

# Halton College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1999-00**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
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.*

*Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT  
Telephone 024 7686 3000  
Fax 024 7686 3100  
Website [www.fefc.ac.uk](http://www.fefc.ac.uk)*

© FEFC 1999 *You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.*

# Contents

Paragraph

---

Summary	
---------	--

---

Context	
The college and its mission	1
The inspection	6

---

Curriculum areas	
Computing and information technology	10
Horticulture	16
Engineering	23
Business and administration	29
Catering and hospitality	36
Health and care	43
English and modern languages	49

---

Cross-college provision	
Support for students	55
General resources	63
Quality assurance	69
Governance	77
Management	83
Conclusions	93

---

College statistics	
--------------------	--

## 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

## Halton College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected October 1999**

Halton College is a general further education college situated in the centre of the borough of Halton, which includes the towns of Widnes and Runcorn. The self-assessment report which the college produced for the inspection was in a new format but based on previous self-assessment processes used by the college. It included summaries of actions taken since the previous inspection and action plans to address current weaknesses. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process and subsequently an executive summary was distributed to staff. The self-assessment was prepared against the background of FEFC and National Audit Office enquiries and the Committee of Public Accounts hearing into the college's affairs. Inspectors agreed with a number of the judgements in the report, but also identified additional weaknesses. They supported the grades awarded by the college in three curriculum areas, considered that important weaknesses had been understated in another three areas and awarded a better grade than the college had for one area. In cross-college provision, inspectors agreed with the overall college judgements in three areas, but considered that weaknesses had been underestimated in the other two.

The college offers courses in all 10 FEFC programme areas and most students are part

time. The college has considerable collaborative provision throughout the country. Although the proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding was slightly below the national average, in engineering, catering and hospitality, English and modern languages there was a high proportion of grade 1 and grade 2 lessons. The proportion of unsatisfactory lessons observed was twice that found nationally. The college provides good pastoral support for full-time students, though some tutorials are unsatisfactory. The college has made a substantial investment in information technology and improved some of its teaching accommodation since the last inspection. Some curriculum management is poor and some provision has suffered from substantial staff turnover. Work-based training is well supported, but students make slow progress towards achieving their qualifications. Governance of the college has been weak with poor supervision of the college's core business and inadequate financial oversight. Financial management is weak. Data produced by the college's management information system are unreliable. Quality assurance procedures have been ineffective in securing progress in key areas. Retention and achievement rates are below the national average in many areas. Overall, the college has made little progress in addressing weaknesses highlighted in the previous inspection report.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Computing and information technology	4	Support for students	3
Horticulture	3	General resources	3
Engineering	2	Quality assurance	4
Business and administration	3	Governance	5
Catering and hospitality	2	Management	4
Health and care	4		
English and modern languages	2		

## The College and its Mission

1 Halton College is a general further education college situated in the centre of the borough of Halton, which comprises the towns of Widnes and Runcorn and has a population of 122,300. The borough has the highest levels of unemployment, at 6.1%, in the north west. Three wards, Castlefields, Kingsway and Ditton have unemployment figures above 10%. Youth unemployment is nearly 32%.

2 Within Halton the college competes for students aged 16 to 18 with six schools and a sixth form college. Three sixth form colleges, a tertiary college and three general further education colleges outside the borough are within easy reach for Halton residents.

3 The college offers courses in all 10 of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas. In the academic year 1998-99, the college had 34,727 enrolments of which 1,828 were full-time students. Only 7% of students are aged 16 to 18. Courses are offered in 28 community centres. The college has linked provision with nine schools. Disaffected pupils who are under 16 are offered full-time programmes in college through the successful 'route-15' course which began last year. This course currently has 28 students. The majority of the college's students are on collaborative provision programmes.

4 At the time of the inspection, the college was in a period of transition following investigations by the FEFC and the National Audit Office which led to a session of the Committee of Public Accounts. The principal and vice-principal resigned in the middle of a disciplinary hearing. Since then, the college has been led by three different acting principals over an 18-month period. It employed 414 full-time equivalent staff in October 1999.

5 The college mission has been refocused on provision for the local community. The college has committed itself to setting and achieving high targets for retention and achievement and

to improving the quality of students' experience. It intends to work collaboratively with partners within the borough and to reduce collaborative provision elsewhere sharply over the next two or three years.

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in October 1999. Inspectors had previously examined the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data derived from the individualised student record (ISR) returns to inform their judgements of students' achievements in 1998. Since, at the time of the inspection, this return had not been audited because of the resignation of the college's external auditors, the data are not published in the inspection report. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1999. These data were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and awarding body pass lists. Because the inspection took place early in the academic year, data were checked towards the end of September. Original documentation of awarding bodies' notification of achievements was not available for many programmes. Inspectors found that relatively few data were accurate in all respects. The college prepared new spreadsheets for students' achievements in 1999 to bring the data in line with the principles established by inspectors for the checking of data. These data were used to inform inspectors' judgements, but were not deemed sufficiently reliable to be published.

7 The inspection was carried out by a team comprising 17 inspectors working for 71 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 119 lessons and examined students' work and documentation relating to the college, its courses and its collaborative provision. All curriculum inspectors inspected either collaborative provision or work in the local community, in addition to provision made in

# Context

college. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, support staff and students. Inspectors also met representatives from the North and Mid-Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the Lifelong Learning Partnership, the Cheshire Guidance Partnership, a community National Health Service trust and the local social services.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Grades awarded to lessons observed were below national averages. Of the lessons inspected, 61% were rated good or outstanding compared with 65% of all lessons inspected in 1998-99.

However, 13% were less than satisfactory, which is more than twice the national average.

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Attendance was low when compared with the national average. The college's figure for the average number of students attending lessons was also lower than the national average, but it includes data from tutorials, some of which were individual interviews and from sessions where individual or small numbers of students were undergoing skills assessments.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Halton College	9.4	70
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*

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	3	0	0	0	5
GCSE	3	2	0	0	0	5
GNVQ	2	5	4	3	0	14
NVQ	6	17	9	2	1	35
Other vocational	3	14	7	5	0	29
Other*	5	10	11	5	0	31
Total (No.)	21	51	31	15	1	119
Total (%)	18	43	26	12	1	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 12 pastoral or group tutorials

# Curriculum Areas

## Computing and Information Technology

### Grade 4

**10 Inspectors observed 21 lessons at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in computing and information technology (IT) courses. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report but judged that the quality of teaching and learning on the courses was overstated. The self-assessment report failed to identify some weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- above national average achievement levels on national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate courses
- good range of courses with significant progression opportunities
- high-quality hardware and software

#### Weaknesses

- adverse effect of significant recent staff changes on course management and teaching
- lower than national average profile of teaching and learning grades
- attendance and retention on most courses well below national average
- low achievement rates on some courses in 1999
- low level of successful completions within agreed timescales for collaborative provision programmes

11 Significant staff changes have adversely affected the management and teaching on several of the courses. Only two of the team of full-time staff at the time of the inspection were in post last year. The position of programme area leader is currently vacant and there is an

acting deputy, who has a substantial teaching commitment. In these circumstances, effective management of the programme area is difficult. There have also been substantial changes in the teaching staff undertaking course leader roles. One of the courses does not have a course leader and some groups of students have had several changes in teaching staff. Students' learning has been disrupted. Currently, part-time teachers carry out a high proportion of the teaching. The full-time teachers are well qualified. However, only a low proportion have the appropriate assessor awards. Not all the part-time teachers have appropriate qualifications. Course management and frequent changes in staff were not identified as weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report.

12 The range of courses is unusually wide; a strength included in the self-assessment report. Progression routes exist from foundation to higher education level. There are GNVQs and NVQs, some higher national certificates and diplomas, a range of computer literacy and other short courses and an evening general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in computing. There is an innovatory national diploma in multimedia. Weekend provision is offered. A large volume of collaborative provision in the community extends throughout Cheshire and IT training is delivered nationally.

13 The profile of grades awarded to lessons is lower than the national average. There were no outstanding lessons. Ten lessons were judged to be good and 10 were satisfactory. Students arrived late for, or were absent from, several sessions. The overall attendance rate for the lessons seen was 72%, which is below the national average for the sector. In some lessons, teachers failed to gain students' interest sufficiently, for example in a theory lesson where students copied notes from a board. Inspectors agreed that in some of the better practical lessons students work well on their own.

# Curriculum Areas

14 The self-assessment report states that there are good levels of students' achievements on some courses. The NVQ level 1 and GNVQ intermediate IT pass rates have indeed been above the national average for two years, but the pass rate for the NVQ level 2 provision last year was below the national average. This year, pass rates on the computer literacy and information technology courses, which recruit large numbers of students, and the GNVQ advanced IT course, were also below average. Retention rates in most areas of provision are below those for comparable colleges in one and, often both, of the last two years. Last year there was low retention and a low pass rate on the GNVQ advanced course in IT, resulting in only about one-quarter of the students who started the course gaining the qualification. Trainees on collaborative provision courses often do not complete their training in the expected times. The self-assessment report recognises some of the weaknesses in students' achievements, but underestimates the low retention.

15 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the college is well equipped for the courses it offers. Up-to-date specialist software is available on modern networked computers. Frequently, students have access to a range of good-quality learning materials. Equipment is housed in attractive open-plan suites with areas for both 'drop-in' and lesson use. Assignments and course information are held on the network. However, occasionally, the time taken for software to load onto the network used for multimedia work caused disruption to lessons.

# Curriculum Areas

## Horticulture

### Grade 3

**16 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths identified by the college in the self-assessment report, but the report failed to identify a major weakness.**

#### Key strengths

- development of students' skills in realistic work environments
- key skills well integrated with the curriculum
- good course administration and recording of NVQ competences
- good support of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- improving retention and achievement rates

#### Weaknesses

- poor curriculum organisation and management
- some floristry lessons timetabled without a member of staff
- some classrooms inappropriate for the activities taking place
- no accreditation of prior learning

17 The college has offered land-based provision for a number of years and there is a range of horticultural and conservation courses from pre-foundation level to NVQ level 2. The provision was reviewed in September 1999 when a number of non-viable courses were discontinued and full-time floristry courses were introduced. The area has a significant proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

18 Recruitment on a number of courses has not met college targets and courses have been combined for teaching purposes. Teachers take this into account in their schemes of work and lesson plans but, in some instances, the teaching

was not effective in providing appropriate learning for all students. The large groups created by combined cohorts are difficult to manage in practical situations and the needs of some groups are not compatible. In one instance, where a group of pre-NVQ students were combined with an NVQ level 2 conservation group, the pre-NVQ students were coached and instructed by the NVQ students. This was helpful for the personal development of the NVQ students, but it did not help them to develop the other skills they require at an appropriate pace. The self-assessment report recognises that teachers need to develop differentiated learning materials, but insufficient attention has been given to the differing needs of students in combined groups.

19 The college has a small range of practical resources on site but staff have built up good relationships with industry and the community and a number of high-quality sites are available for practical work. Students are able to develop their skills in these realistic work environments. This strength is recognised in the self-assessment report. The curriculum is extensively based on practical projects but, in some instances, this is at the expense of the students whose learning needs are not sufficiently taken into account. A florist's shop has recently been opened on the main college site to provide a realistic work environment for students. Students work in this shop on a rota to develop practical skills. A member of staff is present for only 45% of the time and many lessons are unsupervised by staff.

20 Key skills, developed through the medium of horticulture, are well integrated with the curriculum. There is close liaison between the subject team and the key skills tutor. In one key skills lesson, students used a variety of techniques to measure out a garden site. They then used the data in computer-aided design. Overall, retention and achievement are improving. In 1999, 91% of students were retained and 85% of those completing courses achieved their award.

# Curriculum Areas

21 Staff are enthusiastic and committed to the college and the students. While students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported by support workers there are no instructors or technicians. The small number of qualified and experienced staff means that the ratio of staff to students in practical lessons is too low. There are good relationships between staff and students. Course administration is good. Course files contain comprehensive records of teaching schemes and students' progress. Action plans are maintained. Much care is taken to support students in the construction of portfolios. Registers are up to date. Currently, the accreditation of students' prior learning is not well used in the section and some mature students are disadvantaged.

22 In 1998, a Beacon Award received for work with the community was used to purchase a computer and a small supply of books for land-based courses. The range of books is small in both range and quantity. Classrooms used by the team are decorated with posters and photographs, but they are not always appropriate for the classes using them. In a combined NVQ floristry and creative skills lesson the bench space available for the students was quite inadequate. One group of 25 amateur gardeners is timetabled in a room with only 18 chairs.

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 2

**23 The inspection covered all aspects of engineering. Inspectors observed 14 lessons covering both college-based provision and collaborative provision. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective range of teaching and learning methods
- good schemes of work and lesson plans
- effective work-based assessment
- effective provision of key skills and learner support
- thorough quality control of collaborative provision
- good accommodation and equipment

#### Weaknesses

- failure to provide college students with adequate course information
- inadequate management of the local provision's curriculum
- no analysis of part-time students' learning support needs

24 Most of the engineering courses are in collaborative provision. Inspectors judged that there was a thorough quality assurance process in place which consisted of regular contract reviews, course quality monitoring, internal verification and student monitoring systems. The information provided was complete and audit trails showed no discrepancies. Collaborative provision falls into one of three types: dispersed provision in which the learning contracts are made with private companies; private training partnerships; and provision in which the learning contracts are with

individuals who are employed within the armed forces. For two of these types of provision, the college provides valuable services such as skills analysis, assessment of trainees and internal verification of the process. In private training partnerships, the learning contracts are with private companies who form an agreement with a training provider and the college. The training provider delivers a training programme whilst the college provides a quality assurance service for the whole process and assessment and internal verification, as required.

25 Schemes of work and lesson plans are good and prepared to a standard format. Teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning methods and there is good rapport between teachers and students. As identified in the self-assessment report, much of the teaching is good; 11 out of 14 lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be good or outstanding. The teaching and assessment of NVQs in the workplace is to a high standard. Candidates in work-based schemes are enthusiastic and fully engaged in the assessment process, which is well prepared and appropriate for the qualification. Trainees use college-developed learning materials and assessment packs. Full-time engineering students make good use of the college's resource for the development of key skills and for learning support. There is no analysis of the learning support needs of part-time students. However, in contrast to work-based trainees, students in the college do not have detailed information of their course structure or aims and objectives. They do not receive the assessment requirements or an assessment schedule for their course. Grading criteria for assignments are not clearly stated.

26 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college offers a comprehensive range of programmes which meets the needs of the local community. Good opportunities exist for students to progress from foundation to higher programmes. The college has

# Curriculum Areas

well-established links with local employers, schools and the community. The curriculum for local provision is poorly managed, which was not identified in the self-assessment report. Targets are set by course leaders but not always in conjunction with their teams. Students were not provided with course handbooks. Surveys of students' views are conducted once a term and form part of the programme review. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that class sizes are low.

27 Industrial standard, up-to-date specialist equipment exists in spacious, clean and well-maintained accommodation. This is a particular strength in collaborative provision and in the college instrumentation and control facility. Extensive IT resources exist in laboratories and multimedia and key skill centres. There is a well-resourced library. Recent additions include a virtual reality machine simulating various engineering systems. This was not identified in the self-assessment report.

28 Teachers are well qualified and have a good range of specialist skills. Technicians carry out the dual role of assessing NVQ competences and maintaining equipment. All have achieved, or are working towards, training and development lead body assessor awards. This was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Appraisal is undertaken once a year for all staff and is linked to staff development needs.

# Curriculum Areas

## Business and Administration

### Grade 3

**29 Inspectors observed 19 lessons at the college main site, in the community and in dispersed provision. They agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- examples of well-planned and well-managed learning
- good links with employers for collaborative provision
- high standard of students' work
- good specialist IT facilities
- appropriately qualified teachers with recent industrial experience
- good use of realistic work environment on administration courses

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention and low levels of achievement on several courses
- narrow range of full-time business courses
- few opportunities for planned work experience outside college
- poor attendance and punctuality in some lessons
- little sharing of good practice across the programme area
- inadequate additional learning support for full-time business students

30 A broad range of courses in administration and single skills subjects provides students with good opportunities for progression. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the number of courses in the community is a strength. The range of other business courses is narrow. The college offers no foundation or intermediate full-time courses, although students

can progress to higher national certificate and diploma courses in the college. A substantial part of the provision is collaborative provision delivered nationally.

31 There are many examples of well-planned and well-managed learning as stated in the self-assessment report. Teachers make clear to students the aims and objectives of lessons and provide a variety of appropriate activities to promote effective learning. Students appreciate the opportunities provided in the skills workshops to follow programmes which take into account their individual needs and enable them to progress at their own pace. On NVQ administration courses, key skills are fully integrated. A learning support tutor provides additional support for students of NVQ administration. On the GNVQ course, an innovative scheme to develop students' confidence in face-to-face communications provides extra staff to give additional support for students. However, the sessions offered are poorly attended by those students who might benefit from them and there are delays in reporting students' absences. In some lessons, students arrive late and teachers fail to question them as to the reasons. The college's self-assessment report identified attendance as poor on some courses. During the inspection, the average attendance in lessons observed was 76%, which is 2% below the average for the business programme area nationally. Teachers made good use of part-time students' work experience to provide realistic examples of work in lessons.

32 Assignments are set at the appropriate level and are carefully marked to meet examination board and NVQ requirements. Most students' work is of a high standard. Students make good use of IT facilities to improve their presentation of work. On NVQ courses, students are assessed largely on evidence of their experience of real work. The administration centre provides good opportunities for full-time students to gain experience of, and be accredited for, work

# Curriculum Areas

experience. There are few opportunities for work experience to be undertaken outside college.

33 Inspectors considered that the information relating to students' achievements was largely unreliable. Where judgements could be made, inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that some retention and achievement rates are poor. On GNVQ advanced level courses, retention fell to 15% in 1999, on the national certificate course it was 52% and on NVQ level 1 administration 20%. Pass rates in single subject secretarial skills examinations equal or exceed national averages. All students who completed the certificate in personnel practice achieved the award. The pass rate for NVQ level 3 wholesaling, warehousing and stores at 90%, is substantially higher than the national average of 33%. Pass rates on several important courses are low; for example, the GNVQ advanced pass rate declined to 50%, and the NVQ level 2 in customer service at 60% is below the national average of 85%. On NVQ administration, levels of achievement were low in 1998 with level 1 being 0% and level 2 being 39%.

34 Courses are well managed. Teams meet regularly to plan and review. Internal verification on both dispersed and traditional programmes is rigorous. There are good links between employers for collaborative provision and college staff involved in assessment and verification. There is little sharing of good practice across the programme area; often teachers in different sections duplicate efforts to prepare documentation and learning materials.

35 There are good specialist IT facilities at the main college site. Resources at sites in the community are poorer. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that most staff are appropriately qualified and have recent and relevant industrial experience. In administration courses in college there are few staff with the appropriate internal verifier award.

# Curriculum Areas

## Catering and Hospitality

### Grade 2

**36 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in hospitality and catering. The self-assessment report was comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses identified, although some weaknesses were understated.**

#### Key strengths

- well-managed teaching programmes
- good standard of assessment
- well-qualified staff with good staff development strategy
- appropriate individual progression routes for students

#### Weaknesses

- some poor retention and achievement rates
- insufficient target-setting for collaborative provision students

37 The school offers a good range of programmes leading to national qualifications from pre-foundation to higher national certificate. Programmes have been developed to meet the needs of individual students who can gain additional qualifications to improve their employment prospects. Courses offer good progression routes. Key skills have been integrated with full-time NVQ programmes. As the college identifies, representatives elected by student groups attend course review meetings as well as meetings with the programme area leader. On a regular basis, students complete questionnaires. Course teams meet on a regular basis to review performance and consider new developments. Local collaborative provision is well supervised, although no observation of the teaching and learning by the college manager has taken place. There is an effective internal verification schedule within the area and good recording of students' achievements.

38 Teaching and learning is well developed with clearly defined objectives. As identified in the self-assessment report, initial assessment of students' learning needs is undertaken before the start of programmes and good learning support is available. There is a useful induction period for students. Lesson plans are well developed, as are schemes of work. There are good working relationships between staff and students which helps to sustain students' motivation. The realistic working environments provide good opportunities for assessment. As identified in the self-assessment report, students from different course levels operate within the same working environment and reflect the hierarchical structure within the industry. Students on reception programmes undertake an extended period of industrial placement. Assessment for these students is carried out in the workplace. Assignments are well developed and in marking them teachers give good feedback to students. Students are encouraged to ask for assessment when they feel competent. This also applies to the students who are based within the industry but learning targets for these students are not identified sufficiently. Students with learning difficulties are integrated with mainstream programmes, where appropriate, and good progression routes exist for them.

39 The targets for retention and achievement on programmes are set largely by programme teams and they reflect established trends. Retention and achievement on some programmes has been weak and this was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. The need for close monitoring has been addressed and is leading to improved retention and achievement rates. Achievement is well recorded and monitored within programmes.

40 Students and staff are regularly involved in outside catering events, which provide good experience for students and complement programme content. The school has long-established links with overseas organisations that help to broaden students' experiences. Many students make good use of

# Curriculum Areas

IT in their assignment work and achieve a good standard of presentation.

41 The self-assessment report recognises that staff have appropriate and relevant qualifications and good industrial experience. There is a well-constructed staff development system where staff are asked to appraise their roles and identify development needs. At present, four staff are following degree courses. Observations of staff teaching takes place at regular intervals and is well documented. Assessors in the workplace are vocationally qualified and have either achieved, or are working towards, assessor awards.

42 The area is generally well equipped and the teaching accommodation is of a good standard and well maintained. Equipment in dispersed local provision is of a good industrial standard. Learning materials which provide the necessary basic knowledge have been developed to help students learn on their own. These learning materials are also developed to take into account the needs of students with learning difficulties. There are good displays of students' work in the area. Library resources are of an adequate level, though magazine and periodical stock is low.

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Care

### Grade 4

**43 Inspectors visited workplace provision for childcare and a range of collaborative provision for health and social care and childcare as well as courses in the college. They observed 17 lessons. Inspectors were unable to agree with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but agreed with most of the weaknesses. They also identified other significant weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- well-managed and well-planned collaborative provision
- clear link of theory and practice in many lessons

#### Weaknesses

- retention and achievement rates below the national average
- insufficient learning in a significant number of lessons
- adverse effect of staff turnover on students' learning
- failure to develop students' key skills
- few opportunities for progression
- inadequate curriculum management, structure and organisation of college-based provision

44 The department of health and social care makes up 29% of the overall college provision. The departmental head is responsible for both college and collaborative provision. Programmes are offered at levels 1 to 3. Current provision limits progression opportunities particularly to level 4. Planned programmes have not materialised in the current year, for example a newly validated higher national certificate for early years. On college courses, approximately 280 students attend full time and approximately 220 on a

part-time basis. On collaborative provision courses there are approximately 5,500 part-time students. Students are predominantly female. There is little curriculum planning, structure or management of college-based provision. Faculty meetings are held monthly. Action points are noted in the minutes. There is no clear evidence that action points are addressed.

45 The college recognises that its achievement and retention rates are low for both collaborative provision and college-based courses. Evidence presented suggests that almost all retention rates fall below the national average as do most achievement rates. For example, GNVQ foundation health and social care college-based provision had a 29% achievement rate for students completing in July 1999, and the NVQ level 3 childcare and education course in collaborative provision had an achievement rate of 28%. Detailed evidence showing students' progression to related occupations was available only for a minority of full-time programmes. There is some evidence of progression within the college. Key skills are a centrally provided entitlement for year-one students but are integrated with second-year programmes. Students work towards City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) wordprocessing and the English Speaking Board awards. There was no evidence of the integration of learning technology with the curriculum. Students had little understanding of key skills and there was no evidence that their development of key skills was monitored either by the teacher or the students.

46 Students on collaborative provision spoke favourably of flexible and timely assessment opportunities. Work-based candidates on collaborative provision spoke very highly of the support they received from the college. The college is responding to the needs of complex care organisations by offering an increased range of NVQs, for example, in childcare and education, special needs, and in residential and hospital support. In childcare, students attend a range of appropriate work placements on

# Curriculum Areas

alternate weeks. College-based assignments draw on these experiences to link theory to practice.

47 Schemes of work were underdeveloped. Lesson plans were appropriately detailed and some included different activities for groups of students in the same lesson. These opportunities were not always taken. In the better lessons, teachers used a variety of appropriate teaching methods. For example, in a sign language stage 2 lesson led by a profoundly deaf teacher, students signed throughout the observation working on a variety of tasks, as a whole group, in pairs and on an individual basis with the teacher to ensure that all students had a clear understanding. Almost a quarter of the lessons observed were less than satisfactory. Little learning took place. For example, in a lesson in a laboratory, three students were unable to undertake the allocated task because the microscopes were faulty. In another lesson, the teacher failed to give clear guidance on the writing of personal statements. In a few cases, students arriving late were not appropriately questioned as to why.

48 During the last year, the department lost 45% of its permanent staff, mostly those working in college. Staff development has concentrated on training and development lead body awards rather than current national curriculum developments. Staff who manage collaborative provision hold appropriate training and development lead body awards. A well-equipped base room is now available for childcare studies. A range of appropriate, current texts, periodicals and CD-ROMs are available in the library. Further resources are available for collaborative provision. All candidates are able to borrow college materials. Provision of resources for candidates on dispersed NVQs is not always good, though some centres have a range of appropriate materials available on site.

# Curriculum Areas

## English and Modern Languages

### Grade 2

**49 The inspection covered English and modern foreign languages. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- high-quality teaching
- above average achievement at GCE A level and well above average achievement at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE)
- good staff development activities
- thorough assessment procedures and careful, conscientious marking
- good leadership of the programme area

#### Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many courses

50 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the range of provision is extensive. There are ample possibilities for progression. Courses run in languages up to level 3 with the possibility of attaining level 6 in French, Spanish and German. Lessons also take place in centres in the community, including foreign language lessons for primary school pupils and their parents and for students with learning difficulties. The college offers a range of methods and facilities for learning and both full-time and part-time students are encouraged to use the latest language software in the multimedia suite.

51 The self-assessment report describes the teaching as effective. Inspectors judged teaching to be of high quality. All lessons seen were at least good, and well over half were outstanding. Lesson plans and schemes of work are exemplary in clarity and detail. Teachers

adhere closely to them. Lessons proceed in a friendly collaborative way which does not compromise the teachers' concern for academic rigour. Class time is fully utilised. Students appreciate being encouraged to express their own views and enjoy the variety of activities and assignments they receive. In some English lessons, video clips of the works being studied are used imaginatively to bring a text to life and to underline the main points of the lesson. In one GCSE English lesson, students enjoyed finding alternatives for a basic verb in a vocabulary extension exercise.

52 Students clearly enjoy their learning. They are eager to learn and make progress. There are lively discussions in English lessons. More advanced students can converse quite fluently in groups in the appropriate foreign language. Coursework is almost invariably well-presented and appropriate to the level of the course. Assessment is thorough. Formal and informal reviews give staff and students a clear picture of the progress that is being made. Teachers correct errors in English conscientiously and make copious comments on students' written work showing how it might be improved. This is a clear improvement compared with the previous inspection. The self-assessment report identifies students' achievements as excellent. This certainly applies to GCSE where the proportion achieving grades C or above is high, but it is an overstatement for GCE A level where achievement is good. College results at various accredited proficiency levels in modern languages are also good. Retention levels are identified by the college as a weakness and inspectors agreed. However, strenuous efforts are being made to improve the situation, for example, through the recently introduced 'at risk file' system. Attendance at the lessons observed was 72%, which was unusually low, according to the registers. A large number of sick notes were received.

# Curriculum Areas

53 There is good leadership in this programme area. Curriculum management is effective. Pastoral and academic record-keeping is meticulous. All significant data and information are accessible and easily retrieved. There is an obvious commitment to improvement across administrative, pastoral and academic affairs. The staff development record is good. Two members of staff have completed research degrees in relevant fields. The college hosted a Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) conference on technology in languages teaching. Part-time staff participate in meetings and training days. The self-assessment report failed to mention the successful lesson observation scheme which helps to improve teaching standards and has given staff the valuable opportunity to evaluate and compare their own perception of their teaching with that of their observer.

54 Staff have appropriate degrees and teaching qualifications. Teacher-generated resources are excellent in content and presentation. Library provision is generally adequate, but students complain rightly that there are insufficient copies of more popular texts. The supply of CD-ROMs for language studies is currently being increased. As stated in the self-assessment report, the college was justifiably pleased with its award for innovation in video-conferencing several years ago. At the moment, however, this very useful facility is underused because of the inability to locate suitable partners.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

55 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. However, they also identified some further strengths and weaknesses.

#### Key strengths

- good pre-entry and enrolment information and guidance for full-time students
- effective tutorial support for most students on collaborative provision
- effective personal support services
- good support for students with learning difficulties
- regular progress reviews

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate support for part-time students in college
- poor quality of group tutorials
- ineffective management and co-ordination of tutorial support
- inadequate co-ordination of the different aspects of student support
- poor punctuality and attendance

56 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that central admissions procedures for full-time students, the systems for identifying learning support needs and the integration of students with learning difficulties with mainstream courses are good. Support and guidance services are centralised in the 'Welcome Centre' next to the main reception area. Its comprehensive service is well used and valued by students. Since the last inspection, the college has improved the support it gives to full-time students. The admissions system for them includes impartial guidance, diagnostic testing to identify their preferred learning styles and learning support needs and interviews with

course tutors. Some are invited to attend a basic skills summer school to help them to prepare for study. Of students diagnosed in need of support, to date 81% have received help this year as compared with only 30% last year. Students with dyslexia receive good support, including a self-help group available through the learning support co-ordinator.

57 However, 95% of enrolments are part time and many of these students are on collaborative provision. In college, the provision of support for part-time students relies mainly on their taking the initiative. Students may refer themselves to support services but they are not routinely screened. The college recognises the many weaknesses in its support for part-time students but has so far not made plans to address them. Entry to collaborative provision is generally well planned and students receive appropriate initial guidance. Most students have regular progress reviews and are appreciative of the support given by their tutor or mentor. However, in some areas, there is a lack of rigour in monitoring students' progress and the extent to which they are achieving targets for the completion of courses.

58 Many aspects of student support are individually well organised but there are insufficient links between the activities that contribute to the support of students. Data are collected on the uptake of additional support but are not rigorously analysed to monitor the impact of additional support on retention and achievement. A new structure for the management of pastoral care has been agreed but little progress has been made in implementing planned improvements. Staffing difficulties have contributed to the current situation, but they do not account for the lack of progress made to address weaknesses that were identified at the last inspection.

59 The college offers help ranging from financial support with course-related costs, transport or childcare to information on benefits, loans and accommodation. Access funds are an important part of the college's

# Cross-college Provision

retention strategy. The retention rate for those full-time students in receipt of support from the access fund was 91% last year. Students identified this help as significant in affecting their ability to continue their studies. All students have access to a health adviser, personal counselling and individual careers advice from a trained careers officer employed by the college or a member of the local careers service. Seventy-two group careers sessions and 647 individual careers interviews were conducted last year. Induction courses are planned for all students.

60 Twenty-one support workers work at the college to provide help for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities with note-taking and signing and with the integration of students with some mainstream courses. Specialist help and learning resources are made available in response to students' diagnosed needs and to support inclusive learning. A separate specialist course for high school students with moderate learning difficulties integrates key skills with the curriculum. Teachers have high expectations of the 60 students currently enrolled on this course. The use of electronic equipment to enhance assignment work, provide evidence for portfolios or improve their presentation of work is common amongst these students.

61 Students' progress is regularly reviewed and action plans for learning updated. Parents or guardians of younger students are invited to attend a parents' evening and they receive written progress reports. Employers are kept informed of the performance of students and their attendance. The college has been slow to address the issues of student retention, punctuality and attendance that were highlighted in the previous inspection report. There is no vigilant system for monitoring non-attendance and poor punctuality. Attendance in lessons observed was 8% lower than the national average. There is no effective strategy to identify the causes of poor retention in several curriculum areas.

62 Although a tutorial framework is published, implementation of the tutorial programme is not rigorously enforced, monitored or evaluated in all programme areas. Many part-time students, including some on collaborative provision, have no readily identifiable personal tutor. Inspectors found that some students received good, regular tutorial support and some did not. Of tutorials observed, 40% were unsatisfactory. Attendance at individual tutorials averaged 69%. Attendance at group tutorials ranged from 17% to 86%.

## General Resources

### Grade 3

**63 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but they identified an additional weakness. The college has made some progress to address some of the weaknesses since the self-assessment report was written.**

#### Key strengths

- well-maintained and refurbished accommodation at the main site
- good range of specialist equipment and learning resources
- attractive reception area providing easy access to student services on the main site
- good range of easily accessible IT facilities

#### Weaknesses

- some outdated and inadequate library stock
- inadequate arrangements for monitoring the efficient use of accommodation
- poor arrangements to provide non-smokers with access to catering facilities
- poor accommodation on some sites including limited access for wheelchair users

# Cross-college Provision

64 The college operates on four sites in Widnes as well as 26 sites in the local community and the extensive collaborative provision at company sites throughout the country. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the main site has been extensively refurbished over recent years. The reception area is attractive and welcoming. It leads directly to the area where students can obtain advice and guidance. Major improvements have been made to the standard of decoration and the quality of the environment in classrooms and resource centres. Most specialist equipment in subject areas is of a high standard. Access for students who use wheelchairs is good, although there is no lift to the upper floor of one block. Toilets for students with disabilities are located only on the ground floor.

65 In contrast to the high quality of accommodation at the main site, the other three annexes offer a less appropriate environment for learning. The poorest accommodation is at the Simms Cross site, a former nineteenth-century junior school used to accommodate health and social care and horticulture provision. The building is expensive to maintain and offers a generally unattractive learning environment. The college shares accommodation at the Victoria Street annexe. Some rooms are inaccessible to students using wheelchairs who are thereby denied access to programmes in art, design and performing arts. There is no wheelchair access to Broseley House, which is mainly used for administrative accommodation, but some lessons, for example in trades union studies, are held there. The college does not have effective arrangements in place to monitor effectively the allocation of accommodation to subject areas to ensure that effective and efficient use is made of the space available. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

66 In its self-assessment report, the college identified the location of the library as a weakness. It is detached from the modern and

well-equipped resource centres in the main block. As a result of student feedback the college identified the need to address the inadequacies and outdated bookstock in several subject areas and made an additional allocation for extra book purchases this year. In a survey, only a minority of college students claimed that they made use of the library for access to books. There are no concise subject guides available for students to inform them of the book and non-book resources available in the college. The college has only recently introduced arrangements to improve the liaison between teachers in curriculum areas and library staff in order to plan more effectively the development of the library as a learning resource.

67 The college is well equipped with computers for students' use. The majority of the 355 machines are located in four resource suites on the main site and a further 30 at the Victoria Street annexe. In the self-assessment report, the college stated as a weakness the unreliability of the multimedia network. Since the report was produced, action has been taken to remedy this and early indications suggest that improvements have been made. There remains a weakness, identified in the self-assessment report, arising from the lack of availability of technical support staff to maintain IT equipment, some of which requires specialist support that is not always available on site. The help desk, through which staff make repair requests, arranges attention within 24 hours of the request for only half of the repairs. Several projects have encouraged staff to produce curriculum materials using the range of IT facilities available. However, there is no current IT strategy in place to ensure that curriculum areas make full use of the technology available to improve students' learning.

68 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college lacks sports and social areas for students. Other than an arrangement for students to use the local leisure centre at lunchtime there is little curriculum enrichment available for students and few facilities to

# Cross-college Provision

provide it. The college has been particularly remiss in not providing adequate catering facilities for students and staff who are non-smokers. There is a small coffee and snack bar in which smoking is not permitted, but the main college refectory is a smoking area. A small room at the far end of the refectory is for non-smokers but access to it is through the smoking area. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 4

**69 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and most of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified some weaknesses not recognised in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- staff fully involved in the self-assessment process
- good staff development arrangements

#### Weaknesses

- slow progress in addressing the main issues arising from the last inspection
- lack of routine use of standards and performance indicators to measure progress
- uneven quality and rigor of some course reviews
- ineffective monitoring of achievement of curriculum targets

70 The college strategic aims and operating statement give a clear commitment to the improvement of quality. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process, which resulted in a comprehensive and self-critical report. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that staff have had good training in developing a self-critical analysis. Lesson

observations have raised awareness of how to improve teaching and learning and evaluate performance.

71 As the college recognises in its self-assessment report, its procedures for assuring quality are not fully effective. It has not set standards or established performance indicators against which improvement can be measured. There is inadequate monitoring of the achievement of college targets. Senior managers do not have regular updates on course and student performance. This makes it difficult for them to make comparisons across provision or compare performance with national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC. The college has been slow to demonstrate the progress made in addressing several of the main weaknesses identified at the last inspection. The proportion of unsatisfactory lesson observation grades remains the same as at the last inspection.

72 There is uneven quality and lack of rigor in course reviews. The college identified this weakness. Poorer course reviews lack critical evaluation of course performance and action plans fail to address key issues. A minority of reports are carelessly completed. Dates for the completion of reports are not always made clear or adhered to. There is little evidence in course review minutes that all actions from previous meetings have received attention. The better reviews include explicit reference to students' views, external verifier reports and clearly identify the key strengths and weaknesses. The college has made slow progress in ensuring that the course review process is implemented fully in all areas.

73 The college has self-assessed its work in previous years. The system was bureaucratic and staff perceived it as unwieldy. The self-assessment report prepared for this inspection is the first of a new format. The judgements have been informed by the college's internal arrangements for the review of quality

# Cross-college Provision

and have been moderated by the senior management team. Staff took the process of self-assessment seriously and have produced a comprehensive, well-presented assessment of strengths and weakness supported by appropriate evidence. Curriculum teams have analysed course retention and achievement, but have used national benchmarking data ineffectively to inform judgements. The college did not identify a number of weaknesses. Managers overestimated the proportion of higher grades in its lesson observations as compared with those observed by inspectors by 22%. Significant staff changes had taken place between the internal observations being made and the inspection. The seriousness of the weaknesses in some areas of cross-college provision was not appreciated.

74 The college systematically collects and analyses the views of students on the quality of its provision. Overall, levels of students' satisfaction have improved over the last few years. Students get regular feedback on the outcomes of the survey and representatives attend some course team meetings. Their contributions are valued by staff. The college charter is clear and concise. Improvements in students' awareness of the charter is developed during induction, but rarely reinforced during the course. First-year students in local and dispersed provision are clear about the college arrangements and student entitlement. Students use the complaints procedure, but in some cases, do not always get immediate action from the college.

75 Quality assurance arrangements for the collaborative provision agreements are mainly thorough and include lesson observations, regular visits to providers, involvement in the self-assessment process and appropriate initial guidance. There is regular monitoring, good internal verification and staff are committed to implementing the procedures. However, in engineering provision the monitoring of the progress of trainees and of targets for

completion is not clear. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that rates of achievement in collaborative provision are slow. There is little evidence of strategies for improving performance and retention in collaborative provision.

76 Inspectors agreed with the college that there are appropriate training opportunities for staff. The college places a high priority on staff development. The college spends the equivalent of 1% of its pay budget on staff development. College staff are encouraged to update their professional skills and participate in industrial training and work placements. They appreciate this level of support. Teachers in curriculum areas and staff from areas of cross-college provision organise a wide range of development sessions where good practice can be shared. The annual professional review of staff is well established and includes all staff. Each review results in an individual development plan that takes account of personal training needs and college strategic objectives. The college achieved the Investor in People award in 1997.

## Governance

### *Grade 5*

**77 The self-assessment report for governance was produced by the former board. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses recognised in this report and they also identified others. They did not agree with the strengths.**

#### **Key strengths**

- there are no key strengths

#### **Weaknesses**

- lack of attention to the educational character and mission of the college
- failure to exercise proper control over the activities of senior postholders
- ineffective committees and an inadequate committee structure

# Cross-college Provision

- weaknesses in clerking
- neglect of duties in relation to franchised provision
- unauthorised signing of contracts
- few links with staff
- lack of performance indicators and targets to measure board performance

78 The board has a determined membership of 19 governors. In the week prior to the inspection, the secretary of state for education and employment appointed six governors comprising five business members and one local authority member in addition to the two existing governors, the acting principal and a staff governor. A temporary clerk is supporting the new board. At the time of the inspection the new board had met once. As one of the business governors was absent due to sudden ill-health the meeting was inquorate.

79 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The former board did not substantially conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also did not substantially fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. Since the last inspection, the former governors had failed to ensure that they were fully informed of the college's activities and did not exercise proper supervision of senior postholders. During 1998-99, the former governors co-operated fully with official investigations into alleged irregularities at the college. They investigated the principal, the vice-principal and their own conduct. They completed a review of both governance and management and they established a 'whistleblowing' policy. All of these actions were outlined in the plan they submitted to the FEFC. They met on 28 occasions between March 1998 and June 1999, but they did not effectively conduct the normal business of governance. In March 1999, the

members of the former board gave notice of their decision to resign in July so that a new board could be appointed. The effective date of resignation of a number of them was not clearly established. The secretary of state did not appoint the new governors until October so that there was no meeting of the corporation between June and October.

80 Until the end of 1998, the college had five committees: finance and general purposes; human resources; audit; search; and remuneration. In January 1999, the finance, human resource and remuneration committees were amalgamated to form a resources committee. Approval for this action is not clearly minuted. The committee does not meet the requirement for the remuneration of senior postholders to be determined by an independent body. Committees have met infrequently and have not functioned effectively. The finance and general purposes committee and the resources committee only met three times altogether in the 18 months preceding the inspection, most recently in March 1999. They did not monitor rigorously the college's finances. Correct procedures were not followed when appointing the third acting principal. The audit committee also only met three times in the same period. It set no performance indicators for internal and external audit. For two years to 1999, it accepted annual internal audit reports without an overall opinion. In 1998-99, it did not ensure that the college had an appropriate internal audit service. It did not issue an annual report to the full board. Its terms of reference were not updated in line with Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*.

81 The former governors did not pay appropriate attention to the educational character and mission of the college. They were not well informed about student retention and achievement. In January 1999, the board set up a quality, curriculum and delivery committee. The committee met once. The former governors persistently neglected to enquire in sufficient

# Cross-college Provision

depth into franchised courses. They received only sketchy and uninformative annual reports on provision, which at its height yielded 75% of the college's funded units. The last report was in January 1999. The former board delegated responsibility for signing contracts for franchised work to two governors. During the summer of 1999, three governors signed contracts on behalf of the college. Three contracts were signed on the date of the appointment of the new governors by the secretary of state. As the self-assessment report states, there was little communication between governors and college staff.

82 Inspectors did not agree with the college's assessment that the clerking arrangements of the former board were a strength. The clerk did not have an up-to-date job description defining his clerking duties. He was a senior manager in the college and his independence was compromised when he presented and spoke on papers relating to the area he managed. The quorum and membership of committees were not determined. Changes to membership were inadequately documented. Standing orders do not reflect current best practice. There is no approved process for responding to complaints about governance. There has been no formal skills audit of governors. The clerk did not implement a review of their induction and training needs. Attendance at board meetings was not adequately monitored or reported. There are no performance indicators or targets to measure the performance of the board.

## Management

### *Grade 4*

**83 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that most strengths had been overstated. They found an additional strength and some additional weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good communications
- productive links with local partners

#### **Weaknesses**

- inadequate management information system
- ineffective strategic planning
- weak financial management
- underdeveloped implementation and monitoring of college policies
- widely varying curriculum management practices

84 During the 18 months preceding the inspection, the senior management team has experienced many changes. At the time of the inspection, only three out of 11 senior managers remained. There have been three acting principals. The current acting principal took up post in July 1999. Two senior posts are vacant. The senior management team includes the acting principal and the three acting assistant principals. Programme area leaders and other managers are invited to senior management team meetings to improve communications. Three of the four programme area leaders were appointed on 1 July 1999. The fourth post is vacant. During 1999, the college carried out a restructuring exercise which resulted in the loss of 140 staff, most of them teachers. Extensive staff changes and the number of vacancies at management level have had considerable adverse effects on the quality of management.

85 Communications have greatly improved during the last year, a strength not noted in the self-assessment report. Senior managers have taken successful steps to improve relationships with staff and make them feel more involved. A staff consultative council, suspended during the restructuring, has been reconvened. There is a regular internal magazine, which staff value. All staff have access to a well-used electronic mail

# Cross-college Provision

system. The acting principals have held regular full-staff meetings. Frequent timetabled meetings at college and department level are well attended and clearly minuted.

86 Senior managers set 12 strategic objectives in October 1998. These were approved by the former board in December 1998. Implementation of these objectives is slow. There has been some reduction in the proportion of dispersed provision and some increase in the proportion of locally based courses in line with one of the objectives. Managers are unsure of their responsibilities in implementing and monitoring operational objectives. There is insufficient reference to improving retention and achievement rates even though this is the college's primary strategic objective. These weaknesses were not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

87 The college has recently revised most of its policies. All the policies include monitoring criteria, though in some, responsibilities and timescales are vague. The equal opportunities policy is well monitored but there are few examples of action taken to address the weaknesses identified. Some other policies are not effectively implemented. These weaknesses were not identified by the college.

88 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. Owing to the college's over-claim of funding, it has not been able to finalise its 1997-98 financial statements. The college has also not been able to submit recent student data claims to the FEFC. The internal auditors have issued very few reports in 1998-99 so there is no evidence available relating to the status of the college's internal control systems. Income for 1999-2000 is based on funding for 550,000 units; collaborative provision contracts for around 40% of this are still to be signed. Management accounts have not been produced on a regular basis and did not consistently include a commentary nor a

cashflow forecast. The college subsidiary company has accumulated significant losses in two years and is no longer trading. A new finance system was introduced in June 1999. Budget holders do not receive any financial information.

89 The college's management information system cannot provide managers with appropriate, up-to-date and accurate information. Cross-college information on retention and achievement was not produced in a coherent form until September 1999. Inspectors found that this information contains inaccuracies. Managers find it difficult to make comparisons across college provision or with national benchmarking data provided by the FEFC or to make a strategic response to poor performance. Paper-based systems are used to monitor deployment of teaching staff and teachers' workloads. Weaknesses in management information are partially acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

90 Curriculum management is not uniformly rigorous. Managers are unsure about recently introduced procedures. In a few cases, sections are well managed and course performance is good. In most areas, curriculum managers are not addressing some important tasks. Registration practices differ across programme areas and are sometimes poorly implemented. There is ineffective gathering, checking and use of student data. Identification of good practice is not shared across the college.

91 A college marketing strategy was approved by senior managers in 1998. There is no marketing manager in post. A number of marketing activities have been carried out. For example, a study undertaken with another local college identified the curriculum needs of Runcorn. Research carried out by the social services was used to bid successfully for non-schedule 2 provision. Few research reports have been followed up by whole-college strategies. The college has worked hard to

# Cross-college Provision

improve its promotional and publicity activity. Strategies include local press 'good news' stories, advertisements on local radio and buses, attendance at schools' open evenings and local mailshots. The effectiveness of these strategies is not closely monitored.

92 Inspectors agreed that the college has developed productive links with a range of external partners. Strong links with the new unitary authority have led to a number of collaborative activities. The acting principal serves on the management group of the Halton Partnership and is a director of Business Link Halton. A number of college staff attend the Halton Economic Development Liaison Group. The college is a member of the local lifelong learning partnership. Links with the TEC have improved recently, but are not good in respect of contract delivery and management.

## Conclusions

93 The self-assessment report and its updates were useful for planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with a number of the judgements in the report, but also identified additional weaknesses. They agreed with the grades awarded by the college in three out of seven curriculum areas. In three areas they considered that important weaknesses had been under-emphasised or not identified. In one area, inspectors placed more emphasis on strengths in the teaching and awarded a better grade than the college. In cross-college provision, inspectors agreed with the overall college judgements in three areas, but found that weaknesses had been underestimated in the other two. The college has made little progress in addressing a number of the main weaknesses in the previous inspection report.

94 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (May 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	7
19-24 years	16
25+ years	76
Not known	0
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	37
Level 2 (intermediate)	26
Level 3 (advanced)	15
Level 4/5 (higher)	3
Non-schedule 2	19
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	251	3,812	12
Agriculture	26	76	0
Construction	28	150	0
Engineering	98	5,991	17
Business	230	4,878	15
Hotel and catering	193	3,286	10
Health and community care	588	9,455	29
Art and design	209	493	2
Humanities	165	4,252	13
Basic education	40	506	2
Total	1,828	32,899	100

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 28% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

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

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	178	20	9	207
Supporting direct learning contact	65	0	6	71
Other support	130	0	6	136
Total	373	20	21	414

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997*	1998	1999
Income	£13,319,820	£15,094,933	£11,641,228
Average level of funding (ALF)	£10.32	£12.56	£15.04
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	55%	55%
Achievement of funding target	194%	158%	79%
Diversity of income	20%	20%	32%
Operating surplus	-£791,494	£7,638,000	-£1,376,726

*Sources: Income - FEFC (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*

*ALF - FEFC (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*

*Payroll - FEFC (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*

*Achievement of funding target - FEFC (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*

*Diversity of income - FEFC (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*

*Operating surplus - FEFC (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*

*\*recalculated by the FEFC and the college*

**FEFC Inspection Report 15/00**

**Published by the  
Further Education Funding Council  
Website [www.fefc.ac.uk](http://www.fefc.ac.uk)  
© FEFC December 1999**