

# Lancaster and Morecambe College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
1998-99**

**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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# Contents

Paragraph

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## Summary

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### Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	5

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### Curriculum areas

Business management, secretarial and office administration	9
Hospitality and catering	15
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	21
Health and care	26
Art and design	31
Humanities	36

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### Cross-college provision

Support for students	41
General resources	47
Quality assurance	54
Governance	60
Management	69
Conclusions	75

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### 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 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 108 college inspections

## Student Achievements

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

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given 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 the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

# Summary

## Lancaster and Morecambe College

### North West Region

#### Inspected February 1999

Lancaster and Morecambe College is a medium-sized college offering a wide range of largely vocational courses. The governors and all sections of the college were involved in the production of the comprehensive self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. The grades awarded by the college and those awarded by inspectors were the same except for two curriculum areas where lower grades were awarded by inspectors. Since the self-assessment report was written, the college has acted to remedy some of the weaknesses it identified.

The college offers provision in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Courses in five programme areas together with aspects of cross-college provision were inspected. The college has made much progress since the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Inspectors judged 74% of lessons observed to be good or outstanding compared with 65% in the last inspection. Pass rates are good on most courses and on some they are outstanding. Vocational courses are enhanced by a wide range of modern, well-equipped realistic work environments. Good practice in

developing and recording key skills is a characteristic of most courses. Senior managers are strongly committed to improving quality and there is positive staff support for quality assurance procedures. Students have good access to a wide range of student services. Their views on courses and college services are frequently sought and action is taken to address their concerns. Governors take an active role in setting and monitoring the college's strategic direction. During the last year, the accuracy and usefulness of the central management information system has improved. The college has been consistently successful in meeting its recruitment and financial targets. Productive links with employers have resulted in the college arranging a variety of specialist courses to meet their needs. The college should: continue to improve the collection and recording of information on students' achievements; improve the unsatisfactory attendance rates on many courses; increase the use of national benchmarking data published by the FEFC on retention, achievement and target-setting at course level; improve the quality of some tutorial support; and address shortcomings in library resources.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Business management, secretarial and office administration	2	Support for students	2
Hospitality and catering	1	General resources	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	1	Quality assurance	2
Health and care	2	Governance	2
Art and design	2	Management	2
Humanities	3		

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Lancaster and Morecambe College serves the communities of north Lancashire, south Cumbria and the western edge of north Yorkshire. Its main campus is located between the city of Lancaster and the seaside town of Morecambe. It also offers provision at centres in Lancaster and Morecambe and at several smaller centres in surrounding rural areas. The district of Lancaster and Morecambe has one of the fastest growing populations in Lancashire. By the year 2006, the population is expected to rise from its current level of 137,000 to 145,000. The local economy is dominated by diverse small and medium-sized businesses in the service sector. There are high levels of persistent unemployment. In the urban wards of Lancaster and Morecambe the unemployment rate is 6.4% compared with the national rate of 4.4%.

2 The college operates within an extremely competitive environment. In the Lancaster district, where the achievement of general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) at grade C or above by 16 year olds is 2.3% above the national average, there are six 11 to 18 schools. Only one of these allows the college direct access to its year 11 pupils. The schools have introduced general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses and this has affected recruitment to such courses at the college. The college has responded to competition from schools by developing nine modern, well-equipped real work environments to support a wide range of vocational courses. The real work environments include a variety of hospitality and catering outlets, hairdressing and beauty salons, a general shop, a travel agency and a rehabilitation, health and fitness centre. There are no other sector colleges near to the college, though there are seven within a 30-mile radius.

3 The college offers courses in all 10 of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas. It has developed a range of

training courses for local employers. At the time of the inspection, the college had 1,456 full-time students, 72% of whom were aged 16 to 19, and 3,861 part-time students, 86% of whom were over 19 years of age. Many were studying at venues in the community.

4 Management was restructured in January 1998. The senior management team of five consists of the principal, two assistant principals, the financial services manager and the corporate services manager, who is also the clerk to the corporation. The curriculum is organised in 10 schools, each with a head and programme area managers. The college's mission is to provide high-quality, diverse and relevant education and training to the 16 to 19 age group and the adult population in its community.

## The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 8 February 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information from other directorates of the FEFC. The college's data on the achievements of students who completed their courses in 1998 were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies and found to be accurate. The college found inaccuracies among some of the data on students' achievements for 1996 and 1997 held on the individualised student record (ISR). The inaccuracies stemmed from errors in specifying expected durations for courses and student completion dates. As a result these data were not sufficiently reliable to be published in the inspection report. Where inspectors were able to verify data for 1996 and 1997 against source documents, they used these data to inform their judgements on the quality of courses. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected about two months before the inspection. Eleven inspectors and an auditor spent a total of 50 days in the

# Context

college. Inspectors observed 87 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated college documents. They held meetings with governors, managers, staff and students as well as representatives from local industry, schools and public services.

6 This college was one of 30 in the current cycle of inspections which agreed to participate in the joint Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and FEFC assessment of careers education and guidance. The joint assessment was guided by the inspection framework, with careers education assessors contributing to judgements made by inspectors.

The emphasis in this report on careers education and guidance will help colleges and careers services to improve the quality of the careers education and guidance they offer and help the DfEE to disseminate good practice.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons and tutorials observed and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 87 sessions inspected, 74% were judged to be good or outstanding, and 4% were rated less than satisfactory. This compares favourably with the average figures of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	1	3	3	0	0	7
GNVQ	2	8	3	0	0	13
NVQ	7	12	6	0	0	25
Other vocational	8	9	5	3	0	25
Other*	6	8	2	1	0	17
Total (No.)	24	40	19	4	0	87
Total (%)	28	46	22	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

\*includes higher education, basic education, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and tutorials

# Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Lancaster and Morecambe College	10.4	71
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

# Curriculum Areas

## **Business Management, Secretarial and Office Administration**

### **Grade 2**

**9 The inspection covered management, professional, administration and secretarial studies courses. The college provided two self-assessment reports for these areas. Inspectors agreed with the conclusions in both but identified some additional weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good retention and pass rates on part-time administration and management courses
- effective course planning
- good teaching in most lessons
- a broad and flexible range of provision
- careful marking and prompt return of students' work
- good specialist information technology (IT) facilities

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor pass rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) accounting and administrative and secretarial procedures courses
- unsatisfactory attendance patterns
- examples of poor monitoring and recording of students' progress on administration courses

10 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that a broad range of administration, management and professional programmes is provided. Flexible entry times to courses is a feature of most part-time administration programmes. The corporate client scheme, an initiative to encourage

employees to enrol, has been successful in attracting significant numbers on to courses. Enrolments have greatly exceeded targets on accounting programmes, but are below targets on many administration and management courses. Course files and detailed schemes of work support effective planning, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Lesson plans for management and professional courses include a section for reviewing learning outcomes and this is completed for most lessons.

11 Most of the teaching is good, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Inspectors judged 16 of the 23 lessons observed to be good or outstanding. In administration lessons, students worked at a level which best suited them. Teachers checked their progress carefully and provided additional help when needed. In a secretarial skills lesson, the teacher used a detailed plan well to meet the needs of students working at different levels. Each student followed an individual work schedule which indicated the learning goals to be achieved. In management and professional studies lessons, a variety of appropriate teaching methods effectively sustained students' interest. Learning and teaching materials were of a high quality. For example, in a successful lesson on a health and safety course, a video about first aid was used to provide an effective introduction to key issues and terminology. It was followed by a productive discussion about the appropriate arrangements for first aid in different working environments. In a minority of administration lessons, teachers do not monitor students' progress effectively. On one course, no records of students' progress were kept. Learning tasks set on some management courses were insufficiently structured and students were unclear about the intended outcomes. These weaknesses in teaching were not recognised in the self-assessment report. Attendance was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. However, attendance at lessons observed was unsatisfactory, averaging 72%.

# Curriculum Areas

12 Students' work is carefully marked and returned within agreed deadlines. Students on management courses are able to make extensive use of the organisations where they are employed in order to undertake assignments which involve analysing management problems and recommending solutions. On the certificate in personnel practice course, employer mentors are assigned to students to support and guide their assignment work.

13 Retention is high on most courses and on accounting programmes it is close to 100%. With large numbers of students, the wordprocessing stage 1 qualification has averaged over 90% retention during the last three years. On some full-time programmes retention has declined. For example, it was only 53% on the medical secretaries diploma in 1998. Pass rates on part-time secretarial programmes and the full-time medical secretaries diploma, meet or exceed national averages. On most management courses, pass rates are above national averages. In 1998, 92% of students gained The National Examining Board for Supervision and Management certificate. The Institute of Management diploma programme has had a pass rate above 80% for the last three years. Pass rates on the certificate in personnel practice are slightly below national averages. Although individual unit pass rates are sound, overall pass rates on NVQ accounting programmes are poor. In 1998, only 29% of students who completed the level 3 programme were successful. None of the students completing the certificate in administration and secretarial procedures in 1998 achieved the full award although all achieved success in individual skills subjects. These weaknesses in students' achievements were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

14 All teachers possess relevant vocational qualifications and almost all have a teaching qualification, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Most teachers in the management section have had recent

commercial experience, though this is not true for administration teachers. Classrooms for management and professional courses are furnished to a good standard and have modern IT facilities. In administration, a large IT area gives students good access to the latest industry standard hardware and software.

# Curriculum Areas

**A summary of achievement and retention rates in business management, secretarial and office administration, 1996 to 1998**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Wordprocessing	1	Expected completions	*	*	223
		Retention (%)	*	*	90
		Achievement (%)	*	*	75
Integrated business technology	2	Expected completions	*	*	128
		Retention (%)	*	*	95
		Achievement (%)	*	*	66
Diploma in medical secretarial studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	30
		Retention (%)	*	*	53
		Achievement (%)	*	*	81
The National Examining Board for Supervision and Management certificate	3	Expected completions	*	*	28
		Retention (%)	*	*	93
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92
NVQ accounting	3	Expected completions	*	*	35
		Retention (%)	*	*	97
		Achievement (%)	*	*	29
Certificates and diplomas in management	4	Expected completions	*	*	58
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	72

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data may be unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Hospitality and Catering

### Grade 1

**15 The inspection covered all aspects of the college's provision in hotel and catering. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered that the report understated the effectiveness of course management and strengths in students' achievements. It omitted a few weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effectively-managed courses
- high-quality teaching
- well-devised learning materials for key skills
- excellent pass rates
- wide range of well-equipped realistic working environments
- strong industry links
- good retention rates on NVQ programmes
- provision of effective additional learning support by vocationally-qualified tutors

#### Weaknesses

- narrow range of provision at advanced level

16 As the self-assessment report identified, much of the teaching is excellent. Inspectors judged nine of the 11 lessons they observed to be good or outstanding. Lessons are well planned and effective. Teachers use a wide range of appropriate learning activities and well-produced learning materials to gain the interest of students and extend their knowledge. They use question-and-answer techniques well, directing their questions at individual students to check their knowledge and understanding. In practical lessons, students acquired a high standard of skills. Teachers carefully integrated relevant knowledge with practical work through

frequent demonstrations of new techniques or methods of preparation. They structured lessons well to provide for the individual learning needs of students at different levels. Where appropriate, students received additional support from vocationally-qualified learning support tutors. Students respond well in lessons and regularly volunteer to work in college beyond their normal hours of attendance in order to assist with functions and external events. In a minority of lessons, teachers did not keep the work moving at a good pace and, as a result, failed to hold students' interest. Appropriate assessment on NVQ programmes is supplemented by written assignments to test students' knowledge and understanding. These are completed to a good standard, though a few contain poor spelling and grammatical errors. Teachers continually check students' work and encourage them to think for themselves. They provide supportive written feedback and guidance on how performance can be improved. Oral feedback is timely and encouraging. Assessment and internal verification systems are rigorous.

17 Students consistently achieve high pass rates on both full-time and part-time courses. They use the many realistic work environments provided in the college to develop practical competences to a high standard. Students have good opportunities to develop key skills. Learning materials used by students to practise their key skills are linked to the appropriate occupational area and are interesting and informative. Students and teachers use IT to enrich learning activities. A computer sited in the production kitchen is often used by students to record and print information for their portfolios. They use digital video cameras to produce photographic evidence of their work. Attendance is monitored and absent students are quickly contacted. The average attendance rate in observed lessons was higher than the national average for this programme area, a strength not recognised in the self-assessment report. Attendance and retention are

# Curriculum Areas

permanent agenda items at the weekly staff meetings. Retention rates on the NVQ programmes are consistently above national averages.

18 The college offers courses leading to NVQs at craft and technician levels and to the national diploma in hotel and catering operations. Part-time professional and short courses supplement the full-time provision. Full-time students have good opportunities to acquire additional qualifications. The department participates in a work-related learning project through which students with learning difficulties from two local schools attend college to follow NVQ food production and cooking units at level 1. Extensive links with industry ensure that students have frequent opportunities to gain experience of working in a range of commercial establishments. The emphasis on craft courses limits full-time students' progression in further education, a weakness not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

19 Courses are effectively managed. Clear and concise course documentation and the minutes of the weekly team meetings help to keep staff and students well informed on course matters. All staff participate in the course reviews which include monitoring of overall course performance and of students' progress. Self-assessment is a continuous process and action plans are monitored and regularly updated. These strengths were not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

20 Accommodation is of a high standard. A wide range of industrial standard equipment is available to support learning. A particularly strong feature is the range and quality of the realistic working environments. Teachers are well qualified, the majority having teaching and assessor qualifications. Newly-appointed teachers have good industrial experience. Staff take up in-service training opportunities and all long-serving teachers have had recent experience in industry.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in hospitality and catering, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ chef's diploma	1	Expected completions	*	*	36
		Retention (%)	*	*	89
		Achievement (%)	*	*	91
NVQ chef's diploma	2	Expected completions	*	*	104
		Retention (%)	*	*	86
		Achievement (%)	*	*	91
Other vocational including NVQ and national diploma in hotel and catering operations	3	Expected completions	*	*	33
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	*	*	91

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data may be unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

### Grade 1

**21 The inspection covered the extensive range of NVQ courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and complementary therapies. Inspectors broadly agreed with the self-assessment report, but identified a few additional minor weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- excellent pass rates on all courses
- high retention rates on all beauty therapy courses
- well-planned lessons
- effective key skills development in hairdressing
- spacious, modern, well-equipped salons
- good curriculum management through close teamwork

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention on level 2 hairdressing courses

22 Flexible attendance arrangements enable students to progress at rates which suit their individual needs. Accreditation of students' prior learning is readily available and used by many students. These strengths were recognised in the self-assessment report. Courses are well organised. However, lesson plans give insufficient attention to the assessment of learning outcomes, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Course files are well maintained and used regularly by all staff. Schemes of work and assignment schedules are shared with, and understood by, students. Learning packages developed by staff are used by all teachers and students, often as an integral part of lessons.

The outcomes of questionnaires completed by students on learning styles have been used to improve course and lesson planning. Effective teamworking by staff is supported by the use of standard documents and good attendance by full-time and part-time staff at the monthly team meetings. All teachers are involved in extensive staff development, self-assessment and operational planning.

23 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that much teaching is of a high standard. They judged 11 of the 13 lessons observed to be good or outstanding. Teachers linked the content of lessons to previous work and regularly checked students' learning. They used short, varied learning activities to help maintain students' interest and attention during long lessons. In a hairdressing lesson, a well-organised and entertaining quiz helped students to revise important topics. Students worked confidently in the salons and achieved high standards in practical skills. Beauty therapy students carried out a range of treatments on clients as part of their assessment. They worked competently in a professional manner, using equipment and materials of good industrial standard. In a few lessons, teachers did not state their objectives clearly, students were not encouraged to take notes and learning packages were used ineffectively. These weaknesses were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Weekly tutorials enable students to review their progress and update their action plans for learning. Timetabled support sessions are held for those who fall behind in their assessments. Learning support tutors work appropriately in lessons. They have extensive links with subject teachers and often attend team meetings. Teachers return written work within the agreed timescale and with constructive comments on aspects for improvement. Most students' portfolios were good, and of an excellent standard on the aromatherapy and reflexology courses.

24 As the self-assessment report recognised, pass rates on all main courses in both

# Curriculum Areas

hairdressing and beauty therapy are excellent. In 1998, 98% of students completing the NVQ in beauty therapy at level 2 and 92% of those completing at level 3 achieved the award. Retention rates are high on all beauty therapy courses, though in 1998 retention on the level 2 hairdressing course declined to 45%, significantly below the national average, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students on full-time hairdressing courses have good opportunities for developing key skills during lessons in the application of number and IT. In 1998, 75% of hairdressing students successfully gained NVQ key skills accreditation at the appropriate level. Students' wider achievements are valued. The annual hairdressing show, which is sponsored by a major hair products manufacturer, is well organised, creative and attracts a large audience of local salon owners. Students are highly successful in regional and national competitions.

25 The self-assessment report stated that realistic working environments are excellent and inspectors agreed with this. Both the hairdressing salon and the new beauty reception area were sponsored by a national hairdressing company and reflect best industrial standards. There are many excellent examples of students' work displayed in rooms and adjacent corridors, providing a pleasant and professional environment. The hairdressing reception area has the latest computerised system. All students are trained in its use. It is shortly to be installed in the beauty reception area. The departmental learning base contains five modern computers and a range of learning materials. Staff are well qualified and most have assessor or verifier awards. Most staff are practitioners and help to keep salon practice up to date. Support staff carry out additional responsibilities, for example, as salon manager or competition co-ordinator.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ hairdressing	2	Expected completions	*	*	60
		Retention (%)	*	*	45
		Achievement (%)	*	*	89
NVQ beauty therapy	2	Expected completions	*	*	66
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	98
NVQ beauty therapy	3	Expected completions	*	*	64
		Retention (%)	*	*	98
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data may be unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Care

### Grade 2

**26 The inspection covered GNVQ courses at every level, the intermediate certificate in childcare and a wide range of advanced level courses in childcare and social care. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that a few weaknesses were omitted. The report contained little quantitative data and the action plan was vague.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- effective work experience
- high standard of students' work
- many consistently high pass rates
- wide range of well-managed courses

#### Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on certificate in childcare and education courses
- declining retention rates on some advanced level courses
- examples of unproductive group work

27 A wide range of courses offer flexible attendance patterns. Courses are well planned and well managed. Team meetings are effective and, in addition, staff meet together regularly in staff development sessions to plan a variety of aspects of course provision. Attendance of individual students is carefully monitored and absent students are quickly contacted. These strengths were included in the self-assessment report. Course targets for retention and achievement are not always set.

28 Most of the teaching is good. Of the 12 lessons observed, inspectors judged nine to be good or outstanding. The self-assessment report

identified, and inspectors agreed, that teachers use a wide range of appropriate teaching and learning methods. In a childcare lesson, nursery nursing students analysed the role of story telling in cognitive and language development. At the same time, they were learning the skills of telling stories effectively to children of various ages. Students on a GNVQ course were well prepared for a small group task on the topic of discrimination. They approached the task enthusiastically and successfully achieved the planned learning objectives. High standards of competence and safety were features of laboratory work carried out by students working on their creative science module. Well-organised and well-supervised work experience makes an effective contribution to learning across all courses, a strength stated in the self-assessment report. Teachers encourage students to apply their experience in work placements to class work and coursework. In a small number of lessons, students were not sufficiently prepared for group work and were unsure about the purposes of tasks. Learning objectives were either not set or not shared and teachers did not check students' learning enough. These weaknesses were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

29 Students' written work was consistently well presented and showed effective use of IT. Professional practice assignments in the national diploma in childhood studies and some work on GNVQ foundation were of an excellent standard. Students' practical work showed a high level of creative skills and displays of their work in classrooms and corridors contributed to effective learning environments. The college values highly other student accomplishments such as taking part in college open days and involvement in voluntary work. Pass rates on most courses are consistently high. Over the last three years, pass rates on the national diplomas in childhood studies and health studies have been above 90%, and 95%, respectively. Pass rates on the diploma in nursery nursing

# Curriculum Areas

are above the national average. In 1998, all students completing the GNVQ intermediate course achieved the award. On the certificate in childcare and education course, pass rates have declined from 88% in 1997 to 38% in 1998. Retention is above the college targets on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses and on the diplomas in nursery nursing and childhood studies. At 94%, it is significantly above the national average on the national certificate in childhood studies. Retention has declined to below the national average on some advanced level courses, and on the certificate in childcare and education. Though these weaknesses in retention were acknowledged in the self-assessment report, action plans to address them are vague.

30 Classrooms are comfortably furnished and have good displays of students' work. A well-equipped laboratory is available for science classes and a spacious workroom with good-quality materials is used for creative studies. The resource area contains a good range of relevant books, learning materials and several computers which students can book at any time. The school has introduced timetabled sessions in the resource area during which tutors support individual students in reviewing their progress on assessed work. During one of these sessions, a student for whom English is a second language was well supported to produce a work plan which took account of her domestic commitments. Teachers are well qualified and experienced.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in health and care, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions	*	*	19
		Retention (%)	*	*	84
		Achievement (%)	*	*	38
GNVQ intermediate and the certificate in childcare and education	2	Expected completions	*	*	50
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	*	*	70
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	*	*	11
		Retention (%)	*	*	55
		Achievement (%)	*	*	83
National diplomas and certificates in childcare and social care	3	Expected completions	*	*	137
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data may be unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Art and Design

### Grade 2

**31 The inspection covered a wide range of intermediate and advanced level courses and the diploma in foundation studies. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report but thought that some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were omitted.**

#### Key strengths

- high-quality teaching
- effective development of basic visual research and drawing skills
- good use of teachers' professional practice
- the high standard of students' work
- good progression to further and higher education
- good pass rates on most courses

#### Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses
- unsatisfactory retention on general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses
- lack of target-setting against appropriate benchmarks

32 Much of the teaching is of a high standard. Of the 13 lessons observed, inspectors judged 10 to be good or outstanding. Teachers plan learning activities which take into account individual students' needs, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. They provide good supporting materials which reflect contemporary art practice. In a graphic design lesson, a packaging exercise required the exploration of paper joining techniques in unusual combinations. This exercise was suitably demanding for students and gave them

good experience of the creative process. Learning activities are well structured. In a figure drawing exercise, short, timed poses encouraged the students to observe basic form without being distracted by extra detail. Effective development of basic visual research and drawing skills is a feature of many courses. During an exercise in three dimensions, students made a series of striking drawings from observation and used photographic digital imagery. In most lessons, students participated well in discussion and spoke effectively. In the weaker lessons, teachers failed to engage students in discussion of the work when it would have been appropriate to do so.

33 Assignment briefs are comprehensive and written to a common standard, a strength mentioned in the self-assessment report. Assessment is thorough and teachers provide regular and supportive feedback for students which enables them to improve their work. Students' work is of a good standard. Sketchbooks and design sheets provide good evidence of students' work in progress and their visual research. On vocational courses, students' learning is extended by work on live projects. For example, graphic design students have produced creative ideas for use in a digital window display for an education training centre. Students have good opportunities to develop their communication and application of number skills, though the integration and use of IT is less well developed than other key skills. Students' accomplishments are celebrated and enriched by activities outside the curriculum. Exhibitions of students' work, fashion shows and self-initiated projects receive good publicity. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report that students benefit from work experience, foreign visits, exhibitions and field trips.

34 Retention rates are at, or above, the national average on most courses. However, they have declined recently on GCE A level courses. In 1998, only 36% of students

# Curriculum Areas

completed the GCE A level course in art, a rate well below both the college target and the national average. Pass rates are excellent on the GNVQ advanced and the national diploma in graphics courses, but they are unsatisfactory on the GNVQ intermediate course. Weaknesses in retention and achievement were not mentioned in the self-assessment report. The use of national benchmarking data published by the FEFC to monitor students' achievements and set appropriate targets has not been adequately developed. Students progress well to more advanced courses. For example, in 1997-98, 75% of students on advanced level courses progressed to higher education courses. Informal liaison with higher education institutions is well developed in the school, but there are few links with employers.

35 The accommodation provides a stimulating learning environment. Students and staff value the easy access to museums, art galleries and the theatre provided by the location of the school. Most studios are well equipped. Students use a suite of 22 computers and have access to specialist studios in fine art, print, photography, ceramic and textiles. The small specialist library operates an inter-loan service with the college main library. However, as recognised in the self-assessment report, students have few opportunities to use the resources at the main site. Teachers make effective use of their professional contemporary practice to inform students' learning. In one lesson, a sample of a teacher's work was used to illustrate the demands of a client in a commercial context. Most teachers are practitioners in art, design or craft.

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in art and design, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Expected completions	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	64
GNVQ advanced art and design	2	Expected completions	*	*	35
		Retention (%)	*	*	63
		Achievement (%)	*	*	95
GCE A level art studies and film studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	35
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	*	*	66
Diploma in foundation studies art and design	3	Expected completions	*	*	82
		Retention (%)	*	*	82
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87
National diploma in graphic design	3	Expected completions	*	*	17
		Retention (%)	*	*	76
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data may be unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Humanities

### Grade 3

**36 The inspection covered GCSE and GCE A level courses in English and psychology, aspects of the access to higher education programme and the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7307 further and adult education teachers' certificate. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional, significant weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- courses suitable for a range of individual students' needs
- good teaching
- good practice in marking and giving students feedback on their work
- effective links with higher education institutions

#### Weaknesses

- poor achievements on many courses
- unsatisfactory attendance on most courses
- insufficiently rigorous monitoring of performance at course level

37 The college provides a range of humanities courses designed to allow students to study in ways and at times which suit their individual needs and circumstances. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the access to higher education programme successfully attracts students who would not otherwise return to education. Students can choose from several units and lessons are timed to be convenient to those with domestic and childcare responsibilities. Strong links with higher education institutions benefit students. Those on English courses have attended study days at a university. Students on access courses and on

the C&G teacher training course are able to use the library at Lancaster University and to attend lectures at St Martin's College. Access students who succeed usually progress to higher education courses in local institutions.

38 Much of the teaching is good. Of the 12 lessons observed, inspectors judged nine to be good or outstanding. Teachers plan lessons well and routinely share with students their aims and objectives. They carefully prepare learning materials and present them well. In the best lessons, teachers create a productive and stimulating environment for learning and encourage students to contribute and test out their ideas in discussion within the group. In a psychology lesson, students learned complex theories about intelligence through a lively and constructive discussion which drew on their own experiences and ideas. Most teachers regularly check that students are learning and readily adapt the planned activity when students have difficulty in understanding the topic. However, in weaker lessons, teachers failed to vary the activities appropriately to sustain students' interest. Mature students speak highly about the way in which their regular meetings with tutors help them to improve. Students on GCSE and GCE A level courses are less positive about tutorial sessions, and their attendance at these is low. This weakness is recognised by teachers who are taking steps to address it. Students receive good guidance on how they might improve their written work, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers' written comments are detailed and specific and they usually speak directly to each student about individual assignments.

39 Inspectors did not agree with the college's self-assessment that examination results are good. Pass rates on GCE A level English and on GCE A level and GCSE psychology are well below national averages. Although many students progress from the access course to higher education, the achievement rate is below the national average for humanities students on

# Curriculum Areas

this course. A large proportion of students do not attend regularly. Average attendance at the lessons observed was 62%, significantly lower than the national average of 77% for this programme area reported in *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*.

The self-assessment report acknowledged that retention is a weakness on some courses and teachers have been taking action to address it. Figures comparing retention rates for the first term in 1998 with the same period in the previous year show some improvement. Students' written and oral work are of a good standard. GCE A level English students discussing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* were able, at an early stage of studying the text, to refer knowledgeably and appropriately to the romantic tradition. Students' achievements within lessons are recognised. The tutor and students evaluating teaching skills in a C&G 7307 lesson identified and praised strengths whilst being constructively critical of weaknesses.

40 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. They receive appropriate and regular training designed to improve their teaching and learning skills and to improve their understanding of students' needs. Psychology and sociology teachers have jointly produced a framework for good practice. Not all teachers work closely with colleagues in their subject areas and opportunities to exchange good practice are missed. Monitoring of course performance, particularly of GCE A levels and GCSEs, is not systematic or rigorous. As the self-assessment report recognised, action-planning at course level is rudimentary and target-setting is not yet routine. Managers are beginning to address this weakness but the results of actions are not yet evident.

# Curriculum Areas

## A summary of achievement and retention rates in humanities, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE English	2	Expected completions	*	*	99
		Retention (%)	*	*	81
		Achievement (%)*	*	*	51
GCSE psychology	2	Expected completions	*	*	30
		Retention (%)	*	*	60
		Achievement (%)*	*	*	22
GCE A level English	3	Expected completions	*	*	71
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50
GCE A level psychology	3	Expected completions	*	*	89
		Retention (%)	*	*	82
		Achievement (%)	*	*	29
Access to higher education	3	Expected completions	*	*	55
		Retention (%)	*	*	83
		Achievement (%)	*	*	69
C&G 7307 certificate of education (further and higher)	3	Expected completions	*	*	62
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	*	*	77

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

\*data may be unreliable

\*\*grades C or above

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 2

**41 The college has made substantial progress since the last inspection, particularly in the provision of learning support. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses. A number of weaknesses were understated.**

#### Key strengths

- extensive and effective recruitment activities
- friendly and welcoming information shops
- well-organised arrangements for enrolment and induction
- extensive and appropriate learning support
- wide range of easily accessible student services

#### Weaknesses

- lack of coherent management of student support
- some ineffective tutorial support
- poorly co-ordinated careers education activities

42 A wide range of recruitment activities successfully enables school-leavers and adults to gain information about the college's provision. All school pupils who have inquired about courses receive invitations to open days. Parents are invited to attend evening meetings in local venues when advice about courses is given. Once made, the link with pupils and their parents is maintained through regular personalised letters. Activities for adults include a 'welcome day' in May, and free 'tasters' of courses available in college and information

shops in both Lancaster and Morecambe. A friendly and welcoming information and guidance service is provided in bright, cheerful surroundings, strengths not identified in the self-assessment report. Students can obtain advice on welfare, financial and personal matters from appropriately-qualified staff in the student services section. The college provides a large nursery and other appropriate help with childcare. Many students are unaware of the range of services that the section offers, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Those who use the services find them helpful. The college takes great care to support students at risk of not completing their courses. A small team of staff contact absent students and offer them appropriate support. Records show that few students contacted by the team withdraw from their course. For students who may leave because of financial reasons, the college has established a 'job shop' which helps students find appropriate part-time work and teaches them job-seeking skills.

43 There are comprehensive arrangements to ensure that students are placed on the right course. During well-organised induction periods, all full-time students undertake an appropriate assessment test to determine any needs for additional support. Of the 586 students identified as needing support, 400 have opted to receive it. As the self-assessment report recognised, good links exist between learning support tutors and course teachers. The learning support tutor attached to each school is a specialist in the appropriate discipline and attends key meetings. Students with physical disabilities are well assisted through specialist aids and equipment.

44 Most students are entitled to a personal tutor and a weekly tutorial session. Students value these and particularly appreciate the individual help with their work which they receive in the course-based tutorials. The self-assessment report recognised that the quality of some tutorial provision is poor but inspectors

# Cross-college Provision

found that the significance of this weakness was understated. Clear and challenging standards that promote excellence have yet to be set and the close monitoring of tutorial provision is just beginning to be carried out. Tutorial observations are at an early stage and outcomes have not yet been analysed.

45 There is no overarching policy or framework to promote coherent management of the various components of student support, a weakness not recognised in the self-assessment report. A cross-college working group has produced a clear and concise tutors' handbook which includes a framework for a tutorial curriculum but the proposals have not yet been implemented. The central tutorial programme, organised by student services, provides activities to promote students' personal and social development. They include good-quality materials on a series of appropriate topics. However, not all students benefit from them because many course tutors do not use the central programme of activities.

46 Course tutors provide individual careers guidance and careers education activities in their own vocational areas, and these are highly valued by their students. Student services offers access to a wide a range of careers education activities including a careers library, careers information sessions and individual or group guidance from Career Link. These two areas of support are not effectively co-ordinated. As a result, some students do not have the same opportunities to avail themselves of the college's wide range of careers education and guidance as others. Referral to student services and hence to Career Link depends on personal tutors, some of whom prefer to deal with their students' information and guidance needs themselves. Others may refer students for specialist advice but fail to gain the students' agreement, resulting in poor attendance at specialist sessions. There are no college-wide standards for careers education and guidance. The college does not systematically gather the

perceptions of students and tutors on guidance activities and the service provided by Career Link. As a result, it does not have sufficient information to assess the quality of its careers education and guidance provision or to improve the annual partnership agreement with Career Link.

## General Resources

### Grade 2

**47 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the detailed self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- good-quality buildings
- an attractive environment
- low energy and maintenance costs
- good access for individuals with restricted mobility

#### Weaknesses

- shortcomings in library resources
- overall low space utilisation
- lack of common room facilities

48 The college's main campus consists of several buildings constructed between 1945 and 1990. A number have undergone radical alterations as the curriculum has changed. Art and design provision is accommodated in two adjacent, modernised mills near the centre of Lancaster. The college holds a long-term lease on one and, on the other, a lease which has to be renewed annually. The Morecambe centre is housed in a former school building built early this century. Part of this is used for humanities and access courses, while the former school gymnasium accommodates an adult and youth training centre. All the college's buildings are in reasonable or good condition and are well maintained.

# Cross-college Provision

49 The buildings generally provide an attractive environment for students and staff. Reception areas are bright and welcoming. At the main centre, the college shop and the windows of retail outlets used for training contain attractive displays. Curriculum areas have their own buildings or suites of rooms. Rooms and corridors are often given a clear sense of subject identity through the use of particular decorating schemes, displays of students' work and related notices and posters. Successful efforts have been made at the Morecambe centre to create an atmosphere suited to the mainly adult student population. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that access to the college's buildings is good. Students with restricted mobility have access to almost all general and specialist teaching rooms, social areas, libraries, IT resource centres and other general facilities.

50 Occupancy of teaching rooms is carefully monitored, a strength mentioned in the self-assessment report. The design of some of the buildings together with college policies to maintain the engineering and construction provision through a period of low enrolment, and to develop a large number of realistic working environments for vocational courses, have resulted in an overall low level of space utilisation. Considerable attention is paid to minimising energy costs, for example, through the use of local thermostatic controls and movement sensors on lighting. Maintenance costs are also low in comparison with available national benchmarks.

51 Students express high levels of satisfaction with the services provided by the college library and its staff. The self-assessment report recognised that teachers are insufficiently involved in determining the range and type of materials available. Nominated library staff now attend meetings of the curriculum schools. The library offers a comprehensive service to users, for example, in compiling resource lists

related to particular topics or key words, but use of this assistance by teachers is patchy. The bookstock is small and the library budget is low when judged by available benchmarks. There are insufficient study spaces and the study area is noisy at times.

52 Most students at the college have good access to IT facilities, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. The ratio of modern computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:7. The resource centre at the main site is situated immediately above the library. It contains 40 computer workstations, which are available for 'drop-in' use by individual students, and a wide range of learning materials. Above the resource centre, a large, open-plan room contains about 90 workstations which are zoned for use by classes studying IT, but which can also be used by individuals on a 'drop-in' basis. Computers linked to the network are available in classrooms for the use of students. Some classes using the large IT room are ill-disciplined and cause distraction to other users. There are well-advanced plans for linking the library and the resource centre accommodation and facilities, and a manager has been appointed to implement these.

53 The refectory at the main centre is popular with students. Students can also use an adjacent fast-food outlet, an attractive bistro, a recently-opened cafe and the main training restaurant. There are no common room facilities for students or staff at the main centre, apart from small rooms allocated for smokers. Students who choose to bring in their own refreshments, or who are temporarily looking after children from the nursery, are restricted in where they can go. These weaknesses were recognised in the self-assessment report. The college has extensive sports pitches at its main centre. A fitness suite equipped for sports science courses can be used at times by other students and staff, and there is a medium-sized artificial ski slope. Students can only use a small gymnasium and the assembly hall for

# Cross-college Provision

indoor sports. The college is to build a major new sports hall following a successful bid for national lottery funding.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**54 Inspectors agreed broadly with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report but considered that a few weaknesses were understated. Significant progress has been made in addressing weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- strong management commitment to quality improvement
- positive staff support for quality assurance procedures
- comprehensive self-assessment process
- effective use of benchmarking by managers
- evidence of a range of quality improvements
- good staff development procedures

#### Weaknesses

- underdevelopment of some quality assurance procedures
- lack of use of lesson observations in appraisal and some curriculum assessments
- insufficiently rigorous monitoring of cross-college policies

55 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a strong management commitment to quality improvement. A senior manager has direct responsibility for the quality assurance system assisted by two 'quality' managers. Other senior managers are actively involved in monitoring quality. The quality assurance committee meets at least three times a year and includes members from external bodies. It considers

useful reports on developments in quality assurance systems and on self-assessment. The committee reviewed the first college self-assessment report before its consideration by the governors. Significant improvements in the quality assurance system have been introduced over the last two years. Appropriate training has resulted in staff understanding and supporting the system. Though there is clear evidence that the quality assurance system is producing improvements across the college, some quality assurance procedures have been established only recently, while others are at a planning stage. For example, there is as yet no rigorous audit of cross-college policies such as tutorial provision, key skills and equal opportunities. This weakness was underestimated in the self-assessment report.

56 All teams carry out a self-assessment annually to a standard format and produce a report. Senior managers validate reports through meetings with all section managers and question self-assessment conclusions, where appropriate. A specific outcome of the self-assessment process is the production of retention and achievement action plans by curriculum schools for courses which do not meet college targets. Senior managers collate and monitor these action plans. Some of the first curriculum self-assessment reports were not sufficiently self-critical and made little use of performance indicator data and outcomes of lesson observations. The college recognised these weaknesses and has taken steps to improve the rigour and consistency of its self-assessment process. Following production of the first self-assessment report in 1998, senior managers evaluated the process and identified improvements. Further staff training and more rigorous auditing has improved the quality of self-assessment in the second cycle. Some useful benchmarking exercises have been carried out by senior managers. Benchmarks on finance and other indicators are used effectively by managers to evaluate college performance.

# Cross-college Provision

57 A system of lesson observations by teachers was established in 1997 to inform self-assessment and assist in spreading good practice. This has been well received by staff and all full-time and some part-time teachers participate in the process. Newly-appointed teachers are observed by managers within six weeks of starting. Lesson observations routinely lead to oral and written reports and an agreed grade. There have been some useful outcomes including improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. During the first inspection, 65% of lessons observed were judged to be good or outstanding. In the current inspection, that proportion has improved to 74%. Observations are conducted within each school so there is little opportunity to spread good practice across the college. As line managers do not observe all their staff, the outcomes of lesson observations do not currently feature strongly in the appraisal process. The self-assessment report acknowledged these weaknesses. One of the quality managers is now regularly auditing peer observations and some observations are carried out by staff from other colleges.

58 The views of students are regularly sought through questionnaires and course meetings, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Outcomes of questionnaires are analysed by course teams and for the whole college by the quality improvement group. Feedback on action taken is provided through posters displayed in the college. The quality improvement group also analyses responses to staff questionnaires and useful quality improvements have resulted. The college charter is used appropriately in some areas but, in others, it is not effective in informing students of their rights. The charter contains few quantitative statements but standards are analysed and monitored. There is a robust formal complaints system.

59 There are effective procedures for identifying staff training needs and providing

appropriate training opportunities. All permanent staff are appraised annually and targets are set for quality improvements and training. Hourly paid staff are not included in the appraisal system though they do have access to appropriate training. The teacher appraisal process is being further developed to improve its effectiveness and make greater use of the outcomes of lesson observations, retention and achievement data and results from questionnaires to students. This is a step towards formalisation of staff self-evaluation, a need identified in the self-assessment report. College priorities for staff development are identified from self-assessment, appraisal and strategic plans and appropriate resources are allocated.

## Governance

### Grade 2

**60 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses included in the self-assessment report and found evidence of actions taken to address the identified weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- efficient clerking arrangements
- open conduct of corporation business
- the audit committee's adoption of best practice
- governors' setting and monitoring of the strategic direction of the college
- close attention to the college's financial and non-financial performance

#### Weaknesses

- excessive detail in reports on students' achievements
- lack of targets to assess the corporation's performance

# Cross-college Provision

61 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.

62 The corporation has a membership of 13 and there are no vacancies. The range of expertise of its members includes accountancy, law, education and management. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that clerking arrangements are efficient. Papers and minutes are well prepared and are circulated in good time. Corporation and committee meetings are appropriately scheduled. Since incorporation, all meetings have been quorate.

63 The corporation conducts its business openly. Minutes of corporation and committee meetings are available for public scrutiny in the college library. There is a policy on 'whistleblowing' and the register of interests has been completed both by governors and by staff who have significant financial responsibilities. A search committee considers reappointments, determines the qualities required of new governors and publicly advertises vacancies. There is currently a waiting list of candidates. Governors receive a comprehensive handbook which includes the instrument and articles of government. The long-established code of conduct has not been updated to reflect fully the recommendations in the most recent Nolan committee report.

64 The corporation has effective committees with relevant and well-defined terms of reference. Their work is overseen, but not duplicated, by the full corporation which receives comprehensive draft minutes and an oral report following each committee meeting. The finance and general purposes committee receives the most recent financial management accounts at each of its meetings. This

committee is closely involved with setting the budget. The self-assessment report stated that governors pay close attention to financial matters and inspectors agreed. The audit committee has responded to the requirements of the Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*, in a positive and timely manner.

65 The corporation plays an active role in shaping the future direction of the college and this strength was included in the self-assessment report. Governors and senior managers meet formally each year to discuss major strategic issues, review the mission and value statements, and formulate the corporate objectives. The corporation considers progress in meeting these main objectives twice a year. It also requests and receives information periodically on specific objectives through reports from appropriate managers.

66 The corporation receives annual reports on students' achievements. The last two reports have contained enrolment numbers, and retention and pass rates for all main courses. Information on students' destinations was included in the most recent report. Governors have discussed these reports in detail. They have requested and received further reports on the action which managers and teaching teams are taking to improve retention and achievement rates. The detail of the statistics presented in the latest report makes it difficult for the corporation to compare them with national benchmarking data published by the FEFC, or against achievements from previous years. The college's health and safety and quality assurance committees each have a governor as a member and the corporation receives regular reports on the work of these groups. However, it only received its first report from the equal opportunities committee in 1998.

67 Governors attend college events and open days, and they receive the results of questionnaires about students' perceptions of the college and its courses. Following self-assessment, the corporation determined that it

# Cross-college Provision

needed to find more ways to obtain the views of students and staff. As a result, a recent vacancy on the corporation was filled by an elected student member and questions relating to governance were included in the staff questionnaire. Returns indicated that some staff misunderstood the role of governors. All staff have now been given a booklet which clearly summarises the relative responsibilities of the corporation and the college managers.

68 The first time the governors explicitly considered their performance as a corporation was in preparing the self-assessment report for this inspection. Attendance records are kept but no targets for attendance are set. The corporation has not, as yet, agreed any further indicators which could be used to measure their effectiveness, or as a basis for setting governance targets. Governors' training needs had not been formally determined before the self-assessment exercise and this was recognised in the report as a weakness. There is now a systematic approach to training which includes a regular series of presentations by college staff and access to the staff development programme. Governors are notified about external training opportunities and a number have attended these. New governors find the induction arrangements helpful.

## Management

### *Grade 2*

**69 The self-assessment report was comprehensive and identified actions for improvement. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses but identified a few weaknesses that were not mentioned. They found evidence of actions which had been taken since the report was produced to address some of the identified weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- well-managed introduction of the new management structure
- effective arrangements for communication with staff
- good financial management
- effective deployment of staff
- success in meeting enrolment and financial targets
- productive links with local organisations

#### **Weaknesses**

- inaccuracy of some aspects of the college computerised management information
- underdeveloped links between strategic and operational planning

70 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college is well managed. It has consistently met or exceeded its enrolment targets since incorporation and is predicted to do so again this year. A revised management structure was introduced in January 1998 after careful consideration of the options for change, the needs of the institution and the experience of other colleges. Staff have been kept well informed of the reasons for changes. Benefits of the new arrangements already evident include improved arrangements for decision-making and enhanced responsibilities of heads of school. The new structure enables middle managers to collaborate more effectively across the college, although to date the sharing of good practice does not feature as prominently as the consideration of routine business operations. Development plans for schools and college sections are compiled to a common format. They do not, as yet, include explicit links to the corporate objectives or to the outcomes of self-assessment. Some make little use of targets or performance indicators as planning tools. These

# Cross-college Provision

weaknesses were referred to in the self-assessment report. The college has adapted its planning cycle this year to allow development plans to include the outcomes of the self-assessment process.

71 Staff are well informed about the college's aims and about issues which affect them, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Managers are respected for their open and responsive style. Through the use of questionnaires, they have sought feedback on management issues from all staff, and have informed staff of the action they have taken in response to concerns raised. Individual staff can participate in decision-making, for example, through the academic board and its subcommittees, but arrangements to ensure staff are consulted prior to decisions being made are not always effective, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report.

72 The self-assessment report stated that staff are effectively deployed and inspectors agreed with this judgement. A senior manager monitors carefully the deployment of staff against both management guidelines and regular reports from the register system produced by the college management information unit. These and the other routine reports are produced by the unit as paper reports because, as yet, most managers do not have direct access to the computerised system. Plans to address this are at an advanced stage. The college has greatly improved the accuracy of the data on its central information system and managers now use these regularly. They confirm that the unit responds quickly to their requests for additional reports. Some of the data held centrally on students' achievements before 1998 have proved to be incomplete. The college has analysed the causes of this and has identified particular problems with the definition of course durations and expected completion dates for students. As a result, inspectors concluded that published performance indicators on students' achievements were not

accurate and that much of the achievement data held on the ISR for 1995 to 1997 may be unreliable. These weaknesses were acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

73 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has a sound financial position. Monthly management accounts are closely monitored by the college's senior management team. Reports from the internal and external auditors do not indicate any significant weaknesses in internal control; financial regulations are clear and comprehensive. The financial services manager is supported by an appropriately qualified and experienced team. Budget holders are provided with timely reports of actual and committed expenditure. Returns to the FEFC are made within the specified deadlines.

74 As the self-assessment report stated, the college has productive links with a range of external bodies. Employers regard the college as responsive and flexible. Local firms have used a video link with the college together with distance learning materials to provide IT training for their shift workers. Effective links with other colleges are used to compare college performance with that of others, promote collaboration with local and national projects and improve progression opportunities for students. Information on labour market needs is made available to managers to inform their curriculum planning, though their links with the central marketing unit could be further developed. The college marketing plan includes several initiatives which have grown from successful pilots. As part of the college strategy to widen participation, the college information shop in Lancaster has been replicated in Morecambe and a scheme to promote the college through local job centres and primary schools has been extended.

# Cross-college Provision

## Conclusions

75 The college self-assessment report was comprehensive and drew on reports produced by all curriculum and service sections and by the governors. The report identified strengths, weaknesses and planned action against the statements on quality in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. It provided a good basis for planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the self-assessment report though they found that the significance of a few weaknesses was underestimated. Inspectors agreed with all of the cross-college grades awarded by the college but considered that two of the college's own curriculum grades were overgenerous.

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

# College Statistics

## Student numbers by age (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	3
16-18 years	23
19-24 years	13
25+ years	61
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	32
Intermediate	30
Advanced	27
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	8
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	245	787	20
Agriculture	20	16	1
Construction	4	64	2
Engineering	78	152	4
Business	242	780	19
Hotel and catering	119	110	4
Health and community care	345	522	16
Art and design	173	372	10
Humanities	177	909	20
Basic education	53	149	4
Total	1,456	3,861	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 16% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	103	5	132	240
Supporting direct learning contact	50	27	0	77
Other support	98	26	0	124
Total	251	58	132	441

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£9,249,000	£9,371,000	£9,620,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£15.18	£15.78	£15.89
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	65%	63%
Achievement of funding target	119%	111%	103%
Diversity of income	27%	28%	29%
Operating surplus	-£159,000	-£36,000	£77,000

*Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

*ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)*

*Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

*Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)*

*Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

*Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)*

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