needs of local businesses; improve provision in mathematics and computing; improve curriculum management; further develop effective learning support and tutorial programmes for all students; develop a wider range of approaches to teaching and learning; implement rigorous and consistent course evaluation systems; and initiate improvements in accommodation, pending completion of the building programme.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	1
Governance and management	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	3
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	4

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	3	Health and social care,	
Mathematics and computing	4	hair and beauty	3
Construction	3	Art, design, performing arts	2
Engineering	3	English and languages	2
Business studies	3	Other humanities	3
Hospitality, catering, leisure and tourism	3	Adult basic education	2
		Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2

INTRODUCTION

1 The City of Liverpool Community College was inspected between May 1996 and February 1997. Inspectors spent a total of 155 days in the college. They inspected the enrolment and induction of students, observed 448 classes, examined students' work and held discussions with staff, students, governors, parents, employers and representatives of local schools, community groups and Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). They attended college meetings and examined a wide range of college documents.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The City of Liverpool Community College is the largest general further education college in the north west region and one of the largest in England. It was established through a series of mergers of further education colleges which began in 1986 when eight colleges were reorganised to four. In 1991, these four colleges were merged to form the City of Liverpool Community College. It is the only further education college in Liverpool and serves a population of approximately 470,000. At incorporation, the college operated on the sites of the eight colleges from which it was formed. Most vocational and some general courses were provided at each of 16 large centres, and community-based education was provided at more than 60 outreach centres.

3 During the last two years, the college has embarked on a large-scale restructuring programme as part of the strategy to locate all vocational and general education programmes on four main sites by the end of 1999. Centres have been closed and provision has been relocated. Three of the remaining centres are in the city centre where opportunities for refurbishment and rebuilding are limited. The provision in these three centres will be relocated to a new city centre building, construction of which is expected to be completed early in 1999. Further closures are planned in 1997 and 1998. Three existing centres, located across the city, are to remain open and will undergo extensive refurbishment over the next two years. Community education will continue to be delivered at a large number of outreach centres.

4 Thirty-three schools in Liverpool offer post-16 education, mainly general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects. An increasing number also offer general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses. In addition to the City of Liverpool Community College, there are three general further education, two tertiary and three sixth form colleges in the Merseyside region. In 1995, the proportion of 16 year olds in Liverpool who stayed in full-time education, was 56 per cent. Of these, 48 per cent continued their education at City of Liverpool Community College. Eighteen per cent of school-leavers entered youth training and 4 per cent, the lowest percentage in the north west, entered employment. The remaining 22 per cent were either unemployed or their

destinations were unknown. In 1995-96, 67 per cent of students at City of Liverpool Community College did not pay tuition fees, either because they were in the categories of students whose fees are remitted by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), or because the college waived their fees in recognition of financial hardship. Eighty-three per cent of students aged 16 to 18, and 78 per cent of adult students, are from Liverpool.

5 The industries from which Liverpool derived economic strength have declined rapidly and Merseyside has been less successful than other major urban regions in attracting higher level service sector businesses and jobs. The European Union has recognised the economic difficulties of Merseyside and has designated it an 'objective 1' area; that is, one in which the gross domestic product per head of population has fallen to below 75 per cent of the European Union's average.

6 The 1991 census indicates that Liverpool had an overall unemployment rate of 21 per cent and a youth unemployment rate of 37 per cent. Figures produced by the city council in 1995 indicate that unemployment had fallen to 17 per cent. This compares with average figures of 9 per cent for the north west and 8 per cent for the United Kingdom as a whole. The minority ethnic population in Liverpool make up 4 per cent of the population compared with 8 per cent of college students. Three inner-city wards contain 40 per cent of the black population of which 20 per cent are black youths aged 16 to 24. The college has initiated a number of programmes aimed specifically at these residents.

7 The college is a major provider of education and training in Liverpool and Merseyside. It works in partnership with the city council, Merseyside TEC and the Merseyside European Colleges group. In addition to a wide range of courses from foundation to advanced levels, the college offers a number of higher national certificates and diplomas, and courses leading to postgraduate and professional qualifications. Some courses attract students from outside the region. These include clothing technology, motor vehicle maintenance, performing arts, music, theatre costume, journalism and waste management.

8 The college's activities take place within a framework of equality of opportunity. The statement of aims underpins the strategic objectives and operating statement found in the college's strategic plan and divisional development plans. The college's mission is to be 'a community resource for the people of Liverpool'. The aim is 'to provide quality, equality and value in programmes offering access to and progression within education, training, employment and personal development'. The college 'is committed to playing its full part in the economic, cultural and social life of the city, locally, nationally and internationally through a development plan designed to deliver a quality service'.

9 In July 1996, the college had 18,049 students, 5,607 of whom were full time and 12,442 part time. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2

and 3. The college employs the equivalent of 1,142 full-time staff. Of these, 637 are teachers and a further 202 directly support learning. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college provides a broad range of general education and vocational programmes in all major curriculum areas except agriculture and is making a significant contribution to the achievement of the national targets for education and training. There is a wide choice of courses, both full time and part time, and opportunities for progression in most areas. The range includes:

- a substantial programme of courses in adult basic education and in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)
- provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. (At the time of the inspection, 161 full-time and 436 part-time students were following discrete courses, 43 full-time and 66 part-time students were following vocational courses and 213 were on inclusive education courses)
- national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in 31 vocational areas, 12 at level 1, 31 at level 2 and 23 at level 3
- GNVQs in eight programme areas, four of which allow progression from foundation to advanced level and four from intermediate to advanced level
- Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diplomas in eight subjects, half of which are in engineering; BTEC national diplomas in 19 subjects, the majority being in the performing arts and engineering; BTEC national certificates in 17 subjects, most of which are in engineering and construction
- BTEC higher national certificates in three specialist construction areas, in four specialist engineering areas and in business administration
- BTEC higher national diplomas in engineering, business, leisure management and the performing arts
- 40 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects offered during the day, 18 in the evening
- 39 GCE A level subjects offered during the day, 22 in the evening
- one of the largest access to higher education programmes in the country with courses in 10 different curriculum pathways
- vocational programmes in hairdressing, business administration and motor vehicle engineering, which include work placement with employers for four days each week.

There are a few gaps in provision. For example, the lack of an NVQ level 3 in beauty therapy, means that students have to go elsewhere to further

their studies in this area. There is also limited provision in the evenings for students of adult basic education and ESOL.

11 Students on vocational courses are able to enhance their learning through a range of complementary activities. These include opportunities to take additional or supplementary qualifications and to participate in international exchanges. Many students make visits outside the college and visiting speakers are used on many courses. Catering students take over a hotel in the Lake District for a weekend and successfully undertake all the jobs in the hotel. BTEC national diploma three-dimensional design (display) students join the visual display team of a large department store, when it is redesigning its departments; students assemble displays, offer suggestions and identify housekeeping needs. Students on general education courses have fewer opportunities to extend their experiences.

12 Marketing is well organised. Effective use is made of market information from a range of sources to provide a detailed picture of the community. Staff are given a clear calendar of marketing activities and comprehensive guidelines for all aspects of communication with prospective students. Promotional activities are monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. Publicity materials are easy to understand, widely distributed and available in numerous community languages. The system for dealing with telephone enquiries from prospective students is clear and responsive. There is an electronic prospectus which is regularly updated. Despite this, the corporate image of the college is not strong. The signs on some college buildings are not clear enough to make them easily recognisable as belonging to the college and some are poorly signposted. In buildings used, but not owned, by the college there is little indication that college courses take place on the premises. There are few clear, well-publicised points of contact for employers seeking customised training and some employers commented adversely on this. Students often identify with the centre which they attend rather than the college as a whole. Marketing information has had insufficient influence on the curriculum. Development of new courses, for example NVQ and GNVQ courses in engineering and construction, has been slow. In some instances, staff hold new courses in lower esteem than the courses they replace, which is discouraging for students. There has been little development of materials which students can study on their own, either in college or at home.

13 The college promotes equality of opportunity strongly. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and accompanying procedures, including the complaints procedure, are understood and supported by staff. Implementation of the policy is closely monitored and action plans are drawn up in the light of the information gathered. The college provides 'listeners' to whom students can turn if they feel they are being harassed in any way. The college's disability statement, which is available in Braille or on tape, emphasises that students should discuss their needs on an individual basis and explains clearly the support available in the college.

However, it does not clarify who to contact for further information or how to make a complaint if a student's needs are not being met.

14 The college makes great efforts to remove barriers to study. Financial support packages are available to students and fees are waived for large numbers of them. Free nursery places are available at eight of the main centres and in a few outreach venues. Access and other courses are timetabled to fit in with adults' domestic and childcare responsibilities. Many vocational courses are scheduled for 16 hours a week to enable job seekers to enrol on them. Students on these courses are given help to investigate job opportunities and careers prospects. The college has been very successful in gaining external funding for projects to increase the participation of groups not usually involved in further education and training. Many of these projects have become established as part of the college provision. They include:

- access courses for black people
- training programmes and other opportunities for people with disabilities in sport
- a guidance and support service for ex-offenders
- an education and training programme for people recovering from drug addiction, provided in collaboration with a charity
- a wide-ranging programme for women, offering courses such as carpentry, motor vehicle engineering, information technology, communications skills and a women's perspective on history
- a college-wide support group for women engineers
- a course combining English and journalism for the Somali community
- a foundation science course for speakers of languages other than English
- courses for excluded school pupils
- a growing number of 'drop-in' study centres in community buildings.

15 The college has productive relationships with a wide range of community groups. Senior managers take an active part in the 'community pathways partnerships' established to prioritise projects seeking European Union objective 1 funding. The college has maintained a positive relationship with Liverpool Local Education Authority (LEA) and works productively with the LEA on adult basic education programmes across the city. The college holds the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) quality kitemark. Good links with higher education establishments in the city and the region help students to progress and enable staff to work with colleagues from the higher education sector. The college has seconded a teacher to the British Broadcasting Corporation thus widening its network of contacts in the media to the benefit of students.

16 Liaison with schools is inconsistent. Participation in the city's vocational education group and the technical and vocational education initiative promote liaison on vocational issues and there are effective links in areas such as hairdressing, care and art and design. Some subject areas, for example science, computing and humanities have few links with schools. Most of the schools in the city compete with the college for 16 to 18 year old students and this impedes more extensive liaison. Attempts to establish links with parents of students under the age of 18 who are studying on humanities courses have not been successful. Despite the demographic increase in the number of 16 year olds in Liverpool, and their low participation rate compared with regional and national averages, the college has not been successful in its aim of increasing the number of 16 year olds enrolling at the college. Indeed, over the last two years, there has been a decline.

17 Courses do not always meet employers' needs, particularly when the college has gathered insufficient information about employers' views on the relevance of the courses it offers. A narrow range of work-based courses has been developed in response to requests from employers but some have very low student numbers. Generally, the college does not make sufficient effort to meet the needs of local employers. For example, there are few part-time courses for the professional development of staff from the computer industry and no concerted strategy to develop full-cost or in-house business studies courses to meet the changing needs of local businesses. With the exception of some courses in engineering and construction, development of workplace training and assessment is in its early stages. There are good links with those employers who offer work placements to students. The college participates in the local education business partnership and in TEC working groups. In the TEC's view, the college could make a larger contribution to the economic development of the city by providing more training for the employed and by improving the enterprise skills of students through business-related activities such as the young enterprise scheme.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 Governors take their duties seriously. They are highly committed to the development of the college and its contribution to the community of Liverpool. The board has 18 members. There are six independent members who together have a range of business experience and expertise, three co-opted members including the chairman, a representative of the TEC, two community members including one from higher education, three staff members including the principal and one student representative. At the time of the inspection, there were two vacancies. The board has a balance between men and women and includes members from minority ethnic groups. Members collectively have a good range of contacts in the city. They receive clear and comprehensive information from the college in well-prepared board and subcommittee papers and background briefings. Senior managers are responsible for maintaining links with the

chairs of all subcommittees and ensuring the timely preparation of papers. Members have reviewed their development and training needs. In September 1996, the board set its own performance targets which include; an attendance rate of 70 per cent, participation in training, and the establishment of links with academic divisions. So far during 1996-97 the average rate of attendance at main board meetings is 85 per cent, and one-third of governors have a 100 per cent attendance record. Training sessions have been held for governors on such matters as their roles and responsibilities, the impact of the Nolan committee recommendations, and the future of further education.

19 Governors take part in the strategic planning process though they are careful to avoid inappropriate involvement in operational issues. They undertake detailed strategic planning through the work of the subcommittees for finance and general purposes, employment policy, audit, equal opportunities, remuneration, search and nomination. Governors have worked hard to understand the financial and legal context within which the college has operated since incorporation. Business members are critical of the volatility of the further education financial environment, comparing it adversely with their experience of the commercial world.

20 Policies have been developed for major aspects of cross-college provision. Most have been endorsed by the board. Responsibilities for the monitoring and implementation of these policies are set out clearly. Generally they are effectively implemented. The learning support policy is not monitored as well as most other policies and it has not been disseminated sufficiently widely.

21 The college inherited a number of structural and financial problems at incorporation, including the need to develop a single college culture while operating in a large number of centres. Much of the early strategic planning necessarily focused on these problems and the college has made good progress in addressing many of them. The staffing structure has been revised and there has been a reduction of over 300 posts, including 195 teaching posts and 21 management posts. Ninety-four per cent of teachers are on new contracts. Savings on staffing expenditure continue to be made. New job descriptions place increased emphasis on cross-college roles and responsibilities. A network of committees and working groups involves staff in planning, monitoring, quality assurance and resource management. Efficient communications systems and standard, documented procedures for all centres reinforce the single college culture. A comprehensive accommodation strategy has been developed and is being implemented. Relationships between staff are generally cordial and respectful and there is a sense of shared purpose. Harmonious working relationships between senior managers set the tone for other staff.

22 The senior managers, comprising the principal, the deputy principal, the three heads of academic divisions and the directors of estates, finance and resources, work well together as a team and have a shared understanding of strategic issues. The curriculum is managed through three divisions each containing three groups of programmes. The nine programme groups broadly replicate the FEFC programme areas and are each managed by a director of studies. Within each group, clusters of courses are managed by curriculum group managers. Directors of studies work closely with business support managers and report directly to the senior management team. The management structure is understood by staff. They are clear about managers' positions and responsibilities. The personnel function is well managed. Customer services and other college-wide support units have been strengthened. Responsibilities for managing curriculum development and quality improvement are clearly identified although they are not always carried out effectively. Not all directors of studies and curriculum group managers have adequate skills to lead their sections. Training for changed roles has been provided internally. It could usefully be supplemented by more focused training for some managers following their appraisal.

23 There are plenty of opportunities for staff to keep themselves well informed. Committee minutes take the form of brief action points and are circulated quickly. Two staff newsletters and a helpful regular bulletin offer information to staff at all levels. Training and information events are held regularly. A number of committees and working groups operate across the college. Designated times for staff meetings are intended to allow curriculum teams to meet frequently. Since staff belong to several different teams, and a number of teams involve staff from several centres, some of the teams have difficulty in meeting on a regular basis. In many instances, there is a failure to share effective practice or to develop common solutions to shared problems. There is scope to improve communications by using electronic systems.

24 Internal audits and reconciliations of enrolment and registration data have led to increasingly reliable management information. However, curriculum managers do not make effective use of management information to set realistic targets and monitor performance. In some sections, there is poor understanding of performance indicators and little action is taken to improve performance. Although the college has recognised the adverse effects on student recruitment and retention of a poor or unattractive learning environment, too little has been done to improve accommodation. There is not yet an effective strategy for setting and achieving targets for student numbers. At the time of the inspection, the individual student record relating to student numbers for 1995-96 had not been returned to the FEFC.

25 The procedures for allocating staff, and resources are well documented and staff understand them. Resource allocation is not linked to performance indicators. There are no calculations of unit costs at course

level. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 was £23.13 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £18.13 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Despite efficiencies made to date, staffing costs are still high as a percentage of college expenditure. The college is heavily dependent on public sector funding. Little encouragement is offered to staff to develop income-earning activity, other than applications for grants. Targets for income generation are very low. The college has projected a fall in the proportion of work funded from sources other than the FEFC over the next two years.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

26 Prospective students are offered a range of opportunities to find out about college courses. There are two open evenings in March, aimed at school-leavers. An open evening aimed at adults is timed to coincide with the national publicity for Adult Learners Week. A course information centre has been established with a dedicated course enquiry line. Staffing is increased at peak enrolment times. The number of telephone inquiries rose from 7,200 in the summer of 1995 to 17,100 in same period in 1996. In 1996, a new customer services section was introduced to help staff to respond to applications within a specified time. Letters to applicants offering interviews, and subsequent offers of places, are based on standard formats which can be adopted to suit individual courses. Staff respond to requests to attend careers conventions and the college has a small programme of vocational link courses which allow school pupils to sample its provision or to attend the college as part of their school programme.

27 There are well-documented, standardised procedures for admissions and enrolments. The enrolment sessions inspected were well organised. Directional signs were clear, staff were welcoming and helpful and staff from student services were available throughout the enrolment period. Staff and students considered that the new customer services were operating successfully. Applicants who were clear about their choice of course were interviewed directly by course tutors, who then completed a record of initial guidance. Other applicants were offered an impartial guidance interview with student services. A few students were given inaccurate information about their courses.

28 Staff are very welcoming to new students. In the early weeks of a course, students are encouraged to consider whether they have made the correct choice, to visit student services for further advice if necessary, and to transfer to a different course if they feel they have made the wrong choice. Equal opportunities and harassment policies and procedures feature strongly in student induction. Comprehensive student handbooks give general information about the college and also contain unusual features, such as details of bus routes and the addresses of LEAs. Students find these useful. Many induction sessions were well designed. They engaged students' interest and provided them with a clear

introduction to their course and to the college as a whole. At two of the four centres visited by inspectors, several induction sessions involved long periods of information distribution and did not enable students to discuss the issues that were concerning them or to get to know each other and their tutor. Some second-year students were given the same information as those entering their first year and did not find the experience useful.

29 Advice and guidance arrangements are managed by student services. They are well publicised and generally effective. Students are offered impartial educational guidance, personal counselling and welfare advice, including financial advice and comprehensive information on benefits. Many student services staff have qualifications and training specific to their role. Nine professionally-qualified counsellors offer 40 hours of counselling a week across the college. A full range of services operates at five of the main college centres. A partial service is available at a further seven locations including two outreach centres. One student services centre is open each evening. Students can drop in to see student service staff or make appointments at any centre at a time which suits them. Student services staff are not yet using client profiles, comprising, for example, information on students' age, ethnicity and courses, as a management tool to evaluate the service. The college intends to monitor more carefully the standards of guidance offered across the college as a whole.

30 The provision of tutorial support is inconsistent. The college itself identified during 1995-96 that large numbers of full-time students were not receiving tutorial support as part of their course. An action plan was developed in September 1996 to ensure that all full-time students and those on part-time programmes longer than one day a week receive timetabled tutorials. Training of course tutors in guidance skills has begun and some tutors have been seconded to work for part of their time in student services. Useful resources have been developed to support the tutorial programme, including time management and career planning materials and a personal tutor handbook. The action plan is still in the early stages of implementation and only a minority of courses, for example access and art and design courses, have well-developed and effective tutorial programmes for all students. On most courses the content of tutorial programmes, their frequency and the time allocated to tutorial support varies. Though some students are very positive about their tutorials and many report that staff are available outside timetabled tutorial time, other students are still not receiving any tutorial support.

31 Recording of students' progress is not systematic across the college. It is particularly poor in mathematics, humanities and on some computing courses. Some vocational areas regularly review work with students and encourage them to use action plans. However, some action plans are vague; there are no specific targets against which future progress can be measured. The college has a system under which students compile or update records of achievement but this is given low priority by many staff

and students. Students' attendance is not consistently monitored, and reasons for absence are not investigated. The college is trying to improve attendance by using customer service staff to support tutors in contacting absent students.

32 Systems for identifying students' literacy and numeracy needs and providing appropriate learning support are still at an early stage of development. There are procedures for assessing students who ask for support or who are referred by staff. At the time of the inspection, 59 students were receiving second language support and 212 students were receiving support to develop literacy and numeracy skills. This support is delivered largely in the 'drop-in' study centres and many of the students, especially the younger ones, fail to attend regularly. There is insufficient communication between teachers and learning support staff. Measures introduced to promote more effective learning support include: designated staff with responsibility for developing learning support; pilot learning support schemes in health and social care, hairdressing, and science and on GCSE courses; and the training of staff in learning support roles. A good level of support is given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Additional staff and equipment are provided to suit individual needs; for example, enlarged handouts or Braille materials for visually impaired students.

33 Careers education and guidance is available through student services and personal tutors. Arrangements have been made with the local careers service to enable students to meet careers officers on college premises. Student services units contain adequate resources for careers guidance, including relevant computer programmes. An interesting recent development has been the introduction of a database of jobs available within the local area. Some tutors work hard to ensure appropriate help is given to students applying for jobs. In one instance during the inspection, the course tutor arranged a one-to-one information session between the student and someone currently doing the job and this gave the student a realistic understanding of the work involved. Higher education applications are monitored through student services. Several students had received comprehensive advice on their Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications. Not all course tutors comply with student services procedures. The college's self-assessment document recognises the need for further development of divisional action plans for careers education and guidance.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

34 Strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses in 54 per cent of the teaching sessions inspected. Weaknesses clearly outweighed strengths in 12 per cent of sessions. These percentages compare with 63 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1995-96, according to figures published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The grades awarded to the sessions inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	4	13	22	5	0	44
GCSE	3	8	12	8	0	31
GNVQ	1	8	15	13	1	38
NVQ	5	30	26	9	0	70
Access to higher education	8	16	6	1	0	31
Adult basic education	12	24	16	1	0	53
Other*	29	79	58	14	1	181
Total	62	178	155	51	2	448

**includes foundation, intermediate and advanced courses leading to vocational diplomas and certificates and to qualifications awarded by professional bodies.*

35 The average attendance at classes was 66 per cent of students registered compared with 76 per cent for all general further education colleges inspected during 1995-96. Average levels of attendance ranged from 57 per cent in mathematics to 75 per cent in performing arts. The average number of students present in the lessons inspected was nine.

36 There were inconsistencies in course and lesson planning. Course team manuals were produced by all course teams but the amount of information in the manuals varied. Where manuals were detailed enough to inform planning, the majority of lessons had clear purposes and outcomes and a range of appropriate learning activities. In programme areas such as business studies, mathematics, leisure and tourism and hairdressing and beauty therapy, some schemes of work were little more than lists of the topics to be covered. They contained little information on course aims and outcomes, learning methods and resources or assessment strategies. Many lessons in these areas were poorly structured, topics were not introduced effectively or linked to related themes and a narrow range of learning methods and resources was used. Too often students did not hand in written work or they completed assignments late. In these cases, students missed opportunities for detailed marking and review of their work, and records of progress were sparse.

37 With the exception of child studies, art and design, science, access and adult basic education courses, little attention was paid to the systematic development of the key skills of communication, application of number and information technology. Classwork provided few opportunities for the development of communication and study skills and corrections of written work were not used to promote accurate use of English. In many sessions, students were not encouraged to make notes or to annotate handouts when it would have been appropriate to do so. Students were given few opportunities to develop skills in using information technology

and most made very little use of information technology to support their learning. Though computer-aided design was used to good effect by some engineering students when it was integral to their course, most students did not use computers more generally, for example to enhance their project and assignment work. With the exception of art and design and science courses, GNVQ requirements for the development of key skills were addressed through separate weekly sessions. In many cases the learning activities in these sessions did not include applications relevant to the rest of the course. For example, the workbook used in information technology sessions contained few vocationally relevant tasks. Most GNVQ students did not have access to information technology facilities at any other time to develop and practise their information technology skills and their progress was slow. Group working was used effectively in some courses to help students to develop social and interpersonal skills.

38 The quality of teaching in science, computing and mathematics sessions varied from good to poor. The better sessions were well structured, students participated in a range of activities, often supported by a variety of resources including good-quality handouts, and their work was at an appropriate standard. In science vocational and access programmes, specialist resources were used to generate lively and productive debate. Mathematics teachers used board work well to present solutions to questions clearly and logically. In the weaker sessions, teachers failed to question students to ensure that they had understood the topic. Learning activities often did not take enough account of the particular needs of individual students. In one GCSE mathematics class, the teacher spent 40 minutes reiterating points already made in learning materials issued in an earlier session although most students were already sufficiently confident about the materials to move on to the next stage. Eventually bored students disrupted the lesson by talking to each other. Records of students' progress were inadequate. Some science students were not being set sufficient homework and a significant number did not complete enough of the work set to ensure good progress on their course. Several computing theory classes took place in practical computing rooms where students had insufficient working space.

39 In many construction theory sessions, opportunities were missed to involve employed students in discussion, to make use of their experience, and to help other students to learn. In the better sessions, there was regular use of questioning to check students' progress and understanding, and particularly effective use of incomplete handouts which students completed during the lesson. In practical sessions students worked diligently. However, teachers rarely demonstrated the craft skills required, nor did they encourage students to discuss specific aspects of their work with other students in the class. On many courses, including some leading to NVQ qualifications, teachers required all students to work at the same pace on the same practical exercises, rather than organising the work to take account of the different abilities and experience of individuals.

By contrast, in painting and decorating workshops, progress charts were clearly displayed on the walls and students were encouraged to progress according to their abilities.

40 Students on engineering and manufacturing courses worked carefully and purposefully in practical sessions and paid appropriate attention to health and safety. Teachers made effective use of specimen materials from industry to give a realistic context to learning tasks. Most practical work in clothing technology was excellent. Students produced well-designed garments and paid commendable attention to detail. Teachers checked students' learning and gave additional help to individual students where needed. Most theory sessions were well structured, though some were conducted at too slow a pace. On many courses the underpinning knowledge learned in classroom sessions was not linked effectively to practical activities. Some assessment materials used in electrical engineering were out of date.

41 Most business studies lessons were competently planned and included a variety of activities at appropriate levels. For example, secretarial workshops were effective in enabling students to work at the level appropriate to them and to have access to teacher support. On many courses, use is made of work placements to develop work-related skills and provide avenues to employment. European business administration students undertake work experience in a European country appropriate to their language competence. This gives students seeking work in that country the relevant experience and access to a referee who is based there. Some lessons were weak. The reasons for this included unclear learning objectives, poorly-designed tasks, the slow pace of the work, inadequate handouts, the paucity of learning aids and the lack of attention given to the quality of presentations. Some poorly-planned activities impeded the rate of students' progress. For example in a GNVQ intermediate level lesson on information technology, students were given a lengthy handbook to work through at their own pace without the benefit of an initial whole-class briefing. Most students then had to wait some time for clarification and guidance before they could proceed with their work.

42 Students on hospitality and catering courses developed action plans to help them achieve the skills required. A range of study packs were available to help them to acquire the knowledge underpinning these skills. Most sessions were well organised and included a variety of activities which enabled them to make progress at a rate appropriate to their abilities. Some lessons were poorly planned and there were not enough checks on students' learning.

43 Only a minority of leisure and tourism programmes had detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Consequently, there were weaknesses in lesson management. For example, in many lessons, the amount of work planned could not be covered in the time available, students were not involved sufficiently in activities which enabled their progress to be assessed and the range of learning methods and resources used was

narrow. The frequent use of dictation or copying of notes resulted in students failing to develop the ability to make their own notes. Marking of students' work was sometimes superficial and mistakes in the use of English were left uncorrected. Though most teachers showed a sound knowledge of their subject, some presented complex material in an oversimplified form and this led to gaps in students' understanding.

44 With the exception of those on GNVQ programmes, students on health, social and childcare courses were well informed about their progress, which was clearly recorded. Course frameworks for nursery nursing programmes were shared with the students and as a result they understood the links between course elements and assignments. In contrast, many students on GNVQ courses in health and social care were unclear about the structure of their courses and of the links between units. In childcare sessions, teachers organised a variety of relevant activities which helped to maintain students' interest and involvement. Teachers used students' responses to questions to check their understanding and to help consolidate their learning. Social and childcare students worked well together in groups, helped each other with tasks, and shared relevant experiences. Effective links were made between classwork and students' work experience. For example, during one well-structured lesson, an example from a student's work placement was used to illustrate the impact of the national curriculum on the early years curriculum and an interesting class discussion ensued to which all students made relevant contributions. Some hairdressing and beauty therapy sessions involved students in a range of interesting tasks including class and group discussions and individual presentations. Others comprised over-long presentations by the teacher during which students were not required to either think through the issues or to perform tasks for themselves. Generally, students had few opportunities to use information technology. In most sessions learning aids were limited to handouts and learning packages.

45 In art and design courses, there were coherent and progressive schemes of work, clear lesson plans and well-structured assignment briefs. Students experienced a wide range of methods of teaching and learning and some of the work was exemplary. The quality of the students' experience in the visual studies programme was enhanced by an enrichment programme which included field trips, overseas visits, visits to Liverpool museums, galleries and specialist libraries. Enthusiastic and supportive teachers used their own portfolios of work to stimulate students' creativity. They further promoted the development of students' competence through their feedback on assignments and during regular tutorials. For example, during a group tutorial for adult students, each student was given an opportunity to present their visual ideas and these were then rigorously and constructively evaluated by the whole group. Discussion was sharpened by the introduction of relevant historical and other visual references and sensitive class management ensured that all students participated and received new ideas for development. Performing

arts students' critical analysis of their own and others' work was not always developed effectively.

46 Students of English and modern languages were encouraged to develop the ability to study on their own. In one GCE A level English literature session, the students reviewed poems they had read for homework together with an extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams. The clear structure of the lesson and the variety in the literature they were discussing kept the students alert and interested. They had prepared well for the session knowing what was expected of them. The teacher knew the texts well and had structured the session to integrate study and examination skills. Students kept good records of class discussions and their understanding was checked regularly. In a minority of sessions, particularly in modern foreign languages, teachers made little use of learning aids and failed to take account of the differing abilities of students when arranging activities or setting tasks. Few students used information technology in language lessons, apart from those on access courses.

47 In other humanities courses, teachers did not give enough thought to planning students' learning. Many sessions failed to stimulate students' interest and insufficient attention was paid to the assessment of students' work. For example, in one law lesson, students were set questions to work on alone. The teacher provided no introduction to the work, offered no help or advice to students, did not check their progress and provided them with no feedback on what they had done. In contrast, sessions in teacher education and on access courses were well organised and provided effective learning.

48 On adult basic education courses, the majority of sessions were very well planned and this enabled individual students to develop appropriate skills and make good progress. ESOL students received a great deal of individual support. Appropriate use of language support in the mother tongue was of particular help to students working at basic levels and some accreditation schemes had been developed which were particularly useful for the foundation level students. In many sessions, however, there was too little variety in methods of teaching and learning, given the varied abilities of students in the same group. The language content of some lessons was too formal and focused too closely on rigid grammatical forms.

49 A high level of support was provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on vocational courses across the college. Teaching and learning were generally effective. In a bridging course in catering, the teacher demonstrated a number of steps in making a meal; students worked in a realistic simulated work environment using correct equipment and uniforms; they concentrated well and were able to complete the task set with minimum help. In some lessons, especially on specialist programmes, the work did not always match students' needs. Occasionally, they were given inappropriate tasks. For example, students

working on information technology assignments were laboriously copying a paragraph onto the computer though they could not read the words. They were making undetected errors and little learning was taking place.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

50 There are good working relationships between students and staff throughout the college. Students enjoy their studies and most of those who attend regularly are interested in and motivated by their work. Mature students in particular work well together and support each other. Most students develop appropriate knowledge and understanding, though on some programmes, for example GNVQ information technology, students' responses to internal assessment are poor.

51 Practical work is usually of a good standard in art and design, catering, construction, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy. Students on the BTEC national diploma programmes in furniture and clothing technology produce exceptionally good work. Construction students have won the north west inter-college surveying competition in four of the last eight years. Students on business studies courses adopt careful working methods during practical activities and are aware of health and safety considerations. Science students pay insufficient attention to some aspects of laboratory and workshop safety. For example, a minority of students fail to use the eye protection provided in laboratories; some younger science students pay insufficient attention in practical classes, leading to spills and poor use of apparatus; and minor obstruction hazards are created by students leaving cupboard doors and drawers open. Construction students also do not pay sufficient attention to health and safety.

52 The college has identified a progressive improvement in retention as a key strategic objective. In 1995-96, the average retention rate across the college was 76 per cent. For 1996-97, a target of 84 per cent has been set. Retention on part-time courses, particularly for mature students, is often better than that for full-time courses or for younger students. In engineering, the retention rate is 30 per cent higher in the part-time programme than the full-time programme. In 1995-96, the college's part-time retention rates were between 89 and 93 per cent, at least 10 per cent better than those reported in the FEFC's national survey of engineering provision, whereas retention rates of between 55 and 62 per cent for full-time programmes were almost 10 per cent worse. Retention on part-time leisure and tourism courses was good; on some the retention rate was 100 per cent. Completion rates were high on adult clerical training courses, though less satisfactory for GNVQ advanced and intermediate programmes in business. On business programmes overall, about 30 per cent of full-time and 25 per cent of part-time students withdrew before completing their courses. Retention rates on the majority of one-year vocational science programmes were good, at 85 per cent or above, though on a few two-year vocational programmes they were poor. The majority

of health and social care courses achieved retention rates of about 80 per cent. GCSE and GCE A level science subjects typically retained about 70 per cent of students. However, only 46 per cent and 62 per cent of GCSE mathematics students completed their courses in 1994-95 and 1995-96, respectively. Comparable figures for the BTEC national diploma in information technology applications were 37 per cent and 50 per cent. In contrast, the retention rates for mature full-time students on the access to physical science programme were 86 and 90 per cent in the same years. Student retention rates for humanities subjects at GCSE and GCE A level varied considerably between different college centres offering the same courses.

53 Of the college's 90 students, aged 16 to 18, in their final year of advanced vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE's) 1996 performance tables, 70 per cent were successful in obtaining their qualification. This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The pass rate for students of all ages completing the advanced GNVQ in art and design improved from 60 per cent in 1995 to 86 per cent in 1996. The best pass rate in 1996 for an advanced GNVQ programme was in science where 93 per cent of students were successful. Poorer advanced GNVQ results in 1996 included business with a 51 per cent pass rate, hospitality and catering with a 38 per cent pass rate and leisure and tourism with a 26 per cent pass rate. In 1996, there were 15 BTEC national diploma and certificate courses where 10 or more students were entered for the examination. All students were successful in four of these; dental technology, design, graphic design and pharmacy. All students were successful in a further six programmes where fewer than 10 students completed the course. Pass rates for students on BTEC national diploma and certificate courses in graphics, photography and media ranged from 77 per cent to 100 per cent in 1996. Pass rates for the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing declined from 100 per cent in 1994 to 92 per cent in 1995 and to 79 per cent, which is slightly below the national average, in 1996.

54 Eighty-eight per cent of the college's 43 students, aged 16 to 18, on the intermediate vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables were successful in obtaining their qualification. This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Achievements on NVQ levels 2 and 3 programmes vary across and within curriculum areas. All the students completing in 1996 were successful on the two-year level 2 programmes in bakery, carpentry and joinery, catering, painting and decorating, and vehicle mechanics and electrics. One-year programmes on which all the students who completed were successful include horticulture at level 1, brickwork, care and painting and decorating at level 2 and care and painting and decorating at level 3. Pass rates on some other NVQ programmes were poor. For example, only 36 per cent of

students on the NVQ level 1 catering programme were successful in 1996. On NVQ level 2 programmes in hairdressing, achievement rates for students who completed in 1996 varied from 24 per cent on a full-time programme to 33 per cent on a comparable part-time programme.

55 Students on access to higher education programmes achieved good results although these varied between college centres. In 1996, 55 per cent of the 564 students who entered achieved full awards and a further 36 per cent gained accreditation in over 50 per cent of their units. In history, pass rates at different centres ranged from 88 to 100 per cent. The percentage of full credits for English literature modules achieved from the Merseyside Open College Federation varied from 56 per cent to 100 per cent. Core communications results were better, ranging from 80 per cent to 100 per cent. In access to science programmes, pass rates improved from 33 per cent in 1995 to 87 per cent in 1996.

56 According to information published by the DfEE, those students aged 16 to 18 who entered one or more GCE A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 3.1 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector using this performance measure. Nevertheless, the average score of 3.1 represents an improvement on previous years; the scores for 1995 and 1994 were 2.7 points and 2.8 points, respectively. The college's 1996 publication of information about student achievements (PISA) includes 10 GCE A level subjects where there were more than 10 entrants aged 16 to 18 years. In all these subjects, except mathematics, pass rates at grades A to E were below the national average for further education colleges. In four subjects, government and politics, film studies, music and Spanish, there were less than 10 entrants, all of whom were successful. Results were poor in art and design (fine art) and geography.

57 Older students performed better than those aged 16 to 18. The average points score per entry for students aged 19 and above who entered one or more GCE A level examinations was 3.8, which is above the national average for this group. In the 26 subjects where 10 or more students aged 19 years or over entered, half had pass rates at grades A to E above national averages for further education colleges. These subjects included art and design, art and design (three-dimensional studies), biology, chemistry, English literature, French, general studies, human biology, law, mathematics, photography, physical education and politics. There were poor results in accounting, English language and literature, geography and history of art.

58 The college's 1996 PISA includes 17 GCSE subjects where there were more than 10 entrants aged 16 to 18 years and 17 subjects where more than 10 students aged 19 years or over entered. The percentage of 16 to 18 year old students achieving grade C or above, was above the national average for further education colleges in English language, geography, history, mathematics and sociology. The percentage of students aged

19 years or over achieving grade C or above was above national averages for further education colleges in English language, English literature, French, geography, history, mathematics and Spanish. Students of all ages achieved poor GCSE results in biology, chemistry, physics and psychology, though in all four subjects students aged 16 to 18 performed less well than older students. None of the 22 students aged 16 to 18 entered for law achieved grade C or above, though 45 per cent of students aged 19 years and over were successful.

59 Most students who complete adult basic education courses have well-developed skills. In subjects such as cookery, study skills, numeracy and English language, almost all gain external accreditation for their achievements. In some subjects the results are good, with pass rates above 90 per cent. In a few they are poor, with pass rates below 40 per cent. Results vary between centres. Targets are not set for achievements and this limits the effectiveness of the college's year-on-year review of achievements. Withdrawal rates are too high and there is insufficient robust information to analyse results across the service as a whole. Progression to other provision is encouraged and often occurs.

60 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making sound progress towards the achievement of nationally-recognised qualifications. Former students have progressed from specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to vocational programmes and then into employment. The students display confidence and competence in carrying out a range of practical tasks. Of particular note is the progress made by students with complex learning difficulties who, with the help of their skilled support workers, are developing a range of practical vocational skills and competences. A student from a City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) course in continuing professional development, who is hearing impaired, is the only person in the United Kingdom to have been selected for a silver award. Students are able to talk knowledgeably about their work and are proud of their achievements. A minority of students on specialist courses do not participate fully in activities and appear to be bored with their work. Some of these students may be underachieving because the tasks set for them are not sufficiently challenging.

61 The college's analysis of destinations for students finishing courses in 1996 was incomplete at the time of the inspection. According to college data, 40 per cent of students in the 16 to 18 age range who completed level 3 qualifications in 1996 were known to have entered higher education, 8 per cent were in employment and 10 per cent remained in further education. Comparable figures for students aged 19 years and above showed that 19 per cent were known to have entered higher education, 15 per cent were in employment and 20 per cent remained in further education. Of the students from all age groups included in the 1996 PISA who progressed to higher education, 42 per cent had studied BTEC national

diplomas, 38 per cent two or more GCE A levels and 20 per cent GNVQ advanced programmes. Of students completing the BTEC national diploma in three-dimensional design in 1996, 53 per cent went on to higher education and 47 per cent entered employment. Sixty-five per cent of students completing the BTEC national diploma courses in graphics and media went on to higher education. Of the students completing the advanced GNVQ in art and design, 28 per cent progressed to higher education and 6 per cent to employment. Progression to higher education from the advanced GNVQ in health and social care is low; out of 16 who successfully completed the course in 1996, one student enrolled on a full-time course and one on a part-time course.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

62 Since it was formed, the college has been working to achieve its aim of 'quality, equality and value' in its provision for all students at all centres. It has developed quality assurance systems and procedures to monitor progress. The principal acts as chair of the quality assurance management group to underline its importance. Responsibilities for quality assurance are clearly defined at different levels of management and most full-time staff understand them. Quality assurance arrangements have been extended to include college support services such as finance, personnel and customer services. The finance team has begun to measure its performance against a set of standards it has drawn up for the level of service its customers might expect. Other service teams have set standards against which they plan to measure their performance. Much effort has been made to persuade staff of the importance of quality assurance though some staff regard the arrangements as bureaucratic and time consuming and having too little focus on the curriculum. The college recognises that further work is needed to develop a culture in which all managers and staff take responsibility for ensuring that standards are set and met, and quality is improved.

63 A process of internal 'quality audit' has been established. Over 30 managers, including seven quality curriculum group managers, have been trained in auditing skills. Internal audits of course team manuals, records of initial guidance, employer report forms and registers have been undertaken and a further programme is in place for the current year. The audit procedures are closely integrated with the quality assurance procedures. There is a published calendar of review and evaluation activities leading to the production of internal quality assessment reports. The internal quality assessment reports are included in curriculum group reports and contribute towards programme area self-assessment reports, the outcomes of which are used to inform strategic planning and development. To date, the internal quality assessment reports undertaken by course teams make little use of performance indicators and achievement data and do not include course-specific targets for improvement. The report format has been revised for the current academic year to

incorporate data on performance indicators. College-wide targets for student retention and achievement have been set but they are not yet applied to individual courses.

64 The college states that the course team manual is the cornerstone of course management and quality assurance within academic divisions and has set out the recommended content. The audit undertaken to identify compliance with the college framework concluded that course teams have benefited from the requirement to develop and standardise their documentation, but the manuals vary in their usefulness as tools of quality assurance or course management. There are examples of good course team manuals in catering, art and design and engineering. Manuals in other programme areas have incomplete or missing sections.

65 The process of setting standards for curriculum teams is not well advanced and course reviews are not informed by systematic monitoring of standards against those achieved by other providers or levels of performance nationally. There is little evidence of course teams setting performance standards for punctuality, attendance and retention of students or for the quality of teaching. There are significant inconsistencies in the rigour with which many course teams carry out evaluations and this is reflected in course team reports. Many action plans are incomplete or express intentions in vague terms. Target dates, responsibilities and milestones are often absent. There is scope for greater consistency in the monitoring of action plans by managers. Across all courses, insufficient attention is given to ways of improving teaching and learning.

66 The college has a well-documented system for producing responses to external verifier visits. Not all visit reports result in clear action plans. Progress made on the issues identified is tracked by managers. The academic board approved a college-wide policy for internal verification in December 1995 and a cross-college team of internal verifiers has been established. There are significant variations in the implementation of the policy at course level. In catering, internal verification is well established but in construction, engineering, hairdressing and performing arts it is still in the early stages of development. In health and social care, the weaknesses identified through internal verification procedures have not been addressed. Internal verification is a standing agenda item at GNVQ management group meetings but an agreed timetable of activity has not been met on many of the GNVQ programmes.

67 The college charter is introduced and distributed to students during induction. It includes a clearly-worded complaints procedure but there has been no compilation or analysis of complaints processed through the procedure which might help in identifying areas for improvement. Some students are unclear about their entitlements and what they mean in practice.

68 In May 1996, the college conducted a major survey of students' levels of satisfaction with their courses. However, the questions posed were too

general for issues relating to individual subjects to be identified and provided insufficient opportunity for students to express judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. Some course teams have developed effective surveys of their own and the college intends to identify and disseminate the good practice which is evident in many of these. As yet, many programme areas do not systematically collect, or act upon, feedback from students. Students' attendance at course committees is encouraged but it is not yet common practice. Health, social and childcare students are often unable to attend meetings because of the times at which they are held. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are encouraged to participate in reviewing college policies through the new 'inclusive committee'. Employers' views of course provision are not gathered or analysed systematically and there are areas in which the college needs to improve communications between course managers and employers.

69 A college staff-development strategy group oversees the process of matching staff-development priorities to the college's strategic priorities. It draws up a college staff-development programme and produces annual reports on levels of participation and the use of the staff-development budget. A designated manager has responsibility for staff development within each division. Many staff feel that the college provides a good range of training opportunities. For example, staff teaching on courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have participated in successful joint staff training with outside agencies. Good progress has been made towards the achievement of training and development lead body awards. There is no policy which requires staff to acquire teaching qualifications or to update their industrial experience and the staff-development programme places insufficient emphasis on improving teachers' skills in managing teaching and learning. Relevant training of staff has not kept pace with the changes in information technology. A systematic programme of induction is provided for new staff joining the college at the start of the academic year but arrangements for staff who take up their appointments at other times are less satisfactory.

70 Development of staff appraisal has been slow. Although a system is in place, so far only senior and middle managers have been appraised. There has been, therefore, no systematic means of reviewing staff performance and identifying development needs. Current arrangements for the appraisal of teaching staff do not include classroom observation. Lack of progress on the implementation of the appraisal system has hindered the college's achievement of the Investor in People award.

71 In 1995-96, a programme of internal inspections, including 210 lesson observations was carried out by a team of college staff trained as inspectors. The outcomes of the internal inspection resulted in self-assessment reports of curriculum areas and cross-college services. The grades awarded by the internal inspectors closely matched those subsequently awarded by the FEFC inspectors. The internal inspection reports contributed to a college self-assessment report compiled using the

headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report sets out the college's view of its strengths and areas requiring development. Sources of evidence are indicated to support the judgements. The report is well presented and contains judgements which, in many cases, matched those made by the FEFC inspectors. In several areas, the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors led to less favourable assessments than those presented in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report on management was confined to senior management and did not address issues of curriculum management. The college plans to continue to develop the arrangements for internal inspection as a component of its quality assurance strategy.

RESOURCES

Staffing

72 The college employs the equivalent of 1,142 full-time staff. Of these, 637 are teachers and a further 202 directly support learning. Forty-five per cent of the staff are male and 55 per cent female. Five of the senior managers are male and three are female. Eight per cent of the staff are from minority ethnic groups. Teachers are well qualified in the subjects they teach. Seventy per cent have a first degree or its equivalent and many have a higher degree. Sixty-three per cent have teaching qualifications. Teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) all hold the teaching of EFL certificate in addition to their other qualifications. Most teachers of ESOL are bilingual and able to offer mother tongue language support to their students. Many teachers are qualified as assessors and verifiers in relevant programme areas, though few are qualified to accredit students' prior learning. The college acknowledges that the establishment of appropriate systems to accredit prior learning depends on more staff completing this training. A high proportion of art and design staff are involved in external moderation and verification. In a few programme areas, a small number of staff are under qualified. Some foreign languages staff have no specific training in the teaching of languages, although this is offset by their experience.

73 In a few areas of work, there are insufficient teachers or they are not effectively deployed. Some full-time humanities staff are teaching in areas with very low numbers of students. Some adult basic education sessions have too many staff in relation to the numbers of students present. In some engineering areas, cover for absent staff is not adequate. With the exception of a few, mainly in construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy, social work and art and design, teachers do not have recent industrial or commercial experience. The college has recognised this issue. In September 1996, it allocated £5,000 to fund divisional bids to pay for industrial secondments. So far there have been few bids.

74 Effective use is made of part-time teachers, especially in engineering, business studies, catering, and art and design. Many are appointed for

their relevant up-to-date technical and commercial experience. In art and design, a wide range of expertise is provided by part-time staff who are practising visual and performing artists. Generally part-time teachers are well supported. They have access to induction and other staff-development opportunities and receive staff newsletters and other relevant communications. They are invited to all course team meetings and, whether they are able to attend or not, they are sent the minutes. Full-time art and design teachers act as mentors to clusters of part-time colleagues. There are a few examples of part-time teachers having insufficient access to teaching resources or being given too little time for the tasks expected of them.

75 In most areas, there are sufficient technical support staff. They are attached to curriculum teams and most attend course team meetings. There are good levels of technical support in construction, mechanical engineering, catering, English and modern foreign languages. Forty-seven per cent of technicians have higher technical qualifications. In some areas, there are too few technicians. The inadequate level of technician support in some practical lessons in engineering means that students have to wait a long time to have their queries answered. The patterns of working of information technology technicians have been changed recently to provide a flexible call-out service. This has reduced the number of computer workstations which are not in use.

76 The college is well served by central support and development services which include learning support, student services, library services, nurseries and customer services. Attempts are made to ensure that divisions have adequate support at all their centres in proportion to staff and student numbers. Managers at the main centres analyse student cohorts to identify the most appropriate opening times and staffing levels for the student services offices. Nursery staff have developed a staff stand-by system to ensure appropriately qualified staff are available at short notice. The college's personnel directorate has developed a range of policies and procedures which are widely publicised to staff. A clear code of practice on recruitment and selection of full-time staff has been developed and this informs recruitment practice across the college. A strategy for ensuring effective recruitment and deployment of part-time staff is nearing implementation. The directorate monitors recruitment of staff in relation to age, gender and ethnic origin to ensure that the college's equal opportunities policy is being applied.

Equipment/learning resources

77 A well-managed information technology purchasing strategy has greatly improved the college's stock of computers. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students now averages 1:10 across the college, though this figure masks variations between sites. The majority of computers are of industry standard. Students on a small number of vocational courses have access to specialist computer software. For example, there are two new computer-aided design suites to support work

on engineering and construction courses, and professional media studies students can use a range of relevant computer applications. Most of the computers used in teaching and learning are now compatible across the college. Some are networked locally, and a college-wide network is planned. Access to the Internet has been installed on four sites. A small proportion of the college's computers are available on open access in libraries, resource-based learning centres and workshops, and the demand on these is heavy. More careful timetabling would allow greater use to be made of machines in the dedicated computer rooms.

78 There are libraries at eight of the college's main centres. Those at the Riversdale and Colquitt centres are large. In others, study space is more limited. The library catalogue is now fully computerised, and is being extended to include stock held in small specialist libraries associated with particular courses. Book issues are recorded manually. The supply of books in some centres is very limited, though an efficient inter-library loan system means that books can be moved quickly between sites. There are insufficient specialist texts in some curriculum areas; for example, in science, mathematics and business. The college has recently installed learning centres in four of the libraries. In these, students can acquire information technology and other key skills by using computer-based packages. Specialist staff are timetabled in the learning centres to give help on demand. The learning centres are drawing large numbers of students, but rather fewer visit the libraries to borrow books. Libraries are not open after 18.00 hours.

79 There is no college-wide maintenance, replacement or enhancement programme for equipment and materials. Money for updating and upgrading comes mainly from divisional budgets, on which there are many demands. The standard of equipment and materials varies greatly between centres and programme areas. For example, the equipment used on painting and decorating, paramedical, motor vehicle and journalism courses is of professional standard. The learning centre for construction students is particularly well equipped. There is a generous supply of materials for art students. The excellent range of materials developed by the college for the 'drop-in' study centres has won a national award. Students with physical disabilities are supported by a wide range of relevant equipment and materials. In many specialist areas, including catering, brickwork, business studies and some engineering courses, materials are not readily available and specialist equipment is outdated. Assessments on brickwork courses cannot always take place because there are insufficient materials available. There is very little equipment to support recreation and leisure courses. Equipment in hairdressing salons is not of a commercial standard. Teaching rooms that have not been refurbished often have whiteboards or chalkboards that are dirty or cracked.

Accommodation

80 The college's estate is managed and maintained by a large and appropriately-qualified estates team. A house committee at each centre ensures that the estates team is kept well informed on day-to-day matters affecting individual centres. The members of the estates team have been responsible for introducing an effective maintenance programme which ensures that lifts, alarms, fire fighting equipment and the heating plant are kept in working order. In addition, they have strengthened security arrangements and reduced theft. The team works closely with the accommodation committee of the student support unit in attempting to improve access to the college for people with restricted mobility. Good progress has been made in implementing a phased programme of improvements; for example, the installation of ramps and chair lifts, where space permits, and the upgrading of existing lifts. The design of the college's buildings means that some centres remain partly or wholly inaccessible to wheelchair users.

81 At incorporation, the state of the college buildings was such that just over £26 million was allocated for property works following the Hunter survey in 1993. Much of this remains unspent pending the finalisation of plans to rationalise the college's estate. At incorporation, the college had far more space than it needed, much of which was not well adapted to educational purposes. The college does not make best use of its space and the rooms used for classes are not always of an appropriate size. The college's accommodation strategy, based on an assessment of curricular needs, has led to the recent closure of four of its sites. The consequent relocation of some engineering, construction, professional media and general education courses has led to greater curricular cohesion, a more efficient use of resources and improvements in specialist accommodation.

82 As yet, few other major improvements to the college's accommodation have been made. Many centres appear shabby and unwelcoming from the outside and need substantial refurbishment inside. Reception areas are poorly designed and most are in need of redecoration. Reception desks at nearly all sites are at some distance from the main doors. Classroom and workshop areas are of a very varied standard. The construction and engineering workshops that were refurbished following relocation are well planned, spacious and offer a good environment. Professional media courses occupy a large suite of rooms organised around the needs of the students who work in them. The 'drop-in' study centres are attractively furnished with modern, matching furniture. Vocational programmes in visual and performing arts, hairdressing, and recreation and leisure, however, are being offered in accommodation that falls well below industrial standards. In 1995, the estates team initiated a programme of redecoration of classrooms and communal areas. Those not yet included remain in poor decorative order and do not provide a pleasant environment for the students who use them. Some accommodation is made worse by

being untidy. In some rooms there are accumulations of broken equipment and yellowing papers. The standard of cleaning in some buildings is poor. Walls of rooms and corridors are bare. With the exceptions of the Clarence Street and Myrtle Street centres, there is very little display of students' work anywhere in the college.

83 There are few common rooms or recreational areas for students. The refectories on most sites are poor and there is some overcrowding at peak times. There are two gymnasia, only one of which is usable at present. The college has extensive fields on its Riversdale centre. They are not marked out as sports pitches and are mainly used to provide practical experience for students on surveying courses.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

84 From its establishment as a large dispersed organisation formed shortly before incorporation, the college has made significant progress towards achieving its mission. Its strengths are:

- the wide range of full-time and part-time courses
- the extensive links with local communities
- the effective measures to equalise opportunities and remove barriers to study
- the large and successful access programme
- the highly committed governing body which works well with the senior management team
- the comprehensive arrangements for advice and guidance
- the well-organised admission and enrolment procedures
- the positive and supportive relationships between managers, staff and students.

85 In order to build on these strengths, the college should:

- increase efforts to meet the needs of employers
- take further steps to improve the efficiency of courses and to deploy staff and other resources effectively
- improve provision in mathematics and computing
- improve curriculum and class management
- develop effective learning support and tutorial support for all students
- develop a wider range of approaches to teaching and learning
- establish systems to develop students' key skills
- improve attendance and retention rates
- improve achievement rates on some courses
- implement rigorous and consistent course evaluation procedures

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- upgrade specialist equipment and facilities to industrial standard
 - initiate improvements in accommodation, pending completion of the building programme.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)

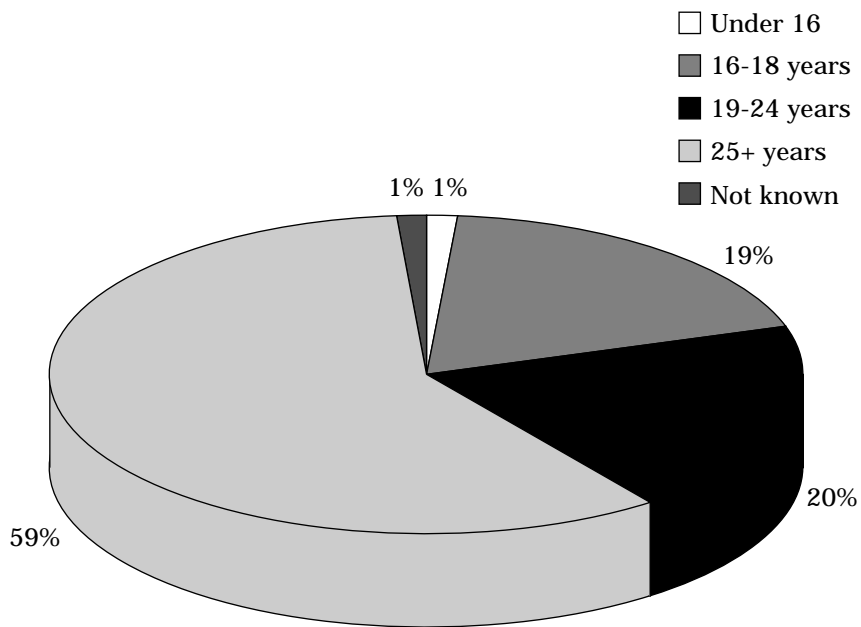
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

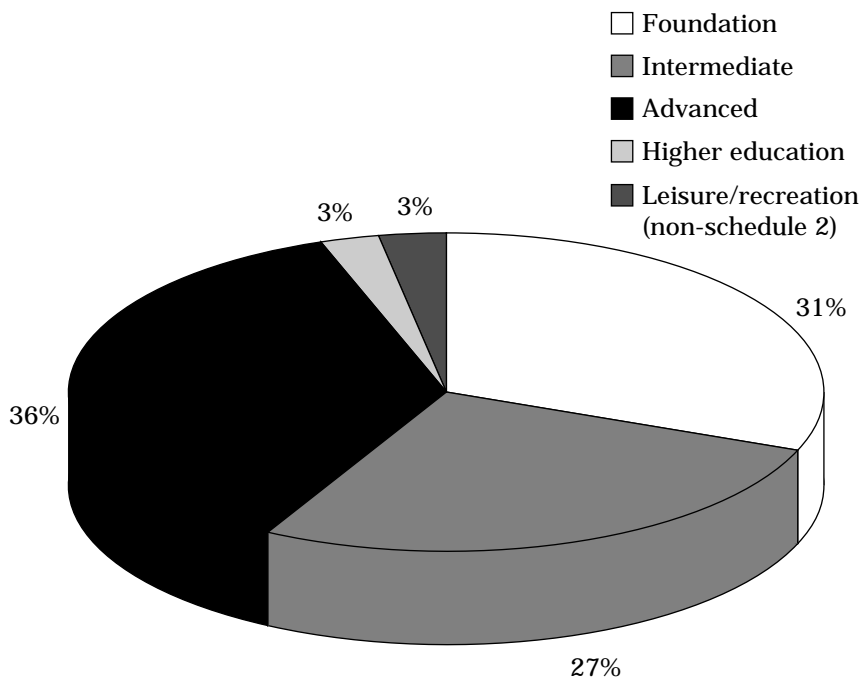
**City of Liverpool Community College: percentage student numbers by age
(as at July 1996)**



Student numbers: 18,049

Figure 2

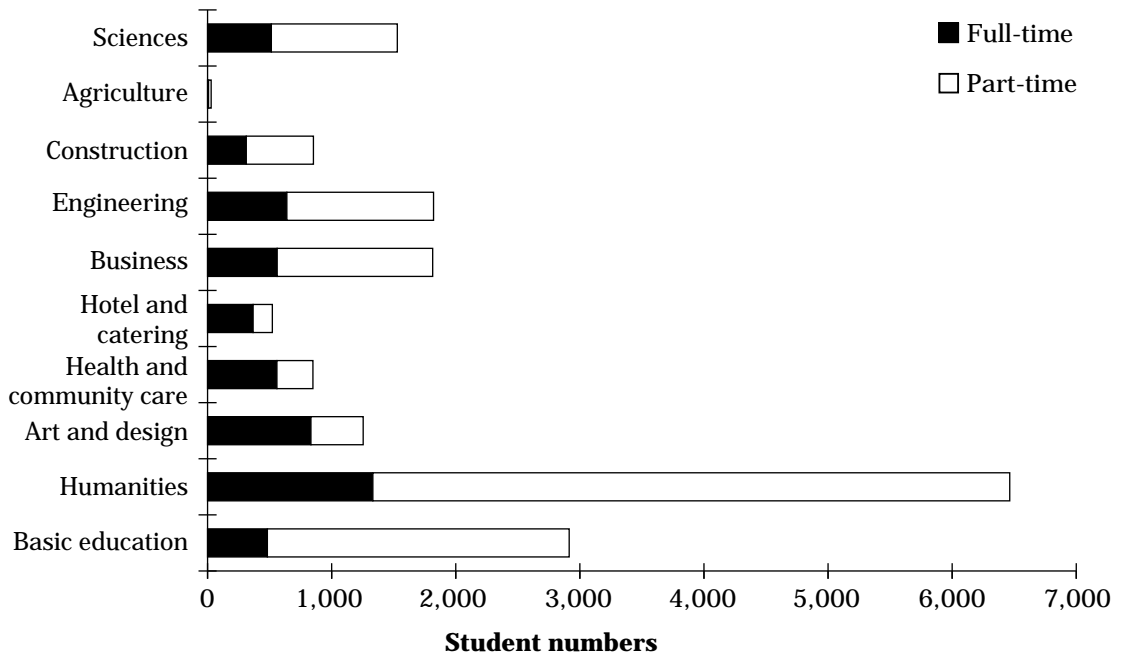
**City of Liverpool Community College: percentage student numbers by level of study
(as at July 1996)**



Student numbers: 18,049

Figure 3

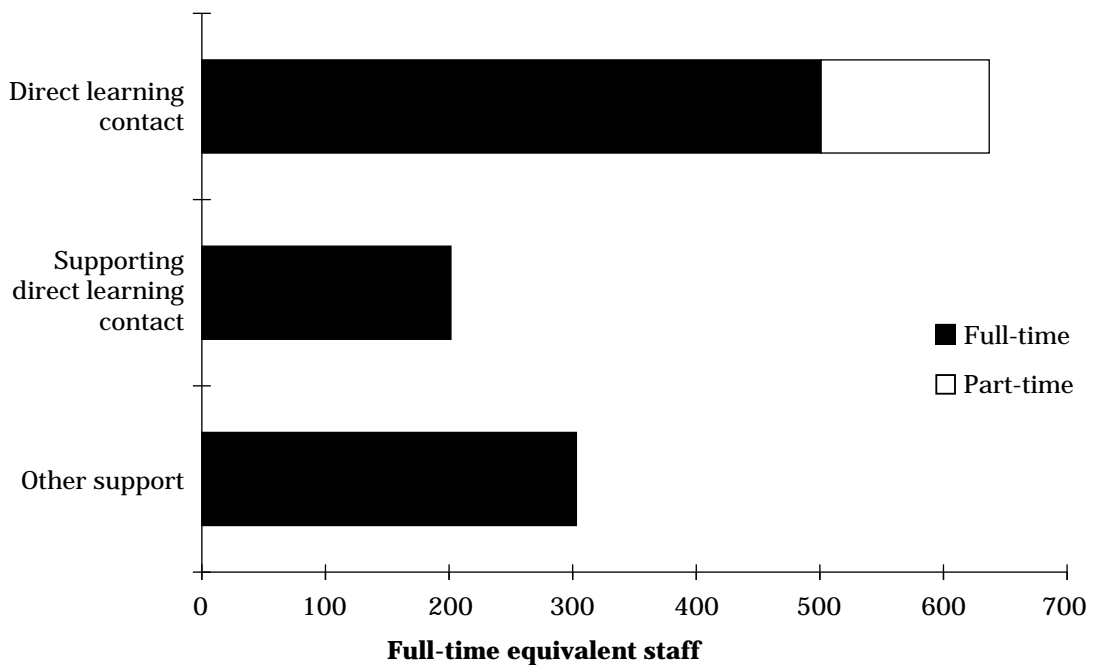
City of Liverpool Community College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 18,049

Figure 4

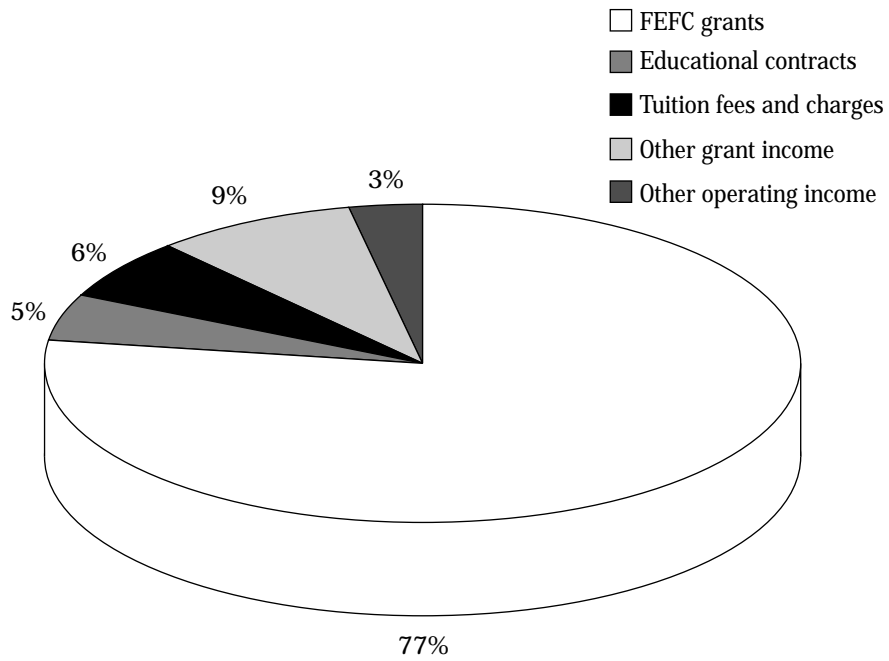
City of Liverpool Community College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 1,142

Figure 5

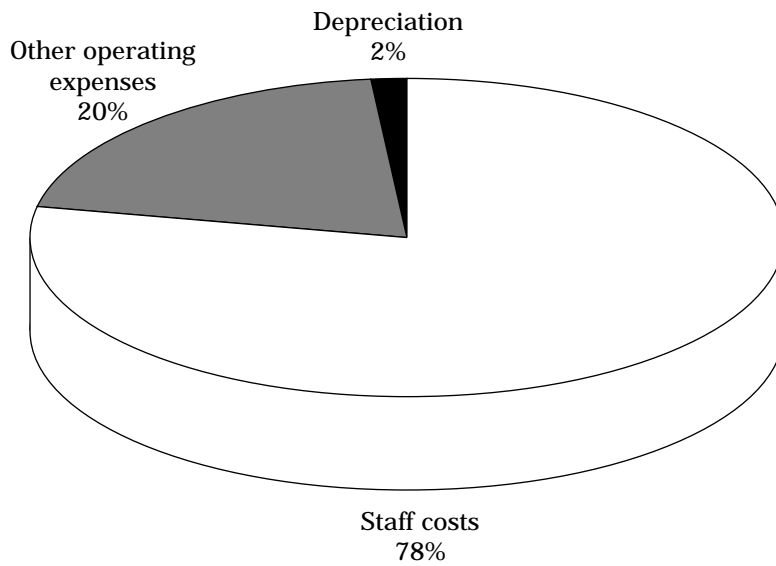
City of Liverpool Community College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £31,074,107

Figure 6

City of Liverpool Community College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £30,819,705

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