

Knowsley Community College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
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 according to a four-year cycle. It also 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 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

© FEFC 1998

You may photocopy this report. A college may use its report in promotional material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings of the inspection are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

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

Context	
The college and its mission	1
The inspection	6

Curriculum areas	
Computing and information technology	8
Land-based industries	13
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	18
Health, social care and childcare	23
Art, design and creative studies	29
English and communications	34
Social studies	39

Cross-college provision	
Support for students	43
General resources	50
Quality assurance	55
Governance	61
Management	66
Conclusions	73

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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Knowsley Community College

North West Region

Inspected March 1998

Knowsley Community College is a tertiary college located on two main sites in Roby and Kirkby, and using two annexes, Bracknell and the Kennels, and over 80 local community centres in the borough of Knowsley, Merseyside. The college's self-assessment report was based on an internal inspection programme designed by the college's self-assessment committee on which governors are represented. The self-assessment report covered all aspects of provision and drew on programme area reviews, observations of teaching and learning, internal audits and the views of students, parents and employers. The report was evaluative and identified strengths, weaknesses and actions for improvement. Action plans derived from self-assessment were incorporated into the college's strategic and operational objectives. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report though, in some curriculum areas, some strengths were overstated and, in others, a few weaknesses were not identified. Inspectors found that significant progress had been made on the action plans for the areas they inspected.

The college offers a wide range of courses covering all of the FEFC's programme areas. Courses in five of these areas were inspected

together with aspects of cross-college provision. The college has extensive and productive partnerships with local and regional groups. It has successfully attracted large numbers of students who do not usually participate in further education and these progress well on a wide range of courses. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and there are many examples of imaginative practice. High-quality and accessible IT facilities result in large numbers of students acquiring these skills. Students benefit from effective and comprehensive guidance services. Governors are fully involved in the strategic direction of the college and carefully monitor its overall performance. The college is well managed and there is a strong sense of shared values among staff. There is widespread commitment among staff and governors to the continuous improvement of provision. Quality assurance procedures are outstanding. The college recognises that retention on some courses is poor and to redress this is using a wide range of strategies appropriate to the community it serves. To improve further the quality of provision it should: extend the range of practical learning activities on some full-time courses for younger students; enable the sharing of good practice within and across sections; and address variations in tutorial support for students.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	2	Support for students	2
Land-based industries	2	General resources	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2	Quality assurance	1
Health, social care and childcare	2	Governance	1
Art, design and creative studies	2	Management	1
English and communications	2		
Social studies	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Knowsley Community College serves an area of suburbs and small towns situated to the east of Liverpool in Merseyside, the only region in England to be granted European objective one status in recognition of its relative poverty. The college operates on four sites: two major centres at Roby and Kirkby and a specialist centre for training in land-based industries known as the Kennels. A further site at Bracknell Avenue is due to close later in 1998 with students transferring to a new building at the Kirkby site. The 1991 census shows that the borough of Knowsley is one of the most deprived areas in the country. One child in four is from a lone parent household; 40 per cent of children live in a house where no adult is in employment and 16 per cent of the population have a limiting long-term illness. The level of skills and qualifications of Knowsley residents is well below the United Kingdom average. Only 16 per cent of Knowsley households are headed by someone of 'professional' or 'skilled non-manual' status compared with 33 per cent for England and Wales.

2 Employment service statistics show that unemployment rates have fallen from 15 per cent in 1995 to 13 per cent in 1997 but are still more than twice the national average of 6 per cent. Thirty-six per cent of all unemployed individuals have been out of work for more than a year. Youth unemployment rates are the highest in the country with over one-third of 18 to 24 year olds being unemployed. According to the Department for Education and Employment statistics, only 24 per cent of Knowsley school-leavers pass five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or above, well below the national average of 45 per cent. In 1997, 12 per cent of school-leavers achieved no GCSEs at any grade, compared with the national average of 8 per cent. Knowsley metropolitan borough council statistics show that 54 per cent of school-leavers enter further

education compared with the United Kingdom average of 72 per cent. About 20 per cent progress to youth training schemes and only 6 per cent to employment. Knowsley's industrial base is mainly manufacturing which accounts for 48 per cent of local employment. The service sector is growing but is well below the national average in the extent to which it offers employment. The college has been very effective in attracting disadvantaged individuals into education. Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) analysis of enrolments indicates that 73 per cent of the college's students are from deprived areas compared with a national average of 25 per cent.

3 The college aims to increase community participation and achievement and has defined its mission as 'responding to lifelong learning needs'. The curriculum offer includes general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), GCSE, adult basic education, access to higher education programmes, pre-vocational day and evening classes as well as a wide range of vocational courses. Courses are mainly at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, though there are a few higher education programmes in business, computing and mechatronics. Considerable resources have been devoted to the development of 'flexible learning centres', large workshops equipped with networked computers, a large stock of software including CD-ROMs, workbooks and other learning materials which enable students to work on their own. The centres are staffed at all times by subject specialists and technical support staff who provide individual support for students. Part-time students who prefer a flexible mode of attendance can enrol at the centres to study for information technology (IT) qualifications at various levels, as can full-time students following supplementary courses in IT.

4 Since incorporation, the college has grown by 50 per cent even though it is in a highly competitive locality. Within three miles of the college, there are 12 school sixth forms and

Context

within 10 miles there are five further education colleges and two sixth form colleges. To attract adults back into education, the college provides courses in over 80 community centres situated in local venues such as primary schools. The numbers on these courses have grown from 800 in 1995 to over 6,000 in 1997. The range of school link courses for students aged 14 to 16 years includes a variety of vocational options such as catering, construction, hairdressing and motor vehicle engineering. This year, over 800 pupils are following these courses. Provision for disaffected pupils attracts over 100 enrolments each year.

5 The college has successfully broadened its sources of income. A college company provides a responsive training service for industry. The college is the largest managing agent on Merseyside for TEC-funded training and is taking a leading role in establishing New Deal provision. European funded courses provide over £1.5 million income. The college has exceeded its growth targets each year since 1993.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 16 March 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by an inspector against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining boards. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors working for 43 days and an auditor working for five days. They examined a variety of documents and held meetings with governors, managers, other college staff, students, and with representatives of the Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the local education authority (LEA), schools and community groups. Inspectors observed 98 lessons and examined samples of students' work.

7 Of the 98 lessons inspected, 68 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 4 per cent were judged to be less than satisfactory. This compares with the average of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 72 per cent, below the sector average for 1996-97 of 77 per cent. The highest average attendance was in health and social care at 87 per cent and the lowest was in hairdressing at 55 per cent. The average class size, at 10.6 students per class, was similar to the average of 10.8 recorded in the chief inspector's annual report. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	10	5	0	0	18
GCSE	7	7	4	0	0	18
GNVQ	0	3	4	2	0	9
NVQ	4	9	3	0	0	16
Other vocational*	10	14	11	2	0	37
Total	24	43	27	4	0	98

**includes courses accredited by C&G, RSA, Edexcel, Merseyside Open College Network and a range of professional bodies*

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

8 Inspectors broadly agreed with the key strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found that some of the strengths were not significant and a few significant weakness had not been identified.

Key strengths

- wide range of provision
- substantial growth in enrolments at community centres and flexible learning centres
- innovative curriculum developments in multimedia and teleworking
- well-prepared lessons and effective learning materials
- good pass rates for general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation and intermediate courses
- high achievements of part-time students enrolled at learning centres
- good-quality equipment and facilities in the flexible learning centres

Weaknesses

- insufficient practical learning methods in computer studies
- low expectations of younger students
- poor retention rates on several courses

9 The extensive range of provision includes courses at GCE A level, GNVQ foundation and intermediate levels, Edexcel advanced and higher levels and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) levels 1 and 2. The college has made very good progress in widening participation in computing and IT courses. Currently, over 1,000 students are participating in courses in IT provided in 80 community

centres located around the borough. Though some of the accommodation is small and does not match that available at the college, students are enthusiastic and achieve good examination pass rates. In addition, 1,360 students are enrolled on IT courses at the flexible learning centres located at the Roby and Kirkby sites, where flexible patterns of attendance enable large numbers of students to complete courses. The standard of the equipment and learning materials at the centres is excellent. Inspectors agreed with the view in the self-assessment report that systems for attendance monitoring at such centres should be improved.

10 The three sections involved in teaching IT and computing work together well and the provision is effectively managed. All are co-operating in a number of innovative developments in multimedia and teleworking to widen participation further. For example, an IBM enterprise project is developing multimedia courses for the unemployed and a TELECENT project is providing access to training for students with disabilities working from home.

11 Inspectors judged seven of the 13 classes they observed as good or outstanding. Lessons are carefully prepared and are supported by good-quality handouts, though schemes of work for computer studies courses give little detail about the teaching and learning methods to be used. Students use electronic information sources in some modules and second-year national diploma students make several individual and group presentations using appropriate modern technology. However, students on many full-time computer studies courses are insufficiently involved in wider practical applications of computing. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there are insufficient links with industry. The majority of mature students are strongly committed to study and enjoy their work. Sixteen- to 18-year-old students by contrast make little contribution to class activities. Some staff do not have high enough expectations for younger students to

Curriculum Areas

attend regularly, to contribute fully to class discussion and to complete their work to set deadlines. Full-time students follow the college record of achievement procedure for progress review but they do not always complete action plans.

12 Examination pass rates for students who complete their courses are satisfactory or good. Pass rates in the national diploma and GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses are consistently above the respective national averages. One hundred per cent pass rates have been achieved on some courses with small numbers of students. In 1997, 531 students at community centres and 753 students at flexible learning centres achieved qualifications in IT. The college's self-assessment report identifies problems of retention on some courses, particularly the GNVQ intermediate IT and the national diploma courses. On the latter course the problem persists, about a half of those students who enrolled in September 1997 having withdrawn at the time of the inspection. Key skills development is identified by the

college as a weakness and this judgement is supported by the poor quality of literacy and presentation in some students' portfolios.

Examples of students' achievements in computing and information technology, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
National and higher national certificates	Retention (%)	53	76	77
	Pass rate (%)	100	77	71
National diploma in computer studies/IT	Retention (%)	65	56	65
	Pass rate (%)	94	87	77
GNVQ foundation and intermediate level courses	Retention (%)	54	72	29
	Pass rate (%)	71	62	67
IT courses taken in outreach centres (part time)	Retention (%)	*	*	82
	Pass rate (%)	70	72	81
IT courses taken in flexible learning centres (part time)	Retention (%)	83	88	88
	Pass rate (%)	82	93	85

Source: college data

*retention statistics unreliable due to roll-on/roll-off nature of courses

Curriculum Areas

Land-based Industries

Grade 2

13 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report, though they found that the report placed insufficient emphasis on teaching and learning and on students' achievements. Many of the weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed before the inspection.

Key strengths

- consistently good standard of teaching
- realistic teaching of practical skills
- good retention and examination pass rates
- high standard of students' work in both classroom and practical activities
- well-managed courses

Weaknesses

- no strategy for the development of key skills
- few animals on site limiting practical opportunities for animal care

14 Considerable expansion of provision in recent years has resulted in a wide range of courses in environmental studies, animal care, floristry, amenity horticulture and arboriculture. Most of the provision leads to NVQ levels 1 or 2 or to other equivalent vocational qualifications. Limited opportunity to progress beyond level 2 was introduced in 1995 with the offer of a course in amenity horticulture leading to NVQ level 3. Modes of attendance are flexible to meet the needs of students from very varied backgrounds. Often, students from different groups are taught together. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report correctly identifies the strong links with local employers who provide work placement opportunities for full-time students and facilities

for practical skills teaching. The college has obtained external funding for an environmental resource and information centre which contains 15 computers and a range of specialist facilities for use by students including videos, books and scientific equipment for environmental studies. The centre is used also to run courses for teachers of environmental education and as a base for the Knowsley Environmental Forum.

15 Courses are well managed. Schemes of work and lesson plans have all been updated recently and are of a consistently good standard. Section and course files are well recorded and comprehensive. Charts of students' progress are kept on notice boards in the staff room. Course tutors know their students well and are aware of destinations and reasons for early leaving. As the self-assessment report indicates, all staff at the centre support one another. Teachers work closely together and often teach as a team. The distance between the Kennels centre and the main campus helps staff at the Kennels to develop their team spirit but it also makes them a little remote from other staff and facilities in the college. The good practical teaching facilities at the Kennels are supplemented by opportunities for students to work on the premises of external agencies.

16 Inspectors found that in eight of the 10 lessons observed, strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses. A broad range of teaching methods is used appropriately and effectively in recognition of the diverse learning needs of students in most groups. The consistently high standard of teaching both in classroom and practical situations is particularly noteworthy. The aims and objectives of each lesson are shared with the students at the start and teachers summarise lessons effectively at the end, enabling students to review their learning. Teachers make good use of question and answer techniques and classroom discussions to draw on students' knowledge and experience and extend their learning. In a classroom-based lesson, students' understanding of the diseases

Curriculum Areas

of small animals was tested and reinforced through use of handouts, group tasks, test sheets and class discussions. In one animal care lesson, the teacher used her own dog to revise a previous lesson on what to look for in an injured animal and then to demonstrate and allow students to practise bandaging. Students appreciate the variety of teaching methods they experience and value the positive working relationships they have with staff. Practical teaching takes place in realistic work situations, often on employers' premises. Appropriate emphasis is maintained throughout on health and safety issues and the curriculum is enriched by the inclusion of a first aid module accredited by Merseyside Open College Network.

17 Students' achievements in most courses over the last three years have been good. Student course files are well organised and show a wide use of handouts, many of which require student responses. Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report takes insufficient account of the decline in retention and pass rates on some courses from the very high levels in 1995. Some courses such as NVQ level 2 amenity horticulture have maintained good retention and examination pass rates. The NVQ level 3 course has a high retention rate, though, at the time of the inspection, no students had yet achieved the full award. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there is no planned integration of key skills with students' learning activities.

Examples of students' achievements in land-based industries, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQs	Retention (%)	98	85	84
	Pass rate (%)	86	82	69
Other vocational qualifications*	Retention (%)	88	72	71
	Pass rate (%)	77	77	66

Source: college data

*includes C&G and Merseyside Open College Network courses

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 2

18 The inspection covered all aspects of hairdressing and beauty therapy provision. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, although they identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- consistently good teaching
- effective use of new technology
- effective promotion of professional standards
- modern specialist accommodation equipped to a good commercial standard
- good pass rates achieved by students completing courses
- practical skills well developed in most students

Weaknesses

- poor retention, attendance and punctuality on hairdressing courses
- insufficient planned work experience
- shortage of clients for practical sessions

19 The college offers a wide range of full-time courses leading to NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. The range of beauty therapy courses has been extended in the last two years to include holistic therapies for full-time and part-time evening students. There are presently no part-time courses in beauty therapy during the day and no part-time courses in hairdressing at any time. This limits the opportunities to participate for those employed in the industry. Foundation level programmes have been introduced to widen participation amongst under-represented groups. Courses are well organised and

effectively managed. Comprehensive schemes of work and detailed lesson plans are features of all courses and are used well by teachers. Learning materials are designed effectively and are appropriate for the level of the course. Regular team meetings are held at which performance indicators are set, monitored and reviewed.

20 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers are well qualified, have appropriate commercial experience and take up regular opportunities for updating their skills. The hairdressing and beauty salons provide a realistic working environment and the wide range of modern equipment they contain compares well with industrial standards. Students use a computerised till to carry out reception duties and they use computers in the salons for storing and retrieving information. There are some courses where insufficient clients cause problems for students undergoing assessment. An extensive publicity campaign over the last two months has started to attract more clients

21 The quality of teaching is consistently high. Of 13 lessons observed, 10 were rated good or outstanding. A range of teaching methods is used effectively. Learning is enhanced by good-quality learning materials and by the appropriate use of IT. Aims and objectives are clearly defined and shared with students at the start of lessons. Often teachers begin lessons by reviewing and checking previous learning. In practical sessions, teachers clearly introduce the skills to be learned, often by demonstration. Students are encouraged to make links between theory and practical lessons. In one particularly effective practical lesson, the organisation of equipment, clients and students reflected a modern commercial salon. Students demonstrated high levels of competence and the ability to carry out tasks independently. Professional standards were encouraged and achieved. In a weaker practical lesson, half the students were unable to participate in the

Curriculum Areas

planned activity because of a shortage of clients. They were not clear what work had to be completed during this period. Most students have little planned work experience. The timing of work placements causes difficulties for adult students with domestic and childcare responsibilities. There are insufficient links with local employers.

22 Students who complete their courses achieve examination pass rates which are consistently above national averages. There is detailed marking of students' written work and portfolios are well organised and presented. Key skills are developed through class and coursework. Students have ready access to computers for assignment work. Most students achieve a good level of practical skills. In 1997, pass rates were particularly good in NVQ in hairdressing at levels 1 and 2 and in NVQ in beauty therapy at levels 2 and 3. The self-assessment report recognises that there is poor retention, attendance and punctuality on some courses. Although students receive diagnostic assessment on entry to the college and students' additional learning support needs are identified, few students make use of the extensive learning support available.

Examples of students' achievements in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
NVQ level 3	Retention (%)	95	72	74
	Pass rate (%)	42	81	83
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	75	73	67
	Pass rate (%)	93	91	90
NVQ level 1	Retention (%)	43	41	41
	Pass rate (%)	94	94	89

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Health, Social Care and Childcare

Grade 2

23 Though inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, they identified a number of additional strengths and a few additional weaknesses. Considerable progress had been made on implementing improvements since the self-assessment report was written.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- effective learning from work experience
- high standards of written work and vocational skills
- good pass rates on most courses
- forward-looking curriculum development, organisation and management
- good use of opportunities for industrial updating by teachers
- creation of an effective learning environment within poor-quality accommodation

Weaknesses

- little sharing of good practice in teaching and learning
- key skill development limited to some courses

24 Most teaching is of good quality. Of the 10 lessons observed, six were rated good or outstanding. These were well planned and well managed to ensure that students experienced a range of learning methods. The college's self-assessment report identified good student and teacher relationships as a strong feature of most courses and inspectors agreed with this. Within a supportive environment, teachers provide varied and challenging learning activities for

students. In a GNVQ advanced lesson, students were successfully encouraged to recall previous learning in order to complete a task concerned with identifying information skills and written communication skills relevant to their future career goals. A few lessons were monotonous and unrelieved by opportunities for students to ask questions and initiate discussion. In one such lesson, an overhead projector slide was presented in language that was too complex for the level of the course. Many students copied it down without understanding its meaning.

25 Effective work experience is provided for all students. Students on the diploma in nursery nursing and the certificate in childcare and education appreciate the good opportunities they have during their work experience placement for developing vocational skills. They are clear about their learning goals and their progress towards these is monitored well by college and school staff. Teachers enable students to use their work experience to contribute to class work and coursework. Employers in the work placements used by students on nursery nursing courses praised the standards achieved and the responsible attitude of students.

26 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report correctly identifies that students generally work well and achieve good standards of written work and vocational skills. They attend regular, formal reviews with tutors at which they are given clear feedback on their progress which is carefully recorded. Though key skills are developed and monitored well for students on GNVQ programmes, this is not the case for students on the other courses in health, social and childcare, an issue not identified in the self-assessment report. Examination pass rates are good on most courses. Those for counselling courses and GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses are consistently above the national average. Retention rates are well below the national average on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses and have declined significantly at advanced level over the

Curriculum Areas

last three years. Strategies for improving retention have yet to have an effect.

27 Inspectors agreed with the updated self-assessment report that improvements have been made to curriculum organisation and management. The new head of section is aware of key issues and communicates well with the whole team to carry forward developments in the curriculum. There are plans to widen participation for mature students but these have not yet been implemented.

28 Teachers on all the health, social and childcare provision are well qualified and experienced. Staff attendance at relevant staff development events and their maintenance of professional registration, where appropriate, keeps them up to date with developments in their specialism. The self-assessment report identifies the poor quality of the accommodation at the Bracknell Annexe, where most health, social and childcare courses are taught. Inspectors identified strengths in the care that staff and students have taken of the building in

order to produce an environment which promotes learning. Rooms were light, airy, clean and tidy and much enhanced by displays of high-quality student work.

Examples of students' achievements in health, social care and childcare, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced childcare	Retention (%)	84	76	93
	Pass rate (%)	63	65	69
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	75	52	49
	Pass rate (%)	76	89	71
Intermediate childcare	Retention (%)	83	76	93
	Pass rate (%)	70	64	79
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	69	57	74
	Pass rate (%)	68	82	69
GNVQ foundation	Retention (%)	89	90	61
	Pass rate (%)	41	44	58
Counselling	Retention (%)	85	92	81
	Pass rate (%)	100	91	82

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Creative Studies

Grade 2

29 The inspection covered all art and design, performing arts and media courses. The college produced a separate self-assessment report for each of these three specialist areas. While inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in these, they found that some important strengths were overestimated and some weaknesses insufficiently acknowledged. Effective implementation of action plans has redressed some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective teams of enthusiastic teachers
- high quality of programme and lesson preparation and teaching
- participation imaginatively and effectively widened for low achievers
- good examination pass rates
- assiduous monitoring of attendance and good retention in art and design
- challenging, sophisticated and varied performance work
- rigorous quality procedures and constructive response to external verification

Weaknesses

- some poor retention, attendance and punctuality
- limitations in the range of part-time vocational programmes
- inappropriate accommodation and lack of resources on some performing arts courses

30 Courses are thoroughly planned. There are detailed schemes of work, including assessment schemes for most courses, though they do not

regularly include the mapping of key skills development. All three self-assessment reports acknowledge that the delivery of the provision across three sections leads to insufficient links between the groups of courses. The different sections have devised a number of initiatives to widen participation, most notably of young men and of excluded or disaffected school pupils. For example, an intermediate level music course 'Roll Over Beethoven' has recruited well and provides progression to national diploma programmes. The college encourages local youth theatre and dance groups to use its facilities as a performance venue.

31 The standard of teaching is high. Inspectors observed 25 lessons, of which 18 were rated outstanding or good. Most were characterised by well-planned and inspirational teaching. The self-assessment reports identified as a strength the wide range of learning experiences and their diagnostic effectiveness for individual students and inspectors agreed with this. A part-time student was so enthused by work on the Renaissance seen on a trip to the Victoria and Albert Museum that she has produced her own work arising from the resulting research and development. The work is unique, clearly inspired by the museum examples, and highly creative. In a new lecture theatre, which has excellent overhead video projection, students were studying war photography as part of media studies. They had been given useful background documents and a format for making critical comments. After using these formats to comment on the video seen, students joined in a discussion which introduced wider communication concepts. Teachers use a range of appropriate and interesting learning materials to encourage students' understanding. An effective system for briefing students on assignments and marking their work includes joint assessment by members of teaching teams.

32 Examination pass rates for students who complete their courses are consistently high.

Curriculum Areas

Retention is much improved in most art and design courses though it remains variable in performing arts and media courses. The self-assessment reports identify that progression to higher education is good in most courses. Few students progress to employment. Creative work is of a high standard with particular strengths in life and technical drawing. There is a challenging programme of theatrical productions which enable students to test and demonstrate their acquired skills. The key skills of communication and IT are well integrated with all full-time courses. All students follow an appropriate course in IT and have computer graphics experience. Number skills are less systematically integrated with class work and assignments.

33 Accommodation and equipment in the art and design and media sections are appropriate and of a high standard. As the self-assessment reports indicate, the accommodation for lessons in popular music is inadequate; it is affected by frequent and distracting interruptions from adjacent rooms.

Examples of students' achievements in art, design and creative studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	76	67	69
	Pass rate (%)	96	89	93
GCE A/AS level	Retention (%)	78	67	70
	Pass rate (%)	95	98	98
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	53	58	75
	Pass rate (%)	80	90	88
GCSE	Retention (%)	77	71	85
	Pass rate (%)	65	80	80
Other vocational (including C&G courses)	Retention (%)	79	61	71
	Pass rate (%)	89	88	83
Foundation vocational	Retention (%)	53	59	68
	Pass rate (%)	70	90	90

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

English and Communications

Grade 2

34 The inspection covered the college's GCE A level, GCSE, access to higher education, pre-GCSE and creative writing courses. The inspection drew on the self-assessment reports for humanities and the community participation unit. Both cover a range of subjects of which English is one. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment reports, though they found a few additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- most examination pass rates above national averages
- the wide range of courses
- good rates of progression from community centres to main centres
- teachers skilled at developing and adapting resources
- enrichment activities that allow students to gain additional skills and knowledge

Weaknesses

- insufficient variation in teaching and learning methods in three-hour lessons
- GCE A level students' lack of confidence in oral skills

35 The college offers a wide range of English courses from basic to advanced, including pre-GCSE, vocational English and creative writing, which successfully widens participation. Enrichment opportunities are valued by students. For example, GCE A level students benefit from additional courses such as introduction to journalism, languages and European business. For students following courses at centres in the community, visits are organised to the main college centres and to

other educational and cultural venues. Courses are well organised. Teachers use detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Regular team meetings involve part-time staff.

36 Of the 17 lessons they observed, inspectors judged eight to be good or outstanding. They agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers are committed to their work and responsive to the needs of students. A first-year GCE A level English language class was considering gender and language. Students were asked in groups to identify words used to describe particular groups in society. This was followed by class analysis of the meaning behind the terms and an analysis of resource materials on political correctness. The teacher was skilled at ensuring that students were aware of the need for sensitive use of language and that their analysis was at an appropriate standard for advanced work. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, in many three-hour lessons insufficient variation in teaching and learning methods leads to some students losing interest and becoming inattentive. Though generally teachers showed skill in developing and adapting resources to meet the needs of different groups, in some lessons, they failed to use videos or overhead projectors when it was appropriate to do so.

37 Students on courses at community centres are developing confidence in oral, written and IT skills. In one basic English lesson, a group of unemployed men had given a presentation to the staff at a job centre. They had to explain their work at college and help the staff to understand the needs of clients with literacy difficulties. In a lesson based at a community centre, a group of mature women were given newspapers covering the budget speech from the previous day. They made lists for and against the budget in preparation for an assignment. The teacher valued their contributions and the discussion was lively and effective. GCE A level and access to higher education students display sound knowledge

Curriculum Areas

and analytical skills. Students in an access to higher education class had been studying *Othello* for three weeks. They were able to pick out the main themes from extracts and explain the use of literary devices like dramatic irony. GCE A level and GCSE students are not sufficiently confident in presenting ideas to the class.

38 The self-assessment report identifies examination pass rates above the national average. In 1995 and 1997, all students on the two-year GCE A level English literature course passed the examination. In 1997, students on the two-year GCE A level English language course achieved a pass rate of 94 per cent. GCSE results are consistently above the national averages and pass rates were particularly good in 1997. Lower retention and pass rates were recorded on the one-year GCE A/AS level courses, which have small numbers of students, and results on the two-year GCE A level English language course were below the national averages in 1995 and 1996. These were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. There are good examples of progression from both community and college-based courses, for example, from the pre-GCSE and the access to higher education courses. However, information on destinations is not thorough. The college is

developing progression routes on courses within the community centres as well as on to courses at main sites.

Examples of students' achievements in English and communications, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level English language (two-year courses)	Retention (%)	72	67	65
	Pass rate (%)	70	67	94
GCE A/As level English literature (two-year courses)	Retention (%)	68	87	80
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	83
Access to higher education	Retention (%)	93	88	89
	Pass rate (%)	92	93	89
GCSE English language	Retention (%)	87	70	73
	Pass rate (%)	68	65	85

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Social Studies

Grade 3

39 The inspection covered psychology, sociology and government and politics. The college's self-assessment report covered the whole humanities section and many of the judgements in it were not necessarily applicable to social studies. There was no specific self-assessment of the social studies area. Many of the strengths listed were descriptions of what should be standard practice. References to evidence were vague. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses that were identified in the report but considered that some had been omitted. Inspectors concluded that the college's self-assessment report overstated a number of strengths and did not identify some weaknesses in social studies.

Key strengths

- high-quality learning materials
- thorough marking of students' work
- close review of students' progress and action-planning for improvement
- good results in GCE A level sociology
- effective subject teams

Weaknesses

- lack of methods to address the different stages of learning reached by students
- inadequate checks on learning in the classroom
- poor development of students' research skills
- GCSE pass rates consistently below national averages
- poor retention rates on most courses

40 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in sociology, psychology and politics. In six of these, strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses. As

mentioned in the college's self-assessment report, teachers in social studies regularly meet to share ideas and plan the courses. They have positive working relationships with the students. In the better lessons, students were involved in a variety of activities and contributed their own ideas. In a psychology lesson students examined newspaper articles which they themselves had selected in order to discuss how violence might be explained by psychological theories of aggression. Most students were able to give plausible explanations which demonstrated a sound grasp of the theories. Students benefit from detailed diagnostic feedback on their written assignments which includes cover sheets on which teachers outline methods for improving performance. The students also benefit from regular subject reviews which enable them to set targets for their learning. As the self-assessment report recognises, little is done to help develop students' research skills and their ability to work on their own. Not much progress has been made in incorporating IT software into the learning programmes. Few of the teaching methods used take into account the different stages of learning of individual students.

41 Examination pass rates in psychology and sociology have fluctuated around the national average for further education colleges, with some improvement in 1997. Results on the one-year GCE A level psychology course improved to a pass rate of 100 per cent in 1997 from the 1995 and 1996 pass rates of 58 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively. In 1997, 82 per cent of students on the GCSE sociology course achieved an A to C grade. Retention rates are generally unsatisfactory and some are poor. In 1997, retention on both GCSE psychology and sociology declined to around 50 per cent. These poor rates for social studies are not recognised in the self-assessment report. Although the college does set targets for retention, there is no clear policy for addressing this issue on the social studies courses.

Curriculum Areas

42 Teachers are highly experienced and suitably qualified. Several have extensive examining experience. They are well informed of developments in their subject areas. Students benefit from high-quality learning materials which supplement classroom teaching. In psychology, these are often structured around a variety of activities for use in three-hour lessons. One extended teaching session was based around a well-designed study pack on sleep and dreams containing a range of sources and mix of exercises which provided a good variety of learning activities. The majority of rooms are adequately furnished but lack any display which would give them distinctive subject identities.

Examples of students' achievements in social studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A/AS level (two-year courses)	Retention (%)	67	64	72
	Pass rate (%)	64	71	75
GCE A/AS level (one-year courses)	Retention (%)	63	46	47
	Pass rate (%)	48	49	73
GCSE	Retention (%)	74	72	52
	Pass rate (%)	74	52	59

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

43 Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. Action plans arising from self-assessment have been implemented and many weaknesses have been addressed successfully.

Key strengths

- effective and comprehensive guidance and entry procedures
- wide and appropriate range of support services
- effective review and recording of progress of full-time students
- successful initiatives to improve retention
- effective systems for identifying students needing learning support
- good opportunities for careers guidance

Weaknesses

- variations in tutorial curriculum and practice
- take-up of learning support provision significantly less than identified need

44 The college places great emphasis on support for students. It provides a wide range of support through student services, which is well staffed and has large, good-quality accommodation located prominently at the entrances of the two main sites. Students can use support services either as a 'drop-in' facility or by appointment. Trained personnel, including the college chaplain, provide prompt careers guidance, counselling, welfare information and financial advice and support. A careers officer from Careers Decisions attends the college daily to provide guidance and assist students with careers action-planning. The college careers adviser supports this work and provides a careers advice service to students on

courses at the community centres. Four workers provide induction sessions on all courses at the community centres, during which they publicise the college support services.

45 Systems for pre-entry guidance for prospective students are effectively and efficiently organised. School liaison is strong. The schools liaison team works closely with year 10 and 11 pupils in local schools and attends parents evenings. Over 800 pupils participate in link courses at the college across a range of curriculum areas. Provision for disaffected and excluded pupils has proved effective and is increasing. Many such pupils progress to mainstream courses at the college. Links with Careers Decisions and the local educational psychology service ensure effective guidance for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The enrolment system is well managed, flexible and provides further opportunities for impartial guidance. Inspectors agreed with the college's positive self-assessment of the induction process. The system is thorough and informative and includes a 'right choice' review at the end of six weeks which allows students and staff to confirm or modify choice of course.

46 All full-time students enrolled on courses at intermediate and foundation levels undertake diagnostic screening to identify those needing support with literacy and numeracy skills. This year, 686 students were screened and 494 were identified as needing support. Only 118 of these students took up the offer of an interview and only 75 are presently receiving individual support. The college has identified that student reluctance to participate in basic skills support sessions is the main reason for the low take up. A contributory factor is that there are only three learning support assistants and this leads to delays in the interview process and difficulties in promoting the provision to staff and students. Since students are more willing to use the learning centres to develop their basic skills, the college has improved this provision through

Cross-college Provision

further development of materials including multimedia packages, productive links between the centre tutors and subject teachers and an emphasis on students' individual needs and interests. Many students use the centres primarily for developing IT and literacy skills. They make less use of them to improve basic number skills.

47 Additional learning support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is provided in a variety of ways. Three specialists provide support for students with dyslexia. The small number of students with sensory impairments are supported with specialised equipment. Many staff have completed a course in basic sign language. The college has made significant efforts, by providing specialised equipment or adapting existing facilities, to enable students who have restricted mobility to join hairdressing and catering courses. Such students follow these courses successfully.

48 There is a well-established, cross-college tutorial system for full-time students. Tutors design their own tutorial sessions using a list of required topics and suggested activities and, in practice, tutorial support to individual students varies considerably. Responsibility for the support of part-time students lies with their subject tutors. The self-assessment report recognises that support for part-time students needs to be offered more consistently. Students have a high regard for the personal support offered by their tutors. Within tutorial sessions, full-time students review and evaluate their progress and personal achievement, using the national records of achievement. The emphasis on university entrance procedures for students on GCE A level courses seeks to raise students' aspirations but it narrows tutorial support in the second year. A co-ordinator has been appointed recently to develop a broader tutorial curriculum and provide appropriate, structured materials and other support for tutors.

49 The college's self-assessment report has identified poor retention rates on many courses

and includes detailed action plans to address these. Various strategies are used, including rigorous monitoring of absences and a routine follow-up procedure. This year, the college has introduced motivational interviewing for those students deemed to be at risk of leaving, linked to the development of relevant teaching and learning methods and the establishment of appropriate courses at pre-entry and entry levels. Retention rates overall have improved by over 6 per cent during the last two years.

General Resources

Grade 2

50 The college's self-assessment report on general resources is comprehensive and inspectors agreed with strengths and weaknesses identified by the college.

Key strengths

- significant improvements in the quality and safety of accommodation since the last inspection
- well-considered planned maintenance, refurbishment and new building programme
- easily accessible reception, guidance, and flexible learning centres
- good standard and range of resources within flexible learning centres
- significantly improved refectory areas on the two main sites
- displays of students' work and general information in teaching and communal areas
- efficient use of accommodation

Weaknesses

- insufficient bookstock for some courses
- poor range of IT equipment at the two annexes

Cross-college Provision

51 Since incorporation, the college has vigorously pursued a policy of reducing the number of main sites and improving its accommodation. It has closed the Prescott Centre and relocated students to a purpose-built art and media centre at Roby, redeveloped sports facilities and refurbished a number of areas. A £4 million capital project is in progress to close the Bracknell Annexe and create new facilities for modern engineering technology and construction at Kirkby by 1999. Plans are well advanced for the establishment of a CD-ROM enterprise centre at Kirkby, partly funded by an international computer manufacturer. Currently, the standard of accommodation ranges from excellent to very poor. Some buildings are old, inefficient and unsuitable for their purpose. Through rationalisation and refurbishment the college is upgrading all areas to a common high standard. Maintenance is carefully planned with effective procedures for the reporting and monitoring of minor repairs. As highlighted in the self-assessment report, a centralised room allocation system ensures efficient and flexible use of accommodation. The FEFC considers the college to be within the top 20 per cent of colleges for effective use of floor space.

52 A new entrance to the Roby Centre has improved its outward appearance and enabled better public access to the reception, student services, hairdressing salons and a leisure management area. Students in office technology, hairdressing and beauty therapy develop their skills in working areas which reflect good industrial standards. Catering students serve paying customers in a well-furnished restaurant. Staff workrooms have sufficient desk and cabinet space, though not all have computers. Photocopying and reprographic facilities are good. Most communal areas and classrooms are carpeted, and include displays of students' work and general information. Premises are clean and free from graffiti and vandalism. Safety and security measures include the use of closed-circuit television surveillance. Inspectors agreed

with the college that on-site security officers provide an efficient service. Seventy-six per cent of the college's floor area is accessible to wheelchairs users, though the building works at Kirkby and the installation of ramps and lifts will increase this figure to 91 per cent by 1999. Directional signposting is inadequate, especially for those who are visually impaired. The college ensures that its provision in community centres is taught in suitable accommodation and with appropriate resources. For example, it supplies adult size tables and chairs to primary schools.

53 Flexible learning centres are located on each of the four main sites. Those at Kirkby and Roby provide good facilities for a range of learning activities and have opening hours to meet the needs of students. However, those at the Kennels and Bracknell annexes have fewer facilities and the centre at the Bracknell Annexe is not open at lunchtimes. Centre staff are experienced and well qualified. They provide a wide range of professional services, including tuition on information searching and handling, and maintain close contact with teachers in curriculum areas. An effective inter-library loans system is available. Processing, cataloguing and issuing of materials is automated. An electronic registration system records the number of users. At Kirkby, the bookstock is small and in some respects outdated, a weakness identified by the college and now being addressed through expenditure which is twice that of the sector average. The learning centres provide students with flexible access to over 150 computers. There is an increasing range of CD-ROMs and access to the internet, but some IT equipment in the learning centres needs updating to match that available in dedicated IT rooms. Most hardware and software at Kirkby is of industrial standard, but some at Roby and the Bracknell Annexe is outdated. There are few information retrieval facilities at the Kennels. Facilities for sensory impaired students include voice synthesizers, adapted controls for keyboards and enlarged screens. The college has over 120 portable

Cross-college Provision

computers which it supplies to its community centres on a daily basis.

54 Newly-built refectories at Roby and Kirkby and a coffee shop at Roby provide pleasant social areas. Opening hours at the refectory at the Bracknell Annexe are restricted. Food is not available at the Kennels, although students have a room where they can eat their own food and purchase or make drinks. A well-run crèche is available at Roby with sufficient places available to meet the demands of students. Sport facilities are well developed at Roby with a sports hall, fully-equipped fitness centre and 10 acres of playing fields. Sufficient car parking is available on all sites, including reserved spaces for students with disabilities.

Quality Assurance

Grade 1

55 The college has maintained its commitment to continuous improvement since the previous inspection. It has further developed its outstanding quality assurance system through the incorporation of a highly effective self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- staff commitment to continuous improvement of provision
- comprehensive quality monitoring procedures
- extensive use of external standards, college targets and performance indicators
- comprehensive internal inspection arrangements that accurately inform self-assessment
- comprehensive and successful efforts to gather the views of students, employers and parents about college provision

- extensive professional development and training opportunities for all staff

Weaknesses

- insufficiently self-critical reviews in some humanities subjects

56 The quality assurance system is comprehensive and effective. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that there is a widespread shared concern amongst staff for continuous quality improvement. The corporation's quality assurance committee monitors the quality of all aspects of provision through well-prepared reports. Governors assess their own performance effectively. Every college employee is a member of at least one 'quality' team. As identified in the self-assessment report, quality teams meet regularly to review and improve courses and all services that support students. They record their activities in a standard format. The college strategic plan gives each quality team direct responsibility for quality monitoring and the continuous improvement of a group of courses or college services.

57 As the college's self-assessment report indicates, there have been developments in quality assurance procedures since the previous inspection. Performance is increasingly measured against college performance indicators and team targets. Although governors and senior managers give clear guidance on overall college performance criteria, each team of staff can negotiate a range of quantitative targets for its own area of work and set challenging but attainable goals. Course team review and evaluation documents analyse targets and evaluate progress; the more effective ones place strong emphasis on action-planning. In these cases, comparison of recent and previous course review and evaluation reports shows notable progress. In some curriculum areas, action-planning is not sufficiently well developed. Teams of support staff have devised

Cross-college Provision

performance targets to improve the standards of services to which students are entitled. Where appropriate, the college seeks external assessment of the quality of its provision. It was the first college to receive the Investor in People award and to complete re-registration. Course delivery and assessments meet awarding body quality assurance requirements. Managers have carried out an extensive benchmarking exercise using FEFC inspection reports of other colleges.

58 Senior managers carry out assessments of curriculum areas, including lesson observations, called programme reviews. They evaluate and score teaching and the promotion of learning, students' achievements and resources. In addition, senior managers review a range of cross-college provision under standard headings. Staff remark that the cycle of programme reviews has improved provision for students. The percentage of lesson observations graded 1 by inspectors has increased from 12 per cent to 25 per cent since the first inspection. Lesson observation contributes to staff appraisal and professional development. The manager responsible for quality assurance has undertaken a number of reviews of aspects of support staff activity that have direct impact on the students' experience such as enrolment and induction procedures, examination administration and reprographic services. Action for improvement has resulted from these reviews.

59 The college places strong emphasis on the evaluation of the perceptions of its client groups. The college has charters for students, parents and employers. Extensive surveys are undertaken to establish how the college is fulfilling its charter service standards. The views of students about their courses and about college services and facilities are surveyed termly. In the main, students' responses are highly favourable. Response rates from parents and employers are low, but their responses mainly reflect a positive view of the provision. The well-publicised charters include information

about complaints procedures. The number of written complaints from students is low, but all attract a timely response. Outcomes are reported annually to governors, who have authorised refunds of course fees to a few students where managers' perception is that charter commitments have not been fully achieved. The college charters are scheduled for review shortly after inspection.

60 All staff are appraised and there are effective procedures for the provision of staff development. The staff development budget exceeds 1.5 per cent of the staffing budget and is supplemented by a good range of internal training events based on self-assessments of performance by teams and individuals. The college recognises that staff development activities give insufficient emphasis to teaching and learning skills. Computerised records of staff development and training activities support efficient booking and review procedures and enable evaluation of the cost effectiveness of every external event by both the participant and appropriate manager. The analysis is beginning to generate useful information on the effectiveness of a number of sector training providers.

Governance

Grade 1

61 The self-assessment report includes a comprehensive analysis of the quality of governance. Inspectors noted that actions had been taken to remedy almost all the weaknesses included in the report and those previously identified in the FEFC's audit service report issued in 1996.

Key strengths

- good balance of skills and experience offered by governors
- close monitoring of college's financial performance

Cross-college Provision

- significant contribution by governors to the strategic direction of the college
- productive relationships between governors and college managers
- comprehensive monitoring of academic performance
- careful review of the implementation of the strategic plan
- excellent clerking arrangements
- comprehensive reports presented by managers to the corporation
- systematic evaluation of the corporation's performance

Weaknesses

- poor attendance by a few governors at full corporation meetings

62 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

63 There are 20 governors, six of whom are women. There are no vacancies. Members have a wide range of appropriate experience, including business, finance, legal, and estates. One governor is a local member of parliament. Two members of staff and one student are governors. A search committee carefully identified the needs of the corporation in filling two vacancies before the inspection. Membership of the audit committee has been strengthened following the introduction of a co-opted external member with audit and financial expertise. The deputy principal and head of finance attend all corporation meetings. New governors undergo a formal induction programme. Most governors attend an annual residential training event. Training is provided

for student governors prior to them taking up their appointment.

64 The corporation has the following committees which meet at least termly: finance and general purposes; audit; accommodation; human resources; quality assurance; and remuneration. The date, purpose and content of each meeting is set out in the annual planning calendar. The conduct of meetings is determined by a comprehensive set of standing orders. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that corporation meetings are effectively chaired and that all those present are encouraged to participate. Attendance at committee meetings is good. There have been a few instances of poor attendance at corporation meetings, though meetings have been quorate. The clerk has a legal qualification and is employed by the corporation. Clerking arrangements are effective and the corporation and its committees receive a high level of professional support. Minutes of meetings are clear, well structured and identify actions required. They are distributed promptly. Copies are available in the college's learning centres and summaries are included in staff bulletins. The corporation has a code of conduct and conducts its business openly. It has a procedure for self-assessment. Governors review their performance over a four-year cycle by completing an annual questionnaire on specific aspects of their role. The quality assurance committee analyses the responses which are then discussed at the governors' annual residential meeting.

65 Governors display strong commitment to the college and are clear about the differences between governance and management. Many attend open days, award ceremonies and student performances, but some consider that they could increase such involvement with more notice of events. Inspectors agreed with the view in the self-assessment report that governors are closely involved in the review and formulation of the college's mission, aims and

Cross-college Provision

objectives. The annual residential meeting always includes an item on strategic planning. All governors receive comprehensive reports which cover both financial and non-financial matters, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Monthly financial reports are clear and concise and each has an accompanying commentary written by the head of finance. The principal provides a written report at each corporation meeting. It includes information on progress towards meeting the college's strategic objectives. Reports on other aspects of the college's performance are equally detailed. For example, those on students' pass and retention rates are compared with both sector averages and the performances of students in the region. Presentations by college managers cover initiatives by both the college and outside agencies. Governors are keen to debate issues which arise. The planning cycle ensures that governors receive reports on the implementation of key policies such as health and safety and disability. However, as identified in the self-assessment report, governors need more information if they are to be able to monitor fully the equal opportunities policy. The quality assurance committee considers the outcomes of staff and student surveys and the nature of complaints, and reports its findings to the corporation. It reviewed the college's self-assessment report prior to its submission to the FEFC and carefully questioned college managers on the reasons for the grades proposed.

Management

Grade 1

66 The college's self-assessment report on management is comprehensive and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the report and found that many of the weaknesses had been redressed.

Key strengths

- positive management and good staff relationships leading to a strong sense of shared values
- exemplary work in widening participation
- effective and cost-efficient achievement of college targets
- positive and productive community links
- good strategic planning and review system
- effective planning and management of the college's estates
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of aspects of management information system at course level
- uneven implementation of the equal opportunities policy

67 The college is effectively managed. The management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and six assistant principals. The team meets weekly and members have open and positive working relationships. This open management style permeates all levels of the college and staff report that they are well informed about college values and objectives. There is full staff involvement in strategic planning and in extensive course evaluation and review. Communications are good with

Cross-college Provision

opportunities for staff to raise issues and receive information through weekly bulletins, staff meetings and a comprehensive schedule of weekly team meetings. Surveys of staff opinions show positive results on morale, management and staff relationships, and understanding of college matters. The provision of a free 'well person' screening service is indicative of management support for staff.

68 The college management structure has clear functional roles for the six assistant principals, with cross-college managers reporting to them. The curriculum is managed by 17 section managers each responsible for a group of courses and the attached consumables budget. Effective management enables the college to achieve its targets and to keep costs under control. The deputy principal monitors course efficiency through graphs which plot staff hour costs against course income and group size. FEFC funding units have been on target for the past three years, and the college has attracted significant European and other funding through a number of partnership initiatives. The phases of the accommodation strategy are being implemented effectively and significant progress has been made in creating a welcoming and attractive environment for students.

69 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance team is appropriately experienced. The college is presently in a healthy financial position. It is successful in generating income from sources other than the FEFC. The FEFC's policy on convergence means that the college will receive additional funding due to its current low average level of funding. Financial returns are submitted to the FEFC in accordance with established deadlines. Management accounts are prepared promptly each month and are accompanied by a commentary and performance indicators to assist their review by senior management, the finance and general

purposes committee and the corporation. Budget holders also receive financial reports generated directly from the accounting system. A comprehensive set of financial regulations exist and these are kept up to date. No internal audit work has been carried out in the current financial year due to a change in the internal audit provider. However, the results of the previous internal auditors and current external auditors do not indicate there are any weaknesses in the college's internal control system.

70 Though the college's management information system has a number of strengths including excellent postcode analysis and prompt return of reports to the FEFC, the college's self-assessment report identifies as a weakness middle managers' lack of direct access to student and course information. At present, they rely on course administrators to provide routine information on courses and students, though requests for reports are met promptly. Systems which would give managers more direct access are being established but have been held up by network installation problems and the need for more training. Information available on student attendance and retention is not always used effectively by course teams.

71 Most college policies are implemented effectively and monitored well. Though considerable progress has been made on equalising opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the self-assessment report identifies the need to promote awareness of the gender aspects of the equal opportunities policy. A video on equal opportunities was bought for use in induction but many staff and students remain unaware of its existence.

72 The self-assessment report stresses the college's strengths in widening participation and inspectors agreed with these. The highly successful courses in the community centres form the largest area of work in the college.

Cross-college Provision

Several other examples of positive community links include the college's close working with European funded 'pathways' groups in Knowsley in meeting their training needs; the productive links with schools through link courses and the free 'in-fill' places offered to GCE A level students in local school sixth forms in subjects not offered by that school. Relationships with the local TEC are cordial and productive. The college is a major provider of TEC-funded youth and adult programmes. Many employers see the college as a responsive and high-quality training provider. The college plays a major role in the local Education and Business Partnership and the Merseyside Strategic Partnership.

Conclusions

73 The self-assessment report was based on the quality assurance evaluations routinely undertaken within the college. It was fully discussed and approved by governors. The report assessed broader aspects of provision than those covered in FEFC inspections. Nevertheless, its comprehensive coverage and format of strengths, weaknesses and detailed action plans for clearly-defined curriculum and cross-college areas provided a sound basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. The self-assessment report is concise and evaluative. Inspectors generally found that strengths were substantiated by a range of evidence and that many of the weaknesses in the report had been or were being addressed as part of the college's operational activities. There was broad agreement between the quality ratings of lessons by inspectors and college managers. Inspectors agreed with all but two of the curriculum grades awarded by the college. In one area, inspectors judged that provision was of a higher quality than indicated by the college's assessment because many significant weaknesses had been redressed. In the other area, they found the college to have overstated the strengths.

74 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 (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	10
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	12
25+ years	56
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	63
Intermediate	19
Advanced	15
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	372	1,530	18
Agriculture	113	420	5
Construction	155	611	7
Engineering	271	474	7
Business	318	800	11
Hotel and catering	191	216	4
Health and community care	494	1,009	15
Art and design	279	990	12
Humanities	521	978	15
Basic education	67	529	6
Total	2,781	7,557	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	183	11	33	227
Supporting direct learning contact	139	8	0	147
Other support	32	0	0	32
Total	354	19	33	406

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£11,030,000	£11,218,000	£11,652,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£14.18	£14.53	£15.29
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	72%	69%
Achievement of funding target	103%	102%	101%
Diversity of income	49%	43%	39%
Operating surplus	£602,000	-£325,000	£262,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	118	148	154
	Average point score per entry	4.4	3.7	3.9
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	96	106	128
	Percentage achieving qualification	88%	75%	73%
	Position in tables	top third	middle third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	119	113
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	69%	69%
	Position in tables	*	top third	top third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

**1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available*

FEFC Inspection Report 77/98

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
July 1998**