

# West Cheshire College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**1999-00**

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	8

---

### Curriculum areas

Science and mathematics	11
Engineering	16
Business: administration, management and professional studies	22
Hair and beauty	28
English and modern foreign languages	33

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### Cross-college provision

Support for students	39
General resources	47
Quality assurance	53
Governance	62
Management	72
Conclusions	80

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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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*  
Sample size: 104 college inspections

## Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

# Summary

## West Cheshire College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected February 1999**

West Cheshire College is a general further education college with sites in Chester and Ellesmere Port. The preparation of the college's self-assessment report for the inspection involved all staff. Judgements in the self-assessment report were supported by a wide range of evidence and were subject to a critical internal assessment process. Inspectors were in broad agreement with the judgements in the report, but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. The college was jointly inspected by teams of inspectors from the FEFC and the TSC. Work in five of the college's programme areas funded by the FEFC and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected. Inspectors agreed with three of the curriculum grades and four of the cross-college grades that were awarded by the college.

The standard of most of the teaching and learning in the curriculum areas inspected is good. Inspectors observed no lessons which were less than satisfactory which represents a considerable improvement since the college's last inspection. Most students' achievements are good and compare favourably with national averages for the sector. In contrast, retention rates on a number of courses, although improving, are below sector norms.

Specialist equipment, including IT, is good. Students are provided with helpful information about the broad range of courses which the college offers. The induction programme is well organised for full-time students. There are effective arrangements to identify any additional support which students need and to ensure that they receive it. The approach to quality assurance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is effectively integrated with the self-assessment process. Staff have a wide range of opportunities for development and training. Communications in the college are effective and staff value, in particular, the college's electronic mail system. Curriculum management is effective but weaknesses in the college management information system have restricted the use to which data have been put. The college makes good use of the wide range of expertise on the governing body. Corporation members have a clear oversight of the strategic direction of the college although there has been a lack of rigour in some aspects of governance. The college should improve: student attendance and retention rates; arrangements for marketing the college's provision; the quality of information available to managers; the arrangements to ensure that all students have access to advice and support of high quality; and the operation of some areas of governance.

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

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science and mathematics	3	Support for students	3
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Business: administration, management and professional studies	2	Quality assurance	2
Hair and beauty	2	Governance	3
English and modern foreign languages	2	Management	3

## The College and its Mission

1 West Cheshire College is a general further education college. It has three sites in Chester, a site in Ellesmere Port, the Grange, and a centre of excellence in engineering technology which opened at Capenhurst in 1999. The majority of students are located at Handbridge which is the largest of the Chester sites. Students at the two smaller sites specialise in catering at Greenbank and art and design at Blacon. The college offers a wide range of courses under contract to Cheshire County Council in 10 outreach centres, most of which are based in schools. Franchised provision accounts for 9% of the college's work and is mainly available in the local area. The college has invested in a number of learning centres in major companies and in local libraries.

2 The low levels of unemployment in the area, 2.1% in Chester and 3.5% in Ellesmere Port, compare with 6.2% for the north west region. These figures mask significant pockets of deprivation in some localities where rates are much higher. In Chester, the principal industries, which are expanding, are tourism, retailing and financial services. By contrast, Ellesmere Port retains its traditional focus on petro-chemicals and manufacturing which are dominated by a small number of major employers. However, in recent years, it has taken advantage of the benefits accruing from European Union objective 2 status to develop leisure and retailing activities. Small and medium-size businesses are an important feature of the local business environment; some 4,300 companies were operating in 1999.

3 The college recruits students predominantly from its local catchment areas. There are approximately 2,000 full-time students, almost half of whom are aged 16 to 19 years, and 20,000 part-time students. The college provides courses in all the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). They range from entry and

foundation levels to professional and degree courses. The college is able to offer the degree courses through its links with higher education institutions in the region. It also provides teaching aimed at raising achievement for pupils from local schools at a junior college run at weekends.

4 The percentage of post-16 pupils who continue their education is 75% in Chester and 64.5% in Ellesmere Port. All but one of the local secondary schools have sixth forms and there are many independent schools in the area. One large further education college is situated less than 20 miles away. The college also competes with several private training providers. The proximity of the national boundary with Wales restricts the college's potential catchment area to the west.

5 The college is a member of the New Cheshire Consortium of Colleges and the Cheshire Lifelong Learning Partnership. The consortium has secured the contract to provide New Deal full-time education and training for the young unemployed and the over-25 age-group. It has also obtained project funding for initiatives to develop skills, to widen participation and to establish a 'University for Industry' hub.

6 The college management structure comprises the principal and chief executive, and six senior managers who are heads of the divisions of: business services; human sciences; science, art and technology; learning development; student support; and resources. Each head of division periodically takes responsibility for deputising when the principal is absent. The curriculum is organised into 22 programme areas, each headed by a programme area leader, who is responsible to the appropriate head of division. Business support activities are grouped into sections. Learning development leaders with a primary responsibility for curriculum development and the implementation of new initiatives, are

# Context

located in teaching divisions, but with additional responsibility to the head of learning development.

7 The college purpose is stated as ‘working with people to realise their potential through the provision of high-quality learning opportunities’. Its strategic aims emphasise a commitment to partnership and high standards.

## The Inspection

8 The college was inspected in November 1999. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the college’s self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college provided data on students’ achievements for 1999 which it derived from the individualised student record (ISR). These data were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and the pass lists issued by examining bodies, and most were found to be reliable. Together with ISR data for 1997 and 1998, the data were used to compile the tables in the curriculum area reports. The college was notified of the sample of work to be inspected two months before the inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 50 days. Inspectors observed lessons and examined samples of students’ work and a variety of college documents. They met students, college governors, managers, staff, and representatives of local schools, the careers service, the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the Cheshire County Council. Five inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training that is supported by the college in leisure studies, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy and business administration. They interviewed 42 trainees and visited 13 placements. In relation to

judgements contained in the self-assessment report they interviewed employers and their staff and reviewed evidence in the workplace and in the college. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected by FEFC inspectors and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 77 lessons inspected, 70% were judged to be good or outstanding and none was judged to be less than satisfactory. These judgements compare favourably with national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively.

# Context

## Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	7	2	0	0	10
GCSE	2	2	2	0	0	6
GNVQ/NVQ	6	14	9	0	0	29
Other vocational	5	10	7	0	0	22
Other	1	6	3	0	0	10
Total (No.)	15	39	23	0	0	77
Total (%)	19	51	30	0	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

### Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
West Cheshire College	10.4	73
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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



# Curriculum Areas

## Science and Mathematics

### Grade 3

**11 The inspection covered the range of science and mathematics courses offered by the college. Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report and identified some additional strengths.**

#### Key strengths

- above average retention rates for general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics and some science courses
- good retention and pass rates in access to science provision
- well-prepared schemes of work
- good use of support staff in practical sessions

#### Weaknesses

- low pass and retention rates in two-year general certificate of education advanced levels (GCE A levels) in mathematics and sciences
- insufficient use of information technology (IT) in lessons
- an inadequate range of full-time vocational science programmes
- some poor laboratory provision

12 The college offers a range of provision to cater for the needs of school-leavers and adults. Courses include GCE A level, GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and GCSE subjects together with an access to science course, an introduction to nursing provision and a national certificate in pharmaceutical science. Different managers have responsibility for managing the science and mathematics programmes but they ensure that there is effective co-ordination between the two subject areas. As a

consequence, for example, the modular courses for day and evening provision and for one-year and two-year courses operate effectively and offer students the choice of taking GCE A/AS level qualifications. There is, however, an inadequate range of foundation and vocational programmes in science. Inspectors agreed with the finding of the self-assessment report that the college needs to develop further the availability of foundation science programmes. Schemes of work are well organised and are used in most subject areas. The entire GCE A level physics scheme, which has been developed into learning packages, was available for students on the college's internal computer network. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Regular team meetings in science identify where there are areas of concern and a need for improvement. There is poor use of value-added measures to monitor students' progress.

13 There are good working relationships between teachers and students. Teachers plan their lessons well and make judicious use of high-quality handout material. In a successful GCSE mathematics class, the teacher started the lesson by reinforcing students' mental arithmetic skills before giving a very clear explanation of the use of such skills when preparing percentage frequency histograms. In science lessons, support staff play an important part in practical sessions to ensure that students make correct use of the practical and safety skills that are required. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. In over half the science lessons, inspectors found that students were not encouraged sufficiently to concentrate on the work and ask questions. Their responses in question and answer sessions were often poor. Teachers made insufficient use of IT in mathematics and science lessons observed, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. The assessed work undertaken by students is at an appropriate standard for the level of the course. Teachers review regularly

# Curriculum Areas

the progress of students. They mark students' work thoroughly and their attention to detail and written feedback enable students to identify where they need to improve their performance.

14 Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report that noted the high retention rates for GCSE mathematics and some science subjects. Retention and pass rates on the access to science course are above the national average for the sector. However, as the college self-assessment noted, there are low retention and pass rates in nearly all the two-year GCE A level courses in science and mathematics. Retention rates in GCE A level sciences fell significantly in 1999. Fewer than 25% of those who started on a two-year course leading to

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	461	375	336
		Retention (%)	76	78	84
		Achievement (%)	25	29	31
GCSE sciences	2	Number of starters	67	70	71
		Retention (%)	84	67	70
		Achievement (%)	20	53	34
Introduction to nursing	2	Number of starters	22	24	20
		Retention (%)	55	54	80
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A/AS level mathematics	3	Number of starters	51	57	30
		Retention (%)	61	56	67
		Achievement (%)	71	56	58
GCE A/AS level sciences	3	Number of starters	184	175	130
		Retention (%)	84	80	58
		Achievement (%)	48	60	50
GNVQ advanced science and precursors	3	Number of starters	25	15	16
		Retention (%)	64	60	81
		Achievement (%)	53	100	100
Access to science	3	Number of starters	36	31	27
		Retention (%)	83	84	89
		Achievement (%)	73	81	72

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

GCE A level chemistry passed the examination in 1999. The general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced science course in 1997 had no successful student completions and was discontinued the following year. Retention and pass rates in other vocational science awards are either on or above national averages for the sector.

15 Science and mathematics staff are well qualified. The level of science equipment is generally satisfactory for the courses currently on offer. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that about half the science laboratories are outdated and reduce the scope of the teaching. Many classes are taught in these laboratories and, as the self-assessment report acknowledged, students find them uncomfortable, especially during long theory lessons.

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 2

**16 FEFC inspectors observed 12 lessons covering all aspects of engineering provision including electrical, mechanical and motor vehicle engineering. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors from the TSC observed training in electrical and electronic engineering for work-based students both within the college and on five company sites where a total of 15 students were seen.**

#### Key strengths

- much good teaching
- effective use of support tutors and curriculum assistants
- good tutorial support for full-time students
- industrial standard of competence
- most achievement rates above the national average
- subject specialist resources of high quality
- close attention to health and safety in college workshops

#### Weaknesses

- high student absentee rate
- declining retention rates on intermediate vocational courses
- insufficient opportunities for work experience for students

17 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that aspects of teaching and learning were strengths. Of the 12 lessons observed, eight were judged to be good or outstanding. However, the report did not identify some mundane approaches to teaching that were observed by inspectors where teachers failed to engage students' interest. In the best lessons, clear links were made between

theoretical and practical work, the pace of delivery was demanding but achievable, and teachers made good use of an appropriate range of teaching techniques. Assignments are well conceived. In one class a mature group of electronics servicing students worked through a series of well-planned exercises which enabled them to gain a good understanding of electronic principles and of their industrial application. In a few lessons, too much time was taken up by teachers on activities which failed to motivate students. Course handbooks, available for all courses, were used effectively in programmes of student induction.

18 Inspectors considered that tutorial support for students was a strength but it was not noted in the self-assessment report. Full-time students are provided with timetabled opportunities to develop their key skills and tutors keep careful records of their achievement. The college makes good use of support tutors and curriculum assistants to provide for students who require additional support. This strength was not reflected in the self-assessment report. However, both FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed that workplace assessment of vocational competencies does not occur.

19 Student achievement and retention rates are above the national average for the sector for vocational students taking courses at levels 1 and 3. However, retention rates for level 2 vocational students have declined and coincide with the above average absentee rate for the same group of students; this point is recognised in the self-assessment report. Inspectors also considered that arrangements to provide for student registration were ineffective. The average attendance during the week of inspection was 69% and in one national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 motor vehicle class, only 30% of the students were present. Students reach industrial standards of workshop competence which was reflected in their practical achievements. This strength was noted in the self-assessment report.

# Curriculum Areas

20 Good health and safety practice was observed in all practical workshops. In both mechanical and motor vehicle workshops, teachers introduced students to risk assessment during their induction period. Students as a matter of routine were expected to review all risks before starting any practical work and to document and sign for their risk assessment.

21 The lack of work experience opportunities for full-time students meant that some did not fully appreciate the industrial applications of their technology studies. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

During September 1999 the college moved its entire provision for engineering 8 miles from the main college site in Chester to an industrial site. These new premises now provide students with access to extensive accommodation designed and built for engineering activities which contain specialist industrial standard equipment. In addition the college has made a further investment to equip the centre with state-of-the-art learning technology. In the robotics laboratory, software has been designed to provide teaching materials and assignments. This development allows the subject of robotics, which features to some extent in many

technology syllabuses, to be available to tutors and students. The resource centre offers students access to a wide range of IT as well as to traditional resources such as journals and books, some of which are in need of replacement. Both FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the new technology facilities on the Capenhurst campus represent a major enhancement to the subject area at the college.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Foundation vocational (GNVQ, precursors, NVQ C&G)	1	Number of starters	127	192	294
		Retention (%)	72	68	83
		Achievement (%)	16	91	98
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ, precursors, NVQ C&G)	2	Number of starters	228	242	*
		Retention (%)	81	78	*
		Achievement (%)	63	77	*
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, precursors, NVQ C&G)	3	Number of starters	157	209	375
		Retention (%)	89	72	86
		Achievement (%)	68	75	91

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

\*incomplete data

# Curriculum Areas

## **Business: Administration, Management and Professional Studies**

### ***Grade 2***

**22 FEFC inspectors observed 22 business lessons covering administration and IT, management and professional courses. Inspectors agreed with the main judgements in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional weaknesses. Inspectors from the TSC observed eight trainees in business administration and visited five work placements.**

#### **Key strengths**

- an effective range of courses and teaching methods
- high rates of retention and achievement on most courses
- much good teaching
- effective curriculum management and planning
- good specialist IT facilities
- a high level of teacher support for students

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor retention on higher national certificate business and NVQ level 2 accounting
- low attendance on some courses
- some poor schemes of work and lesson plans

23 The college offers a wide range of provision from foundation to higher levels. Courses offered at different locations in the community and at various times of the year provide students with opportunities for further progression. The college has been particularly successful in recruiting students onto the

introductory IT courses. It also provides NVQs in administration and supervisory management in the workplace, and shapes the provision of many IT courses to meet the needs of employers.

24 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that courses are effectively managed. There are good links between business planning at curriculum level, staff development planning and the college's strategic objectives. Course management files are well maintained and are used effectively to plan and review provision. Action notes are circulated to staff following team meetings. Electronic mail is used effectively to communicate to full-time and part-time staff. Systems to record students' progress are comprehensive. Internal verification procedures ensure that assessments are standardised and meet external quality requirements. Franchised provision is well managed and providers respond well to the management and quality assurance systems required by the college. These systems are monitored closely by college staff.

25 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is much good teaching. Teachers use an appropriate mix of teaching methods and student activities to consolidate learning. Lesson plans and schemes of work are used for all courses but some do not clearly indicate aims and objectives, assessment methods and resources. On management and professional courses teachers make effective use of the work experience of students. There are good examples of additional support provided for students. High-quality information packs have been prepared to help students to work at their chosen pace in the workshops. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there are effective procedures for the assessment and monitoring of students.

# Curriculum Areas

26 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is a good standard of student achievement and that over the last two years at all levels achievement has been improving. Although inspectors agreed that the overall retention rate has improved, the college's self-assessment failed to identify the low retention rate in higher national certificate business studies and NVQ accounting level 2, both of which are significantly below the national average for the sector. The overall attendance in lessons observed by inspectors was just below the national average, but attendance in a number of courses was very poor. The quality of the presentation of most students' work for assessment is of a high standard. Students' portfolios demonstrate a well-organised approach to work and effective use of IT applications in assignments and projects. Students in IT workshops have opportunities to gain multiple qualifications in the course of a year.

27 Staff are appropriately qualified and have made good progress in the acquisition of assessor, verifier and accreditation of prior learning awards. In management and professional courses the use of some part-time staff who are working in a professional role brings contemporary relevance to teaching. Staff are regularly appraised and staff development opportunities are planned to meet needs that have been identified. As noted in the self-assessment report, there is a heavy reliance on part-time staff, who are responsible for teaching 59% of the lessons. The standard of IT facilities is high. Computer rooms are well equipped with up-to-date hardware and some industry standard software packages. All rooms have whiteboards and most have overhead projectors and screens. In management courses, good use is often made of electronic whiteboards and presentations using a computer software package. Furnishings are of a high standard. There is effective co-operation to identify subject specialist needs between programme area staff and staff in the library.

# Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in business: administration, management and professional studies, 1997 to 1999**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Vocational – foundation	1	Number of starters	1,459	1,132	1,436
		Retention (%)	94	87	91
		Achievement (%)	59	67	90
Vocational – intermediate	2	Number of starters	820	586	887
		Retention (%)	92	91	88
		Achievement (%)	69	76	84
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	380	43	83
		Retention (%)	54	84	81
		Achievement (%)	64	80	98
Management and professional	2	Number of starters	115	427	336
		Retention (%)	96	84	88
		Achievement (%)	28	91	94
NVQ administration	3	Number of starters	339	56	69
		Retention (%)	67	82	88
		Achievement (%)	67	74	97
Vocational – advanced	3	Number of starters	189	163	188
		Retention (%)	97	99	95
		Achievement (%)	74	82	83
Management and professional	3	Number of starters	232	281	213
		Retention (%)	75	75	73
		Achievement (%)	40	70	78
Management and professional	4	Number of starters	240	233	332
		Retention (%)	70	87	76
		Achievement (%)	55	89	96

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Hair and Beauty

### Grade 2

**28 FEFC inspectors observed 12 lessons. The inspection covered all courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified through the college's self-assessment, but considered that insufficient emphasis had been given to some poor achievement. Inspectors from the TSC observed training in hairdressing for 11 work-based trainees.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching and learning
- high achievement rates in beauty therapy
- good student progression to appropriate destinations
- a broad range of full-time and part-time courses
- effective opportunities for students to learn

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient opportunities for work experience
- poor retention rates on some courses
- most rates of achievement in hairdressing below national averages
- some missed opportunities for assessments

29 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that key roles for managing teaching and learning are clearly understood and carried out effectively. There is a good range of full-time and part-time courses which takes account of student needs and opportunities to progress. Full-time and part-time staff take part in curriculum planning and development; these processes are well documented. Franchised provision is managed

effectively. There is less evidence of the effective sharing of good practice across the curriculum area. For example, steps have only recently been taken to introduce curriculum modularisation in hairdressing, although it is well established in beauty therapy. When achievements are reviewed, the comparisons made with national benchmarks are not sufficiently related to the specific qualifications obtained.

30 Most of the lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be good or outstanding. Teachers pay close attention to the needs of individual students. Lessons are well planned and structured. Objectives for some lessons are not shared with students at the beginning of the lesson nor is their achievement confirmed at the end. In a theory class for students, the use of a game to build and test knowledge of anatomy was effective and enjoyed by the students. In contrast, the approach to teaching in a few practical lessons was dull. The development of a realistic working environment was hampered by the lack of clients. Study packs are well developed in beauty therapy but remain underdeveloped in hairdressing.

31 Students' practical work is of a good standard. It invariably conforms to commercial practices. Students use IT with confidence; most assignments are wordprocessed. Students' written work is of a good standard. In one assignment on cutting, the work produced was clearly presented and showed a good understanding of the subject and of the task set. The modularisation of courses in beauty therapy enables students to gain recognition for what they are achieving early in the course and to observe how their individual learning programmes are developing. Achievement rates in beauty therapy are good and have improved over the last three years. In beauty therapy NVQ level 2 courses, achievement rates increased significantly between 1997 and 1999. Both the FEFC and TSC inspectors considered that most achievement rates in hairdressing are



# Curriculum Areas

poor. In hairdressing NVQ level 2 and level 3 courses, achievement rates are below national averages for the sector for the specialist qualifications. Opportunities for assessment are missed for both FEFC hairdressing students and TSC trainees. Actions agreed in tutorials are not always followed up in practical lessons. Retention rates are below national averages for the sector on a number of courses. In beauty therapy, the retention rate on the NVQ level 2 remained at 59% over the last three years. In hairdressing NVQ level 2 the retention rate

remained low. Students progress to appropriate destinations. Most level 2 students progress to level 3; many others to course-related employment when they leave college.

32 Resources are adequate for the provision of hairdressing and beauty. There are two hairdressing and three beauty salons with a separate reception and dispensary for each specialism. Theory and tutorials are conducted in two base rooms. Staff have the use of a large, well-lit workroom with good access to computers.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in hair and beauty, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Beauty (one and two-year courses)	2	Number of starters	69	70	69
		Retention (%)	59	59	59
		Achievement (%)	60	80	97
Hair (one and two-year courses)	2	Number of starters	121	117	120
		Retention (%)	57	46	58
		Achievement (%)	19	83	68
Beauty (short)	2	Number of starters	91	175	152
		Retention (%)	92	93	88
		Achievement (%)	70	83	98
Beauty (one and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	12	20	29
		Retention (%)	83	95	79
		Achievement (%)	80	89	87
Hair (one and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	37	11	33
		Retention (%)	97	100	61
		Achievement (%)	67	91	32
Beauty (short)	3	Number of starters	33	77	77
		Retention (%)	79	81	82
		Achievement (%)	77	88	98
Beauty (24 weeks)	3	Number of starters	191	130	135
		Retention (%)	68	65	64
		Achievement (%)	88	91	98

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

# Curriculum Areas

## English and Modern Foreign Languages

### Grade 2

**33 Inspectors observed 14 lessons in English and modern foreign languages. Inspectors were in broad agreement with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college in its self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- good teaching
- several sets of high pass rates at all levels
- high standards of students' assessed work
- good resources
- a wide and flexible range of provision in languages

#### Weaknesses

- retention rates on two-year GCE A levels below national figures
- poor achievement rate in GCE A level French and English language

34 The college offers a wide range of opportunities for students to study languages. Courses are available at many levels and run at times to suit the needs of different groups of students, including lunchtimes and Saturdays. Provision includes courses in less familiar languages such as Greek and Japanese. This strength is understated in the self-assessment report. The college has also arranged the timetable for GCSE English to ensure that classes are available at times that suit a broad range of students.

35 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the standard of teaching is high. Teachers plan their lessons well to include learning methods that engage and hold the interest of students. They give freely of their time outside lessons to assist students with both pastoral and academic

problems. In English, in particular, teachers are successful in encouraging students to plan and manage their own learning. Most pair and group work is productive especially when students help and encourage each other. Teachers strike a careful balance between guiding students and prescribing too closely what they should do. Many students are responsive in the lessons but there is a significant minority, both in languages and English, who are less forthcoming in class and who need to be more directly stimulated and questioned. This issue was not identified in the programme of lesson observations which the college undertook for use in the self-assessment. Teachers plan homework for students to fill gaps in their subject knowledge.

36 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that students are well motivated and show high levels of satisfaction with their courses. This is confirmed in the detailed feedback from student surveys although the surveys do not provide sufficient opportunity for students to evaluate their actual experience of learning. Subject tutorials are well structured and used effectively to review the progress of students. Students, following presentations they make in class are provided with helpful feedback from their teachers. Their written work is marked thoroughly. Teachers highlight errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar and add helpful comments to indicate where improvement can be made. Records of students' progress are appropriately detailed and ensure that additional help, if required, can be targeted. Students know how they are progressing and what they must do to improve further.

37 The self-assessment report identifies courses such as GCSE German, GCSE English and GCE A level English literature where pass rates and the percentage of higher grades are well above the national average for the sector. Inspectors agreed. In addition, most of the short language courses also have good pass rates. Many other courses have pass rates

# Curriculum Areas

around the national average, but results in French are poor. The pass rate on the one-year GCE A level English course declined sharply in 1999. On the two-year course it has also declined over the last three years and is now below the national average. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the retention rate is poor on two-year GCE A level courses. Students' attendance in the lessons observed by inspectors was below the average for the sector at 71%. Some of the excuses for absence which students sent were flimsy.

38 Course management is sound. Course files are maintained in meticulous detail.

Arrangements to ensure that messages received from outside the college get to students and staff in their subject area are inadequate. The

quality of accommodation in the subject area varies from adequate to good. Blinds in some classrooms do not shut out light effectively, which hinders presentations based on overhead transparencies and videos. The attractive international study centre provides good access to a language laboratory. The new library and resources centre is a spacious, bright and welcoming facility which is well provided with books, magazines and computers. Only a few students of languages and English present their work in wordprocessed form.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and modern foreign languages, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Graded language proficiency test: German	1	Number of starters	35	47	64
		Retention (%)	74	83	80
		Achievement (%)	92	90	98
GCSE German	2	Number of starters	33	33	13
		Retention (%)	88	83	83
		Achievement (%)	66	83	89
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	207	196	202
		Retention (%)	63	73	73
		Achievement (%)	89	75	71
GCE A level French	3	Number of starters	19	29	29
		Retention (%)	16	25	33
		Achievement (%)	25	43	56
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	18	18	17
		Retention (%)	12	67	76
		Achievement (%)	100	100	85
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	26	35	35
		Retention (%)	73	86	74
		Achievement (%)	63	63	44

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

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

**39 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Some of the strengths were overstated, others were more descriptive than evaluative in tone. Some weaknesses had not been clearly identified.**

#### Key strengths

- effective initial advice and induction processes for most full-time students
- well-developed careers guidance
- well-organised and well-implemented learning support systems
- effective teamwork across student services sections

#### Weaknesses

- the narrow focus and inadequate range of tutorial activity
- uneven levels of support for part-time students
- restricted availability of student services at some college centres
- insufficient provision for social and enrichment activities
- underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation

40 Student services are well located near the entrance to the Handbridge site of the college. They provide initial information and guidance, careers guidance, welfare and financial advice and access to nursery provision. The tutorial and learning support teams also operate from this base and work closely with each other. Several of these services have internal partnership agreements with curriculum areas which help to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the staff involved. There is a more restricted access to services at the other college centres. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that students in dispersed provision do not have

adequate access to the full range of support which the college provides. A guidance worker provides some coverage to meet the needs of individuals and groups in community locations.

41 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that students receive good and impartial guidance and information during their initial contact with the college. The college has effective arrangements to liaise with many of the schools in the area. There is appropriate provision for 70 disaffected pupils in year 11 who attend college to study vocational areas such as motor vehicle, hairdressing and catering. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive careful guidance. The induction process for full-time students is well organised. Tutors are provided with information packs which give them clear information and guidance on the requirements for induction. Student satisfaction with induction is monitored, but it does not always lead to subsequent action to effect improvements. As the self-assessment report recognises, although the college has established a minimum entitlement for part-time students, their induction is not always as successful as that for full-time students and at the time of the inspection there was no effective action plan to remedy this shortcoming.

42 The college has tried to improve the student retention rate which was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. Students' attendance is monitored and letters are sent to students after they have been absent on three consecutive occasions. To date there has been little monitoring of the effectiveness of this approach. Some tutors contact students earlier to avoid what they regard as needless delays. Attendance rates at lessons observed by FEFC inspectors were 5% below national figures for the sector. As part of the strategy to improve retention, the college has established closer links between the teams responsible for learning support and tutorials, and the staff responsible for curriculum areas.

# Cross-college Provision

43 Students appreciate the help they receive from their support tutors. Observations by inspectors of individual tutorials confirm this positive view, which was identified in the self-assessment report. However, the emphasis on individual tutorial support reduces the opportunities for students to benefit from group activities or to discuss wider issues of interest for example equal opportunities or aspects of personal or social education. Some part-time students who attend for over 180 hours a year do not have the opportunity to take the programme of career planning to which they are entitled. The procedures for career development for students which operate through the tutorial system have improved student access to study and careers planning and preparation for employment. The low achievement rates at higher levels on the programme suggest that it is inappropriate for many students.

44 The college has good links with the local careers service and has agreed a set of standards against which to measure performance. The college careers officers provide good initial information and guidance, advise students who wish to transfer from their course and provide formal and informal sessions to students in each curriculum area. Careers officers give good support to students applying for higher education, but student feedback suggests that the students' support tutors are insufficiently involved in the process.

45 There are effective arrangements to provide additional learning support for those students who need it. The screening process meets its targets and has the confidence of staff in curriculum areas. Support is provided in various ways: to individual students in class; to groups; by appointments; or on a drop-in basis at the learning centres. The majority of students identified as needing support do attend. Of the students who received additional support last year, 97% achieved their primary learning goal. Students with sensory disabilities receive

specialist support and students with visual impairment are provided with appropriate equipment and software.

46 There are insufficient opportunities in the college for students to socialise with each other outside class time. Not all centres have social areas. The students' association is not well established and there is no college strategy to provide full-time or part-time students with curriculum enrichment opportunities.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**47 The self-assessment report was comprehensive. Inspectors found evidence to support the main strengths and weaknesses identified by the college.**

#### **Key strengths**

- substantial improvement to accommodation and equipment
- excellent IT facilities
- good learning resource centres

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor space utilisation
- poor access to some parts of buildings for students with mobility impairment

48 As the self-assessment report recognises, substantial investment has improved the accommodation since the last inspection. Many curriculum areas now have a dedicated base. Most classrooms and communal areas are well decorated and furnished, although there are some exceptions, especially at the Grange site. There is a clean, pleasant learning environment. Staff and students appreciate the substantial improvements that have been made to accommodation and equipment. The quality of equipment available to support learning ranges from satisfactory to good and includes new

# Cross-college Provision

technology, for example interactive whiteboards. Specialist equipment and accommodation have been enhanced in many areas, for example the international study centre for languages at Handbridge, and an improved fitness centre and theatre at the Grange site. Refectory facilities have been modernised at Handbridge and are satisfactory elsewhere. Sports facilities are adequate. There is a lack of display material in several classrooms and circulation areas. Some areas and equipment have not been upgraded, for example the changing room facilities at the Handbridge site and parts of the science area.

49 As stated in the self-assessment report, IT facilities are very good. Eight hundred computers are networked across the sites, giving a ratio of approximately one machine for every six students. IT provision at Handbridge is excellent and there has been significant improvement to the equipment available on other sites. Staff and students speak highly of the back-up support available to ensure the computers are well used. As well as induction sessions, clear explanatory leaflets and helpful online support are available. Courses are run for students and staff to develop their skills in the use of IT. There is good access to the Internet. Electronic mail is used by many staff. The college has developed its own website and intranet. The college has received national awards for the development of Internet use in the curriculum and for its weather pages. Some curriculum areas are making effective use of online resources for teaching. Other online learning programmes are also available such as the European Computer Driving Licence.

50 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college has developed effective resource centres. There is an excellent new resource centre at Handbridge, which incorporates a wide range of services, including areas for teaching key skills and staff development. A spacious resource centre is central to the new engineering development at Capenhurst. Blacon and Grange sites both have adequate resource centres. Students at

Greenbank have access to computers on site and can attend nearby Handbridge for other facilities. The centres are open throughout the week, including evenings and weekends in some cases. Staff within the resource centres are well qualified and work to specific curriculum areas. There are good subject specific leaflets outlining the resources available. Students speak highly of the support they receive. Bookstock and other learning materials such as CD-ROMs and journals are adequate. The self-assessment report identified some weaknesses in bookstock but inspectors found that most students have access to the resources that they need to complete their courses. In addition to the main resource centres, the college, in partnership with other organisations, has developed learning centres in the community and employers' premises. The college is aware that monitoring of students' use of facilities is underdeveloped.

51 The self-assessment report recognises that the college still under utilises its accommodation; this issue was identified in the previous inspection report. The 1997 accommodation strategy outlines the need to rationalise the number of buildings. The college intends to withdraw from the Blacon site, and remodel accommodation at the Grange. There have been delays in implementing this strategy. The stock of accommodation has actually increased in the short term with the development at Capenhurst. The self-assessment report recognises that the college is significantly below the norms for best practice in the sector in terms of space utilisation. According to college figures, full implementation of the accommodation strategy will reduce the size of the estate by 20% . However, some classes are taking place in rooms that are too small for the number of students. There is pressure on rooms at peak times and at other times they are underused. Two new posts have been created this year to take over the timetabling function and to monitor more effectively the use of rooms.

# Cross-college Provision

52 Access for students with restricted mobility is still poor at some of the sites; this weakness was also identified at the last inspection. There have been improvements at the Handbridge site, which include ramps and the recently installed lift. The self-assessment report recognises that there is still inadequate access at Blacon, Grange and Greenbank.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**53 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- a well-structured and comprehensive framework for quality assurance
- the effective integration of the self-assessment process with the quality assurance system
- improvements in teaching and learning and students' achievements
- linkage of the extensive opportunities for staff development to strategic aims

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient rigour in action-planning
- underdeveloped use of target-setting and lesson observations in course reviews

54 There is a comprehensive framework for quality assurance with well-developed procedures which also apply to franchised provision. The system has been extended in recent years to include lesson observations, qualification reports and the introduction of training needs analysis at appraisal. Most staff recognise the value of the system which is available in both paper and intranet form. There remain some gaps, for example, where exit interviews are not conducted for work-based students and the occasional incorrect use of documents, especially where updated versions are available.

55 The quality of teaching and learning has improved. At the last inspection the profile of lessons observed was below national figures for the sector. At this inspection the profile was above national figures and no lessons observed by inspectors were less than satisfactory. There have been improvements in students' achievements for the last three years at all levels and across both 16 to 18 and over 19 age groups. Retention rates, although showing some improvement, display a more mixed picture. The college has provided a quality improvement budget for the last two years which has funded successful action plans to rectify shortcomings that were identified through self-assessment. Performance indicators for retention, achievement and enrolment are used across the college to aid decision-making. The college has made extensive use of benchmarking to compare its performance against other colleges.

56 The self-assessment process is well structured. It encompasses all staff in both curriculum and support areas. A separate internal assessment process that has included all the curriculum areas over a two-year cycle contributes to the development of judgements. It has recently been extended to include the support areas. Both the self-assessment and internal assessment processes are thorough and have increased staff awareness of issues that need to be addressed. The internal assessment process includes lesson observations which are carried out in all programme areas each year, together with an evaluation of students' achievements, resources, student feedback and improvements to standards. Identified weaknesses in teaching and learning have led to action to improve staff performance and subsequent observations.

57 Course reviews are thorough and led by the qualification managers who have a clear role and enable staff to focus on all aspects of the programme. The reviews include an appropriate range of evidence, for example, pathway reports, external verifier reports, team meetings, student feedback and students' achievements. Lesson observations and the

# Cross-college Provision

internal assessment report were used in only a minority of cases. Targets are set for retention and achievement which are in line with the college policy, but are not always sufficiently demanding. Usually an analysis of trends in students' achievements is made, but the data are not always included in the reports. No comparisons are made between current results of student surveys and those from previous years within the qualification reports.

58 There are several instances where action-planning lacks rigour. Action plans are developed as part of the course review and there is evidence that subsequent action is taken and improvements are made. However, there is no formal review against the plans to ensure that each action point has been dealt with effectively. Programme area leaders do not always comprehensively follow up issues arising from lesson observations. The college has recognised this shortcoming and intends to use the teacher training team to support the manager in the follow-up process.

59 The internal verification system has been developed to comply with requirements of the awarding bodies. The system works well in certain areas but the college recognises that improvements are required in some areas, including computing, hairdressing and work-based training.

60 Student feedback extensively contributes to course reviews and self-assessment. Student views are sought through questionnaires at induction, in mid-programme and at the end of year. In addition, students' views are sought as part of the self-assessment and internal assessment processes. Analysis of student feedback is carried out by an independent organisation. A three-year comparison of data showed an improving trend in student satisfaction with their courses and the college.

61 Wide-ranging staff development opportunities are available which are linked to the college's strategic aims. There is a monthly programme of staff development events and designated days for curriculum planning and development. However, there are insufficient opportunities for staff to receive updating on their industrial experience or their knowledge of new developments in a particular industry. The appraisal process is applied to all full-time staff and also to part-time staff where appropriate. The process is used to identify staff development needs and has been refined to enable staff to focus more effectively on areas that have been prioritised by the college. There are no clear links between the lesson observations and appraisal although observations can be used in the process. The appraisal system is not used to set and review performance targets.



# Cross-college Provision

## Governance

### Grade 3

**62 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the assessment of governance but judged that the college had overstated certain strengths and failed to identify significant weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective use of the wide range of expertise of governors
- good induction and information package for new governors
- a clear oversight of the college's strategic direction
- good monitoring of overall rates of student retention and achievement

#### Weaknesses

- lack of rigour in the operation of the remuneration committee
- inadequate monitoring of college franchised provision
- failure to adhere to certain articles of government

63 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governors have a wide and appropriate range of skills. The corporation has a membership of 16. There are currently two vacancies. Four out of the current 14 governors are women. Individual governors are linked with college divisions and projects where they apply their skills and experience to the benefit of the college and its students. The induction programme for new governors is good and includes informative packs of documentation and attendance at an externally organised training event. The individual training needs of governors are identified but the college has been slow to meet these needs.

64 Governors are closely involved in determining the college's mission and strategic direction. They review and amend strategic objectives annually during a planning seminar. They are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The annual calendar of corporation and committee meetings sets out the standing items that relate to their main responsibilities. In meetings governors demonstrate a good understanding of key issues related to college business. The self-assessment report recognised this strength in governance.

65 Corporation minutes and papers are available in college resource centres and a register of interests is available for public inspection. Their availability is publicised on the noticeboards in resource centres. There is no written policy to determine which agenda items should be considered confidential. A code of conduct has been adopted which has not been updated to take account of the Nolan report.

66 The corporation and its committees receive efficient support from an independent clerk. Agendas and minutes are produced and circulated well before corporation and committee meetings. The clerk offers advice on compliance with the instrument and articles of government and other statutory requirements. At the time of the inspection, the chair of the corporation had not appraised the clerk.

67 Standing orders covering the operation of the corporation and its committees have been amended recently to take account of the requirements of the modified instrument and articles of government. The corporation has an approved code of practice on 'whistleblowing' but it has no procedures for dealing with complaints about the corporation. The college register of interests, which is completed by governors, has recently been extended to cover senior managers. An interest in a college property has not been declared by the principal.

# Cross-college Provision

68 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct all of its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also does not fulfil all of its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

69 The corporation has five committees covering: finance and resources, audit, remuneration, search, programmes and standards. All have terms of reference, which have been reviewed recently and approved by the corporation. The finance and resources committee receives monthly management reports and monitors the college's financial position closely. The committee does not receive regular financial information on the performance of franchise contracts, the college company or commercial activities. Governors do not receive adequate monitoring reports on the volume and performance of students on courses run under arrangements for franchised provision. The remuneration committee failed to formally recommend one senior manager's remuneration package before the corporation gave approval. The information on remuneration presented by the committee to the corporation was not always complete. The committee's recommendations on the remuneration of senior postholders have not been based on a rigorous assessment of performance. The inspection team found that the corporation had contravened some of the instrument and articles of government. Shortly after the inspection was completed, the FEFC formally raised this weakness with the governors. The governors immediately commissioned an investigation of the matters raised through the college's internal auditors.

70 The corporation monitors student retention and achievement rates. Corporation members are well informed about retention strategies implemented by the college. The corporation reviews college policies for health and safety

and equal opportunities annually and receives quarterly monitoring reports on health and safety issues. The corporation does not regularly monitor the implementation of the equal opportunities policy.

71 The corporation assesses its own performance against the standards that it has set for its work. Governors complete a questionnaire identifying strengths and weaknesses. The quality assurance panel of the corporation produces a draft self-assessment report, which is discussed and amended at a corporation meeting. A college colleague oversees the process. The corporation does not make full use of performance indicators and targets against which its performance could be monitored and measured.

## Management

### *Grade 3*

**72 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that some strengths were overstated. They considered that progress had been made to rectify some weaknesses but identified other weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- effective communications
- extensive and productive links with external organisations
- a well-established annual planning cycle

#### Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of management information
- inadequate marketing
- ineffective promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities

# Cross-college Provision

73 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that staff are involved in the college planning process. There are clear links between the college's strategic objectives, the college's operating statement and the divisional development plans. The results of self-assessment and of surveys of students' and employers' perceptions contribute to the formation of subsequent plans. Staff understand and support the college's mission statement.

74 The senior management team meets every fortnight to consider strategic matters. Regular, scheduled meetings at division and programme area levels are timed to allow staff to receive briefings from the senior management team. Minutes from college and divisional meetings are available on the college intranet. There has been an improvement in communications over the last two years after managers sought and acted on ideas for improvement from staff. As the self-assessment report identifies, staff are well informed and involved in decision-making irrespective of the site at which they are based. They value particularly the electronic mail, to which they all have good access, and 'Grapevine', the informative and interesting monthly college news sheet. The principal meets with all staff at least once a term.

75 The college purchased a new computerised management information system in 1998. At this time, there were significant weaknesses in the quality of management information due to inconsistent procedures in data gathering and recording at college, divisional and course levels. Although actions to remedy weaknesses are clearly identified, many are at an early stage of implementation. Inspectors agreed that the system requires further development to be fully effective. Residual problems of gathering data hinder the provision of up-to-date retention rates. Data returns to the FEFC are late. Monthly reports are provided to managers, but some are not using these effectively. Some managers have difficulty interpreting the reports which they do get. Training on the use of the

system has been provided for all staff, but only 10% of academic staff attended. Further training is planned. Staff have welcomed the allocation to divisions of assistants for this system of computerised management information. Their role is to help staff to make better use of the system.

76 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has reported historic cost surpluses in each of the last three years. The senior management team reviews the management accounts monthly. Budget holders are provided with timely reports of actual and committed expenditure. These reports do not include details of committed part-time teacher pay expenditure. The college's financial forecasting has not been accurate. It has failed to achieve its income targets in each of the past four years. Financial regulations have been revised recently but require further enhancement to take account of good practice guidelines.

77 The college has gathered a wide range of market information which has contributed to the needs analysis in the strategic plan. However, many curriculum areas are not using it effectively to enhance the information which they collect. Some managers do not use market intelligence or data from the computerised management information system to assist in the construction of recruitment targets. The college has consistently failed to achieve its targets over the last three years. Where market information has been used to determine the curriculum that is to be offered, for example in the weekend provision, recruitment targets have been met or exceeded. Promotional and publicity activity takes place but its co-ordination could be improved. A marketing plan was drawn up in 1999, but is awaiting full implementation, until the recently appointed marketing manager is in post. These weaknesses were partially identified in the self-assessment report.

# Cross-college Provision

78 The college has an equal opportunities policy and procedures for dealing with harassment for students and staff. While the procedures are clear, those for students have not been circulated directly to them, although they are on the intranet. The policy does not contain specified responsibilities or procedures for its implementation. Though the college has made progress on adapting accommodation and providing specialist equipment to support students who are impaired whether visually, or in their hearing or mobility, there is no evidence that equality of opportunity in other contexts is being monitored. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

79 Inspectors agreed that the college is involved in a wide range of productive local partnerships. It has successfully widened participation through its provision in community and outreach centres and work with schools. Its training provision for a large local employer on the employer's premises has produced good results. The college has good relationships with Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral TEC, though the TEC has identified penetration of parts of the local market and delivery on some contracts as areas where the college needs to improve. The principal is the chair of the local chamber of commerce and senior managers are representatives of the college on other local organisations.

## Conclusions

80 Inspectors found that the self-assessment report provided a useful basis on which to plan the inspection. There had been extensive involvement by staff in its production. The report made reference to a useful range of evidence against which inspectors could check the judgements made. Inspectors generally agreed with the main judgements in the college's self-assessment report. In a few instances, strengths were either overstated or understated and some weaknesses were not identified. In

some parts of the report, the strengths claimed were little more than normal practice for the sector. Some weaknesses were expressed as action that was required. Inspectors recognised that action had been taken to address some of the weaknesses since the report was produced. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the cross-college grades where they awarded a lower grade. In three of the curriculum areas, inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment grades. In one curriculum area inspectors awarded a higher grade and in another a lower one.

81 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 (August 1999)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	22
19-24 years	13
25+ years	63
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	25
Level 2 (intermediate)	24
Level 3 (advanced)	27
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Non-schedule 2	19
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	373	3,232	17
Agriculture	0	40	0
Construction	0	95	0
Engineering	179	853	5
Business	282	2,562	14
Hotel and catering	182	2,211	11
Health and community care	459	1,024	7
Art and design	347	1,276	8
Humanities	196	6,959	34
Basic education	78	690	4
Total	2,096	18,942	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 20% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

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

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	130	225	0	355
Supporting direct learning contact	55	18	0	73
Other support	35	26	0	61
Total	220	269	0	489

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£12,536,000	£13,418,000	£14,528,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£14.86*	£14.68*	£16.20*
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	60%	62%
Achievement of funding target	92%	95%	93%
Diversity of income	26%	26%	26%
Operating surplus	-£44,000	-£738,000	£177,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

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

Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

\*provisional data

### Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	717	1,162	849	3,118	3,181	3,176
	Retention (%)	85	86	80	86	82	82
	Achievement (%)	55	83	90	64	81	93
2	Number of starters	1,391	1,256	1,499	2,826	2,799	2,931
	Retention (%)	71	70	74	80	78	80
	Achievement (%)	62	68	77	60	78	84
3	Number of starters	1,071	1,224	1,447	2,189	2,087	2,334
	Retention (%)	72	63	72	75	78	73
	Achievement (%)	65	72	79	62	78	85
4 or 5	Number of starters	177	50	42	356	341	458
	Retention (%)	79	64	88	64	82	80
	Achievement (%)	18	84	100	56	89	95
Short courses	Number of starters	1,388	2,078	1,360	10,317	16,976	14,045
	Retention (%)	88	95	97	96	96	96
	Achievement (%)	73	90	96	85	91	96
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,954	1,838	1,888	3,190	3,433	3,303
	Retention (%)	85	76	77	86	84	86
	Achievement (%)	17	67	94	45	87	98

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

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