

Wigan and Leigh College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Wigan and Leigh College

North West Region

Inspected October 1997

Wigan and Leigh College is a large tertiary college in the borough of Wigan in Greater Manchester. The college's self-assessment report was based on a review undertaken by teams at all levels in the organisation and on an internal inspection of all curriculum areas carried out by college staff. The self-assessment report also drew on surveys of students' views and the reports of external verifiers and external auditors. The report was evaluative and identified strengths, weaknesses and actions for improvement. The action plans which were produced subsequently contributed to the college's strategic and operational plans. Inspectors generally agreed with the college's judgements, but considered that students' achievements, in some cases, had been overvalued.

The college offers a wide range of courses in all of the FEFC's programme areas. Six of these areas were inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Students have access to a comprehensive range of support through tutorials and advice services such as welfare, careers and counselling. Students with a variety of learning needs are progressing well across a wide range of curriculum areas. The quality of

teaching and learning is generally satisfactory. Most students' achievements on courses compare favourably with the national average. There are wide variations between courses and subjects in the number of students who complete their programmes of study but the overall retention rate across the college compares favourably with national averages. Governors are fully involved in the development of the college and its mission. Strong leadership and effective strategic planning characterise the college management which ensures that financial management and control are effective. The promotion of equal opportunities features prominently in the development of cross-college policies. The college has invested heavily to improve students' access to information technology. There is a programme for the refurbishment and rationalisation of accommodation; a number of teaching areas have already been attractively refurbished. The college should: share good practice in teaching across the college to improve further the learning experience of students; ensure that arrangements for the review of staff performance include attention to classroom practice; make better use of the available resources, including information technology; and improve student retention on some courses.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and sports studies	2	Support for students	1
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Business	2	Quality assurance	2
Leisure and tourism	2	Governance	1
Health and care	2	Management	2
English and modern foreign languages	2		
Social science	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 The borough of Wigan is a large conurbation 20 miles equidistant from Liverpool and Manchester. Wigan and Leigh College is a large and diverse institution with six sites on two campuses, approximately seven miles apart. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses across all Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. Business links and overseas initiatives have diversified the economic base of the college. Higher education courses provide affordable progression routes for local people. The college has expanded its adult provision through its 'college in the community' programme to 2,400 enrolments in 1996-97 from 900 the previous year. It has 837 students who attend the college through the youth credits and modern apprenticeships programmes. FEFC-funded activity, in which the college contracts another organisation to teach its students, has been markedly reduced from 7 per cent in 1996-97 to less than 1 per cent of college activity this year.

2 Local employment in manufacturing has fallen significantly although this sector still represents approximately 24 per cent of all employment in the borough. The strength of the manufacturing base and the significant growth in retailing makes the structure of the local economy markedly different from the north west and the United Kingdom. Seventy-three per cent of businesses employ fewer than 10 people. Only 2.8 per cent of companies have more than 100 employees but they account for 43 per cent of Wigan's labour force. The population of the Wigan Borough is around 316,400, and covers a wide socio-economic range. Relatively deprived wards within the borough receive support through City Challenge and other funds. Nevertheless, the borough overall does not rank as highly on any deprivation index as many other parts of Greater Manchester. The unemployment rate, at 6 per cent, is slightly lower than the national figure of 6.6 per cent.

The representation of minority ethnic groups as a percentage of the total population in the borough is lower (0.8 per cent) than the north west average (3.6 per cent) and the United Kingdom average (5.5 per cent). The proportion of young people in the borough between the ages of 13 and 17 years with special educational needs is 4.5 per cent which is above the national average of 3 per cent.

3 The college is a tertiary college. In the borough of Wigan there are two schools with sixth forms and two sixth form colleges, and there are 10 other sector colleges within a 15 mile radius. Over 21,000 students are enrolled at the college. One-third of students are under 19 years of age. Most of these study full time. Thirteen per cent of students are enrolled on higher education programmes. The published general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) performance tables for 1997 indicate that 43 per cent of the schools scored above the national average for numbers of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs grade C or above. Figures for 1995 indicate that 58 per cent of Wigan and Leigh school-leavers undertook further education compared with the north west (62 per cent) and England (67.5 per cent).

4 The college's aim is to provide 'high-quality, innovative, education and training enabling individuals and organisations to fulfil their potential'. In its strategic plan, the college adopts the core values of professionalism, equality of opportunity, competitiveness, entrepreneurialism, continuous improvement, corporate culture, environmental responsibility, caring culture, partnership and openness. The college organisation has recently been revised. Five faculties replaced seven former curriculum schools. There are four directorate posts: finance and management information; human resources; curriculum; and business and overseas development. At the time of the inspection, the director of curriculum post was vacant, and the director for business and overseas development had temporarily taken on

Context

responsibility for curriculum development. The college employs approximately 750 full-time and part-time teaching staff and about 400 full-time and part-time support staff.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 27 October 1997. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for the majority of programmes for the three years 1995 to 1997 were validated by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examination bodies. The inspection was carried out by 22 inspectors and an auditor of the FEFC's audit service, working for a total of 70 days. Inspectors observed 155 lessons, examined students' work and college documents, and held meetings with governors, managers, college staff and students. Inspectors reviewed the evidence of the college's consultation with external bodies such as the local education authority (LEA), the local training and enterprise council (TEC) METROTEC (Wigan) LTD, employers, local secondary schools and community groups.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 66 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 6 per cent were less than satisfactory or poor. This profile compares with a national rate of 61 and 8 per cent, respectively, for colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 76 per cent compared with 77 per cent for the sector in 1996-97. The inspection took place during the half-term week of local schools, a factor which may have affected the attendance in some classes. The highest attendances were in health and care (84 per cent) and the lowest in social science (69 per cent). The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	11	21	12	2	0	46
GCSE	0	4	2	1	0	7
GNVQ	3	11	11	1	0	26
NVQ	3	5	0	0	0	8
Other vocational	15	29	19	4	1	68
Total	32	70	44	8	1	155

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Sports Studies

Grade 2

7 The inspection of computing covered the wide range of provision on offer, from foundation level to higher education. In sports studies, the inspection covered BTEC first and national diploma provision in science (sports studies) together with the international sports therapy diploma. The inspection team generally agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses, but attached more significance to some key strengths in sports studies and weaknesses in students' achievements in both curriculum areas.

Key strengths

- good teaching and appropriate use of information technology
- steady progress and development of appropriate skills by students
- good student progression to higher education or employment
- high-quality, industrial-standard equipment and software

Weaknesses

- in a minority of lessons unchallenging work set for students
- inadequate records kept by teachers of students' progress in computing in several instances
- some poor written feedback on students' work
- poor GCSE and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) pass rates in 1995 and 1996 and poor retention rate on BTEC national diploma courses in science (sports studies)
- students' work files poorly organised

8 In most cases, the teaching is effective and teachers demand high standards from students' action planning. In sports studies, information technology is used extensively, particularly to analyse sports performance and fitness testing. The numeracy skills of some sports studies students remain poor despite the development of methods to improve them. As the self-assessment report states, some of the teachers' written responses on students' work in both subject areas are poor.

9 The sports studies curriculum is effectively organised and managed. Specialist resources are of high quality. They include a centre where a realistic working environment and industrial-standard equipment enable students to apply their theoretical knowledge in appropriate practical work. In computing, there is little liaison between teachers who teach on the different sites and opportunities to share good practice or engage in joint staff development are missed. Changes in personnel, and the absence of teachers through illness, have caused some disruption to the teaching in computing. There is a good range of modern hardware and software to support the curriculum.

10 In computing, results on the national diploma courses are satisfactory; those in 1995 to 1997 were particularly good with few students not completing the course and an average pass rate of 97 per cent. Students' achievements on computing general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels are also satisfactory with pass rates well in excess of the national average. In computing and information technology GCE A level pass rates were poor in 1995 and 1996. GCE A level retention rates were low for those students completing in 1997. Value-added analysis suggests that students are underperforming in these subjects at GCE A level. Only one student on the GCSE information systems course has achieved grade C or above in the last three years. Retention for the higher national

Curriculum Areas

certificate part-time day course in computer studies has declined to the point where the course has been withdrawn. Short courses for adults are a significant part of the provision. Retention and pass rates on these courses compare favourably with those for such courses held elsewhere in the sector. In sports studies, there is a high pass rate on the BTEC national diploma science (sports studies) course and a good record of students progressing to higher education and employment from both this programme and the sports therapy diploma. Retention rates on the BTEC national diploma in sports studies over the past three years ranged

from 63 per cent to 76 per cent, which is below both the college and curriculum area targets.

Examples of students' achievements in computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997*
GCE A/AS level	Retention (%)	+	71	71
	Pass rate (%)	51	41	63
GCSE	Retention (%)	60	100	73
	Pass rate (%)	33	0	0
Full-time advanced vocational	Retention (%)	59	74	82
	Pass rate (%)	89	94	90
Full-time foundation and intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	95	85	75
	Pass rate (%)	60	61	70
Higher national certificate	Retention (%)	62	60	69
	Pass rate (%)	100	88	100

Source: college data

+reliable data not available

*subsequent completions not included

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

Course		1995	1996	1997*
National diploma in science (sports studies)	Retention (%)	63	76	69
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	77
International sports therapy diploma	Retention (%)	100	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	67	50	63

Source: college data

*subsequent completions not included

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

11 The inspection of engineering covered courses in electrical and electronic engineering, mechanical and manufacturing engineering, fabrication and welding, and automobile engineering. In general, the judgements of inspectors agreed with those in the college's self-assessment report. However, they concluded that the report did not take into account sufficiently students' achievements and some weaknesses were not acknowledged.

Key strengths

- use of differentiated materials which take account of individual learning needs
- good practical work in workshops, laboratories and computer suites
- the wide range of courses
- appropriate opportunities for additional studies, and curriculum enhancement
- a policy of encouraging full-time students to take up employment with linked training opportunities
- good-quality teaching materials produced to a common format
- some good student retention and pass rates

Weaknesses

- a minority of lessons where opportunities to promote learning were missed
- the poor quality of some documentation for assignments and of arrangements for assessment and marking
- poor pass rates and retention rates on some courses
- shortcomings in management and record-keeping on some courses

12 The quality of engineering teaching is generally good. The best lessons were thoroughly prepared and teachers provided good-quality handouts and other materials such as assessment packs and self-study packs. Students have good individual support from teachers who design tasks which take account of students' differing abilities and previous experience. Teachers work well together; the support materials devised by automobile engineering teachers are of a particularly high standard. There are weaknesses in teaching, some of which were acknowledged in the self-assessment report. For example, some teachers did not have clear objectives for lessons and did not make sufficient checks that students were learning. In marking work, some teachers left students' mistakes uncorrected. Additional support for students is well provided in classes held on three evenings a week on technical problems for students from any course, and in workshops run at lunchtimes and in the evenings by mathematics staff.

13 The wide range of engineering courses, and the variety of attendance modes, provide students with good progression routes from foundation level to advanced levels and onto higher education. Students can transfer between full-time, part-time and evening attendance. Students on full-time courses are encouraged to seek offers of employment which have linked training opportunities. The college claims that many of these students return to continue their studies on part-time courses.

14 General management of the faculty is sound. However, some course review and development reports are not specific enough and do not have enough information on students' retention and pass rates, including comparisons on a year-by-year basis or with national standards. Some of the documentation for assignments is inadequate. The need for the faculty to develop internal verification systems to all programmes is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

15 Students' retention and achievements present a mixed picture, made more complex by the many differing individual programmes of study and varied modes of attendance followed by students. The faculty does not have a system which enables it to analyse accurately the achievements of students on flexible programmes of study. There are good retention and pass rates, which compare well with the averages reported in the FEFC curriculum area survey, *Engineering* (April 1996), on two-year part-time advanced vocational courses; one-year full-time intermediate level courses; the GNVQ advanced course which has a pass rate of 58 per cent compared with 33 per cent nationally; the GNVQ intermediate course with a pass rate of 54 per cent compared with 42 per cent nationally; and the two-year part-time intermediate level national vocational qualification (NVQ). The national diploma courses in electrical/electronic engineering, and mechanical/manufacturing engineering have 100 per cent pass rates. Other courses have poorer pass rates. Two-year, full-time advanced vocational courses have a pass rate of 63 per cent compared with an average of 77 per cent recorded in the national survey report. There

are poor pass rates on the two-year, part-time advanced vocational courses and the higher national certificate programme. There is low retention on two-year, part-time intermediate level courses leading to NVQs, and on two-year, part-time higher level courses.

16 Staff expertise is sufficient to cover the range of courses taught. Provision of specialist equipment is at least adequate and there are examples of good provision. Mechanical manufacturing and automobile engineering still use some out-of-date equipment. There are weaknesses in specialist accommodation in all areas of engineering. These weaknesses are partially recognised in the self-assessment report, particularly in respect of the standard of classroom accommodation.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997*
Advanced vocational (excluding NVQ courses)	Retention (%)	80	74	75
	Pass rate (%)	64	59	60
Intermediate vocational (excluding NVQ courses)	Retention (%)	100	83	85
	Pass rate (%)	41	80	62
NVQ courses	Retention (%)	47	49	73
	Pass rate (%)	71	59	81
Other vocational courses including C&G	Retention (%)	95	71	88
	Pass rate (%)	56	76	52
Professional and higher education	Retention (%)	63	60	67
	Pass rate (%)	76	72	64

Source: college data

*subsequent completions not included

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

17 The inspection of business covered administration, management and professional, and general business courses. The self-assessment process carried out within the faculty was generally thorough, and contained much evaluative comment. Evidence to support the judgements was not always offered and there was little use of performance indicators to measure success. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified but considered that some were not recognised or were understated.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- good support for students in their studies
- above average students' achievements on the majority of courses
- well-planned work experience and high-quality realistic work environments
- much students' written work well presented and of high quality
- good achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- well-planned courses

Weaknesses

- some teaching which failed to motivate students
- ineffective use of audiovisual aids
- some assignments with unclear or inappropriate criteria
- low retention rates on some courses
- little development of students' key skills

18 The business programme area contains a wide range of provision from foundation to

postgraduate level across a broad spread of business subjects. Students have access to work experience which is well managed. Documentation, including records of students' progress, are particularly well kept for administration courses but not on all courses across the programme area. Assignments are well presented but some contain assessment criteria which are unclear or inappropriate. A minority of lesson plans, as recognised in the self-assessment report, are of poorer quality and give little detail of the methods to be followed.

19 Much of the teaching is stimulating. Teachers use business examples and case studies effectively and the experience of employed students is well used to illustrate theory lessons. In a minority of lessons, teachers allowed a few students to dominate discussions to the detriment of the learning of the class as a whole. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress well on business courses. Teachers carefully take account of the individual learning needs of students of differing abilities, particularly in GNVQ group work. The college's internal inspection noted weaknesses in some lessons. In several lessons, teachers failed to motivate the students and did not ensure that students had understood the work before moving on to a new topic. Aids such as overhead projectors were not always used effectively.

20 Some of the accommodation, particularly for management courses, has modern furnishings and is of high quality. The facilities provided in administration centres to help students gain qualifications across NVQ levels 1 to 3 are excellent. The college's internal inspection report recognises that some rooms are badly ventilated, poorly arranged and lacking in any wall display.

21 The majority of students develop skills such as teamworking but other key skills are less well developed. Much written work is well presented and of high quality. Students' GNVQ, NVQ and higher national certificate portfolios are

Curriculum Areas

systematically organised and provide a thorough record of their achievements. Pass rates on most courses, including the GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses in business, are above average; this applies in particular to the GCE A level business course where in 1997 there was a pass rate of 82 per cent following three years of steady improvement. Pass rates on the national certificate have fluctuated with better results in 1996 than in 1997. Eighty-six per cent of students on the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) integrated business technology 2 passed in 1997 compared with only 25 per cent in 1996. However, lower than average results were recorded for database stage 2 and typewriting skills part 2, stage 3. Professional and management course students generally achieve the qualification they seek and go on to make good progress in their careers. Retention has steadily improved on management, professional and administration courses over the last three years. Retention on the GNVQ intermediate

course has declined from a high point of 90 per cent in 1995.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	+	75	73
	Pass rate (%)	65	71	82
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	67	66	68
	Pass rate (%)	77	81	63
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	89	85	68
	Pass rate (%)	75	75	87
GCSE	Retention (%)	88	67	64
	Pass rate (%)	75	75	77
NVQ	Retention (%)	88	80	87
	Pass rate (%)	76	75	77
Other vocational	Retention (%)	95	95	93
	Pass rate (%)	81	73	74
Professional and higher education	Retention (%)	78	82	85
	Pass rate (%)	81	76	67

Source: college data

+reliable data not available

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 2

22 The inspection covered courses offered by the school of leisure and tourism, primarily GNVQ programmes and part-time professional courses. Inspectors concluded that the college's self-assessment report on this curriculum area had overstated some weaknesses. The detailed action plan which accompanied the self-assessment has already succeeded in addressing some of the issues and consequently has altered the balance between strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and resources of high quality
- direct application of theoretical study to the leisure and tourism industry
- students' written work at an appropriate standard and well presented
- pass rates significantly above national pass rates at foundation and intermediate levels
- good progression routes on all courses
- action planning already beginning to address weaknesses
- good use of the travel shop as a realistic working environment

Weaknesses

- lack of explicit grading criteria in assignments
- poor retention rates on some courses
- some staff confusion over management roles in the faculty
- little work experience for students outside the travel industry
- minimal use at course level of the analysis of the views from surveys of students' opinions

- some accommodation too small for group sizes

23 The school of leisure and tourism offers a range of courses across four levels, providing good progression opportunities for students. Courses mainly lead to GNVQ, and the majority of students are aged 16 to 18 years old. Part-time professional courses available in the evening are attractive to adult students. The curriculum is broad and includes GNVQ options, languages, and complementary studies. Residential opportunities, visits to industry and work experience are prominent features, although little work experience outside the travel industry is offered. Advice from local industrialists is taken to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant. Joint ventures for catering students, such as running a local hotel for a week, enable assignment work to reflect accurately current working practices.

24 Some staff perceive an overlap between the functions of managers in the faculty. There has been an improvement in the co-ordination of course programmes, partly as a result of action taken following the production of the self-assessment report. At team meetings, there is often a failure to focus on key aspects of course management and insufficient use is made of statistical data and performance indicators. This weakness was not included in the self-assessment report.

25 The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have relevant industrial experience which they use effectively to enrich students' learning. Learning materials are of good quality. This aspect has been improved as a result of the implementation of the action plan. Students on the foundation level programme are well supported by the inclusive learning officer who works alongside the teacher to help students structure their ideas and organise their notes. Assignment work is at an appropriate standard but written comments from some staff are too brief and often too little guidance is given to

Curriculum Areas

help students to achieve a higher level of work in future assignments.

26 Students' written work is of an appropriate standard and some display work is of high quality. A range of key skills is developed across individual assignments. Students' achievements at all levels are high and pass rates are above the national average, particularly at foundation and intermediate levels. There are good progression rates between levels as well as into employment and higher education. Of those completing the GNVQ advanced level last year, almost 50 per cent of students progressed onto the higher national diplomas and 50 per cent of students successfully gained employment. This is a major strength which was understated in the self-assessment report. Those students progressing between levels, for example, from intermediate to advanced levels, rose from 22 per cent in 1995-96 to 33 per cent in 1996-97. Retention rates are poor and many courses fail to reach the 75 per cent target which the college has set. The college has taken steps to address this.

27 Specialist resources such as the travel shop, which is newly refurbished to a high standard, offer good opportunities for real working practice. All college travel business is passed through this independent agency which also attracts customers from the local

community. This feature was omitted from the self-assessment report. Most accommodation is adequate but some GNVQ base rooms are too small for the size of groups using them and are poorly ventilated. Computer equipment is good and is easily accessible to students for study on their own. The library is underused; a factor which is reflected in the bibliographies attached to assignments.

Examples of students' achievements in leisure and tourism, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997*
GNVQ foundation	Retention (%)	+	83	73
	Pass rate (%)	+	60	91
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	74	82	66
	Pass rate (%)	35	75	91
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	81	61	69
	Pass rate (%)	49	82	58

Source: college data

+courses not on offer

*subsequent completions not included

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 2

28 The inspection covered the broad range of child, health and social care courses which provide progression opportunities from foundation level through to higher education. Inspectors concurred with some of the college's judgements about the strengths and weaknesses it had identified, but their findings included strengths and weaknesses which did not form part of the college's assessment.

Key strengths

- the majority of lessons well prepared with aims and objectives stated clearly and shared with students
- teachers use appropriate methods which take account of the different learning needs of students
- well-planned and monitored work experience
- appropriate assessment procedures conscientiously carried out
- good and some outstanding pass rates

Weaknesses

- schemes of work lack detail
- some inappropriate learning activities
- key skills development is insufficiently identified within vocational courses
- failure of students on some courses to achieve the award within the normal timescale

29 The majority of staff have direct experience of work in the health and social care professions. Some part-time teachers are health and social care practitioners. This experience enables staff to use realistic examples when relating theory to practice. Teachers use a variety of methods to enable students to develop and demonstrate appropriate levels of

knowledge and understanding. All courses include well-organised work experience; this is monitored effectively and enables students to relate their theoretical knowledge to practice. Students value the feedback they receive on their assessed work. Schemes of work and lesson plans generally lack sufficient detail and do not identify teaching and assessment methods. Teachers do not make full use of the opportunities presented in vocational studies for the development and practice of key skills. Students' knowledge and understanding is generally sound and, in some cases, is of a high standard.

30 Pass rates on most courses are good and, in some cases, outstanding. Pass rates for students completing GNVQ programmes at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels are significantly above the national average, although at advanced level they are declining. In some courses, such as the BTEC national diplomas in social care and childhood studies, fewer than half the students completing the course in 1997 achieved the award within the normal timescale. Staff monitor attendance and there is a system for following up poor student attendance.

31 There are clear lines of responsibility for all child health and social care programmes. Course teams work in a co-ordinated manner and use effective systems for recording students' progress. Although the college sets performance indicators and targets for retention and achievement of external awards in its strategic plan, these are not used effectively at course team level.

32 Some classes are taught in rooms that are too small for the size of group. Most rooms have whiteboards but in some classes tutors only have access to chalkboards, some of which are worn and difficult to write on legibly. As the college's self-assessment report noted, it is difficult for students with restricted mobility to access some areas which have specialist equipment.

Curriculum Areas

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997*
Foundation vocational	Retention (%)	+	83	72
	Pass rate (%)	+	88	74
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	88	98	83
	Pass rate (%)	63	92	84
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	87	81	82
	Pass rate (%)	81	75	61

Source: college data

+courses not on offer

*subsequent completions not included

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

33 The inspection covered GCE A/AS level and GCSE courses in English, communication studies and modern foreign languages. The inspectors broadly agreed with the findings of the college's self-assessment report, although they considered that some strengths were overstated. Some weaknesses which were not identified in the self-assessment report emerged as a result of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good course planning processes
- many lively lessons
- valuable enrichment opportunities
- rigorous and regular assessment of students' work
- good management practice at curriculum level
- examination results at or above the national average

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention paid to the learning needs of individual students
- some poor retention rates, and poor students' achievements on a few courses
- procedures for setting and using targets not effectively implemented

34 The quality of teaching and learning is generally good. In the best lessons, teachers effectively managed students' work in pairs and groups, role-play, question and answer sessions and discussions. In other lessons, teachers offered few opportunities for students to contribute to the work. The college's self-assessment report noted that some students are too passive. In some lessons, teachers fail to

provide sufficiently for individual students' learning needs.

35 Schemes of work, as indicated in the self-assessment report, are working documents, linked to syllabuses and, in the best examples, identifying lesson objectives which are shared with students. Teachers set regular assignments and students' work is marked thoroughly; much of the marking is sensitive and constructive and provides guidance on how students might improve their work. Arrangements for the moderation of coursework are thorough.

36 The management of modern foreign languages is strong. There are shared resources, fortnightly staff meetings, and regular staff development activities for full-time and part-time teachers. Procedures for setting targets and for measuring progress against them are not always implemented. Where targets are set, they do not inform planning at course level.

37 Many teachers have higher degrees and 40 per cent of modern foreign languages staff are native speakers of the languages they teach. In modern foreign languages, effective use is made of audiovisual resources and of CD-ROMs for students' guided study. Modern foreign language students can take advantage of well-established exchange visits, work placements abroad, and social activities through language clubs. Resources provided for students on English courses lack variety. There is no systematic integration of information technology with the courses. English courses include visits and opportunities for debating and public speaking, in which college students have gained public recognition.

38 Students' achievements are generally good. Pass rates on two-year GCE A level courses in English, communication studies and modern foreign languages for 1997 are at or above the national averages. In English, this has been the case for the last three years. In 1996, all modern foreign language two-year GCE A level courses showed results well below the national

Curriculum Areas

average, except for Spanish where there was a pass rate of over 90 per cent, including a high proportion of passes at grade C or above. In GCSE English and modern foreign languages the proportion of students achieving passes at grade C or above is significantly higher than that in the sector generally. Retention rates for GCSE courses show steady improvement. The college calculates the progress made by students by comparing their GCE A level results with their GCSE results. On two of the three English GCE A level courses, however, the progress achieved was less than that predicted. Retention rates for the last cohort of students are generally unsatisfactory and some are poor. Of the 21 courses, 13 have retention rates below 80 per cent and another eight are below 75 per cent. In 16 of the 21 courses, less than 70 per cent of the students enrolled are entered for the examination. This is an area of weakness identified in the college's self-assessment and action plan.

Examples of students' achievements in English and modern foreign languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	68	79
	Pass rate (%)	78	79	87
One-year GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	77	83
	Pass rate (%)	72	78	53
GCE AS	Retention (%)	+	100	87
	Pass rate (%)	+	100	50
GCSE	Retention (%)	68	70	80
	Pass rate (%)	48	64	56

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

+courses not on offer

Curriculum Areas

Social Science

Grade 2

39 The inspection covered the subject areas of geography, history, law, psychology, religious studies and sociology at GCE A level, GCSE and Open College courses. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements made in the colleges' self-assessment, but considered that the college gave insufficient weight to some of the weaknesses identified.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- teaching methods often linked to the development of students' key skills
- lesson planning to ensure syllabus coverage
- clear assessment criteria often shared with students and thorough marking of students' work
- good achievements on most GCSE courses, two-year GCE A level courses and Open College psychology
- well-furnished, equipped and tidy classrooms with excellent displays

Weaknesses

- failure to differentiate work in lessons to take account of the individual needs of students
- poor achievements, particularly on one-year GCE A level courses
- some poor retention rates
- insufficient liaison between teachers on the two campuses and lost opportunities for teamworking

40 Social science and history and geography are taught on two campuses and on several sites. Despite improvements, there is still not enough liaison between teachers on the different campuses. This results in a duplication of effort

and lost opportunities for the sharing of good practice. The student handbooks for history, for example, vary in quality between the campuses and the better one would be broadly appropriate for all history students. There is excellent practice in the marking of sociology on the Leigh campus. Teachers use cover sheets linked to skill areas and give students the opportunity to assess their own progress. However, on the Wigan campus social science teachers are working independently to develop a marking policy and to introduce cross-marking and moderation.

41 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that much of the teaching is good. Lessons are generally well planned to cover syllabuses and in sociology to ensure that students understand the nature of the discipline. Most lessons incorporate an appropriate variety of teaching methods often linked to the development of students' key skills. In other less effective lessons, teachers failed to use question and answer techniques effectively to stimulate students' learning.

42 Most resources are of good quality. The majority of rooms have good standard furnishings, blinds or curtains and audiovisual aids. There is a well-equipped psychology laboratory at Wigan. In a sociology room at Leigh there is an outstanding and imaginative display of students' work, which includes materials chosen to challenge stereotyping in respect of race, gender, ability and sexual orientation.

43 On most GCSE and two-year GCE A level courses students' achievements are good. In law, over half of the students gained grade C or above in 1995 and 1996 and almost three-quarters in 1997. In geography in 1997, the pass rate was 87 per cent. In sociology, pass rates have been between 18 per cent and 23 per cent above the national average in the past three years and good proportions of students have achieved grade C or above. Younger students on GCSE social science

Curriculum Areas

courses consistently achieve good results. Older students on GCSE and Open College psychology also do well. Students on most one-year GCE A level courses do not achieve well. Only half of the entrants in law in 1996, and just over half in 1997, passed. In history, only half of those entered passed in 1997. In GCSE geography, only 28 per cent of those entered gained grade C or above. Older students in GCSE sociology and law achieve poor results; this contrasts with the national pattern which indicates that older students are often successful.

44 Retention rates are generally unsatisfactory and some are poor. Although the college recognises this weakness in its report, it does not give it sufficient weight. For those courses

for which figures are available, 41 per cent have more than a quarter of students who do not complete their course. Some social science subjects have high numbers of students who complete their courses but who do not enter for examinations. Some course teams have set targets for improvement and are taking action to support students identified as potential non-completers. Other teams appear reluctant to take any responsibility for low completion rates.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	68	71
	Pass rate (%)	96	81	85
One-year GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	86	72
	Pass rate (%)	58	65	62
GCSE	Retention (%)	92	64	76
	Pass rate (%)	59	60	58

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Examples of students' achievements in history/geography, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	75	72
	Pass rate (%)	82	63	81
One-year GCE A level	Retention (%)	100	90	68
	Pass rate (%)	77	84	60
GCSE	Retention (%)	88	65	70
	Pass rate (%)	37	62	39

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

45 The college's self-assessment report for student support is comprehensive. There is detailed analysis of how the implementation of systems can be improved further. Action plans are clear and give specific targets for the college to work towards.

Key strengths

- well-organised publicity, admissions and guidance services
- good induction systems for the overwhelming majority of students
- extensive provision of learning support and study support across all faculties
- examples of students with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities making good progress across a wide range of curriculum areas
- comprehensive system of tutorial support for all students
- a good range of advice services, including welfare, careers and counselling
- very good specialist help for students wishing to progress to higher education
- financial advice and assistance available for students
- an extensive programme of activities to support students who wish to gain broader skills or experience outside lesson time

Weaknesses

- admissions procedures are less well developed for part-time students
- failure of study support systems to identify and provide for all students' needs quickly
- insufficient central co-ordination of reporting mechanisms for advice services

46 The college has attached a high priority to developing an inclusive approach to learning which meets the individual needs of all students. It has developed comprehensive student support systems to respond to individual students' needs. Pre-enrolment services are effective in providing young people and adults with the information and guidance they need to choose an appropriate course. There are excellent links with high schools, including an extensive programme of 'taster' days, course sampling and shared curriculum developments between schools and the college. The college employs guidance officers for adults and has links with a large number of external agencies. Staff are trained in interviewing skills and standards have been set to ensure that prospective students receive the same level of service across the college. The self-assessment report identifies the need to improve enrolment procedures for part-time students.

47 There are excellent systems for students who need additional equipment or support from staff to help them succeed on their chosen course. There are examples in all curriculum areas of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who have succeeded and made progress as a result of the additional support made available. The college has two inclusive learning managers and a team of trained staff (inclusive learning officers) who have responsibility for assessing individual support needs and ensuring that they are met. The principal chairs an inclusive learning committee. Six hundred students are receiving support from the inclusive learning team. Assessment is carried out by college staff and by outside specialists, where necessary. Students are given specialist equipment if applicable or materials adapted to help them learn. Inclusive learning officers go into classes to give extra help to whole groups of students, or to individuals. There is a service run in conjunction with social services which helps to prepare students with learning difficulties for employment at the end of their course. The

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college provides access to assessment and specialist support for students with dyslexia.

48 The college has developed a study support service to identify students who may need extra help with English or numeracy and provide for them. All students up to and including intermediate level are assessed. At the time of the inspection, 1,143 students had been screened. Of those, 556 were identified as needing support and 475 were receiving it. Over 60 study support sessions had been set up. These include study support within curriculum areas, general sessions that anyone can attend, and individual lessons. Students on advanced courses are referred for study support, where necessary. A few sessions are poorly attended and the college has recognised the need to vary its approach in order to address this. The self-assessment report recognises the need to continue to develop the service, and identify more quickly those students who need help.

49 There is a well-planned tutorial system for full-time students and a developing system for part-time students. A flexible approach within a structured framework allows the needs of specific courses and individual students to be met. The college has also developed a team of tutors to work with part-time students. A helpline telephone number on the student identity card allows contact with a senior tutor to be made at any time. There are very good tutorial handbooks for staff and for students.

50 College advice centres provide an effective service directly to students and indirectly by supporting personal tutors and course staff. There is a spacious, accessible, and welcoming advice centre at one of the main sites at Wigan and another at Leigh. Staff include careers officers, higher education specialists, adult guidance officers and welfare/finance officers. There are good levels of practical support for students attending the college, including help with accommodation and hardship funds. Childcare is available. Students can make appointments to see a counsellor, but this

service is more difficult to contact for students based at Leigh.

51 Applicants to higher education receive a good standard of specialist help and comprehensive information. Students are given plenty of opportunity to discuss their applications and forms are carefully checked. The self-assessment report identifies that the careers service was not being fully used by individual faculties and courses. Changes have been put in place. The college should ensure that records kept on cross-college services are analysed at management level each year in order to set future targets.

52 There is a wide complementary studies programme which enables students to gain skills and experience outside their subject area. Many students spoke highly of the opportunity to get involved in activities which range from windsurfing to first aid. The college also operates the Further Education Award Scheme. This is a flexible programme which facilitates the development of personal and social skills. A high proportion of full-time students at the college participate and gain certification at one of the three levels available.

General Resources

Grade 2

53 The college self-assessment document grades staffing, equipment and accommodation separately. The report is based on wide sources of evidence and referenced to sectional self-assessment reports such as those of the library, human resources, accommodation and learning technology. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified although there were differences of emphasis.

Key strengths

- a substantial proportion of rationalised and refurbished accommodation

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- good access for students to modern personal computers and software
- library service points at all major sites of the college
- communal areas, refectories and sporting facilities which enhance the students' experience

Weaknesses

- some poorly furnished and poorly decorated specialist areas
- dated specialist equipment for some courses and deficiencies in library stock

54 The college has a programme for rationalising and refurbishing its accommodation. Two major buildings have recently been taken out of use. A number of teaching areas have been substantially and attractively refurbished. These areas include computing facilities at two major sites, catering and hospitality, sports science, the travel centre and the college crèche. In some areas, accommodation is in poor repair and fittings and furniture need to be replaced. These areas include some parts of engineering and teaching rooms for courses in health and social care.

55 The college has made a major effort to ensure that its accommodation can support its inclusive learning strategy. Over 80 per cent of the facilities can be reached by wheelchair users. Refectories and some communal areas are provided at all sites. College shops have been introduced and, along with the travel shop, provide realistic work experience opportunities for students. Car parking, security equipment and external signs are features which require further improvement.

56 Specialist equipment for a number of costly areas of vocational teaching is good. Industrial-standard equipment is used by students in art and design, catering, computing, sports science and some parts of engineering. In other areas of the college such as engineering workshops,

performing arts facilities and science laboratories specialist equipment is dated although, in the main, still fit for purpose. In the last three years, the college has invested £1.2 million in computing equipment and a further £0.25 million in industrial-standard software to support both teaching and administration. Technology centres have been established on each of the four main sites, providing open access to information technology facilities. Staff are available to give help to students when needed, but the amount of computer-based learning materials is small. There are over 900 computers available for students to use giving a ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers of 7.4:1.

57 Four main library service points at the college's major sites provide a convenient and accessible resource for students. One of the senior librarians has responsibility for collaboration with each of the faculties and this liaison works well. The annual acquisition budget this year is £60,000 with an additional £20,000 for improvements to computing equipment within libraries. The library stock supports the majority of courses effectively, though for some courses, particularly those recently introduced, the number of books is inadequate. A recent college survey indicates that library usage by students is lower than that in most sector colleges.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

58 Inspectors were able to confirm many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment of quality assurance but not the relative weight which the college attached to them. In particular, the proportion of outstanding grades awarded by the college to the lessons their staff observed was markedly higher than those awarded by inspectors.

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Key strengths

- a well-defined structure and clear roles within it
- the comprehensive internal inspection process informing the self-assessment report
- a concise and evaluative self-assessment report
- action plans effectively linked to strategic and operational planning
- the quality framework for partnership arrangements
- recent improvements in the organisation and evaluation of staff development

Weaknesses

- the failure of the review of staff performance to incorporate lesson observation or cover part-time staff
- insufficiently strong internal verification systems
- insufficient attention given to students' achievements and retention rates at course level
- lack of evidence from employers in the self-assessment process

59 The college quality assurance framework has been adapted well to meet the requirements of self-assessment. The quality assurance manager, quality assurance co-ordinators and quality assurance boards have clearly-defined roles. Procedures are well documented in the quality assurance manual. Further development is necessary in some support areas, especially in the use of defined standards and performance indicators. Solid progress has been made in developing the quality assurance arrangements for the college's partnership provision in respect of overseas work, community courses and franchised activities. The college considers its arrangements for internal verification are not strong enough; inspectors agree with this

assessment. It is too early to comment on the effectiveness of the strategy which is intended to remedy this problem.

60 The college makes substantial use of surveys of students' perceptions within its quality assurance framework. These cover admissions, enrolment, induction, teaching and learning, and a survey of students' views when they leave the college. The analysis of surveys is available both to inform course evaluation and review and to be used within the self-assessment process. Better student representation on course reviews is planned. Employers are consulted on matters of quality, but their feedback could be better used in the self-assessment process.

61 The self-assessment report was fully discussed and approved by the governing body, the academic board and quality assurance board. A team of inspectors conducted an internal inspection of most curriculum areas, using procedures broadly in accordance with the FEFC inspection framework. Two hundred and thirty-eight lessons were observed.

62 The self-assessment report is concise, evaluative in its presentation of strengths and weaknesses, and specifies action plans. Action points in the report have been systematically linked to the strategic and business planning activities of the college and used directly to inform staff development planning.

63 A system of staff review and development has been introduced over the last academic year. Evaluation questionnaires reveal that the reviews have been well received by staff. The majority of full-time staff have now undergone a review. Lesson observation is not a required component of the staff review process. The scheme does not yet extend to part-time staff. Although the funding available for staff development has fallen over the last three years, training activities are prioritised more effectively. An internal training programme 'maintaining professional excellence' has

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recently been introduced. The programme has been well designed to match the needs arising from the staff review, the self-assessment action plans and the college's strategic goals. Arrangements to evaluate the effectiveness of staff development activities have improved. This weakness was highlighted in the previous inspection report.

64 The college uses value-added calculations during GCE A level courses to monitor students' achievements against their GCSE points score. The system is used constructively in the monitoring of students' performance. In some programme areas, there are gaps in course review records and insufficient attention is paid to issues relating to students' achievements and retention. The college recognises weaknesses in the recording of students' progress and now requires subject teams to link targets to performance indicators set out in the college's strategic plan, using a standard document.

Governance

Grade 1

65 The self-assessment report sets out clearly the strengths and weaknesses of college governance. Inspection findings identified a number of significant strengths in addition to those in the self-assessment report. Since the report was drawn up, most of the few weaknesses have been addressed.

Key strengths

- an appropriate committee structure and arrangements to enable the corporation to discharge its duties
- involvement by governors in the development and review of the college's mission, core values and strategic aims, and their commitment in support of these
- clear distinction between governance and management

- governors' effective use of their wide range of skills and experience
- governors well informed through comprehensive reports and papers on financial issues and other indicators of college performance
- a self-assessment process as part of the governors' annual planning and review cycle
- implementation of the action for improvement identified in the recent self-assessment report on governance

Weaknesses

- little discussion of curriculum strategic issues at board meetings
- few links between governors and college staff and students
- relatively recent establishment of a training programme for governors

66 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.

67 The inspectors found the governance of the college to be outstanding. Governors have established an appropriate committee structure to enable them to discharge their responsibilities. Clerking arrangements for the corporation and committees are excellent. In fulfilling his duties, the clerk complies with the guidance issued by the FEFC. The corporation has adopted a code of conduct and formal standing orders to guide the conduct of corporation and committee meetings. The register of interests has been revised recently and completed by all governors and staff who have significant financial responsibility. Governors are clear about their responsibilities

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and differentiate them from management and operational tasks. They work to the five key responsibilities in the articles of government which the corporation cannot delegate. The corporation conducts its business openly. Minutes of committee meetings are available to the public. Corporation minutes are held in the college library. Last year, one corporation meeting was opened to the public. It is intended that one public meeting will become an annual event.

68 Governors have been directly involved in developing the college's mission, core values and strategic plan. In developing the 1997 to 2000 plan, they only slightly adjusted the mission and core values which they believe have proved effective in shaping the fundamental purpose and character of the college. Governors review regularly the college's progress towards the achievement of its strategic objectives and update them annually, working to a formal, annual calendar. One full corporation meeting a year is devoted to discussing, reviewing and updating the strategic plan. Governors are considering how better to communicate the basis of their strategic decisions to staff and students. Minutes of recent meetings show little discussion of curriculum strategic issues. Governors have authorised that the post of curriculum director be filled and that a curriculum committee be established. They identified as action points in their self-assessment report that links between curriculum areas and individual governors be re-established, and that ways be found of improving the poor attendance by students at the student affairs committee.

69 Governors are committed to supporting the college and its mission. Meetings are well attended, as are the annual residential meetings. One staff member recently left the college and there is a vacancy. The 15 governors between them have skills in various types of business, resource management, accountancy, civil engineering and education. The TEC nominee is president of the Wigan Chamber of Commerce.

New governors are selected through advertising and interview procedures which seek to improve the mix of experience, expertise, gender and ethnicity on the board. The skills and experience amongst members of the board are used effectively to conduct the college's business and to strengthen its links with the local community.

70 Governors are well informed. Agendas of the six corporation meetings over the year include standing items covering the board's key responsibilities. Papers for meetings are clear, referenced to the agenda, concise, easy to follow and dispatched at least seven days before meetings. Over the course of the annual planning and review cycle, governors receive monthly financial reports and other indicators of college performance, usually making comparisons with previous years. They have taken many of the actions for improvement identified in their self-assessment report. Agendas are now organised to reflect governors' key responsibilities. Future committee reports will focus on major issues, with detail available on request. Governors have identified the need for a training programme, developed a formal induction programme and made arrangements for governors to identify their training needs and to receive support from the college in meeting them. Governors received and considered the college's full self-assessment report. They have established their own self-assessment as an annual process.

Management

Grade 2

71 The strengths and weaknesses of management identified in the college's self-assessment report generally accord with inspectors' judgements while two of the weaknesses had been rectified prior to the inspection, inspectors considered that there were significant weaknesses not identified in the report.

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Key strengths

- strong leadership and effective identification of strategic issues
- well-documented strategic planning and review process involving governors and staff
- the centrality within the college's mission and core values and effective promotion and implementation of equal opportunities
- clear communication to staff of strategic issues and developments affecting the college and of national initiatives affecting the further education sector
- good financial management and controls
- well-established and effective marketing unit and business development unit
- well-informed curriculum planning and review
- effective links with a wide range of external organisations

Weaknesses

- ineffective communications within some faculties
- lack of opportunities for staff from different parts of the college to share experience on curriculum matters
- ineffective use by some curriculum sections of the comprehensive market research information gathered by the college
- insufficient analysis of resource deployment by curriculum sections and course teams

72 The senior management team comprises the principal and the three directors of finance, human resources and business development. They meet regularly but do not keep minutes of meetings. The college has recently been re-organised into five faculties. Staff generally understand the new structure and are clear

about their own responsibilities within it. The college management team is the most senior cross-college committee. Though senior managers take great care to keep staff fully informed of strategic issues and developments, more routine communications are not fully effective. The self-assessment report identifies the need to continue to improve all communications. In response to a staff survey, a wider range of communication measures have been introduced which include a mechanism for consulting staff on cross-college issues. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these. Communications within some faculties are ineffective. Weekly timetabled meetings are not always well used. Experience of curriculum developments is rarely shared across the college.

73 There is strong leadership in the college. Senior managers are highly effective in identifying the strategic issues facing the college, one of which is the management of resources within a climate of declining recurrent funding. Appropriate action is being taken, and indicators have been identified against which the deployment of college resources may be measured. Not all curriculum areas make the most effective and efficient use of staff time and other available resources. For example, though the self-assessment report identifies the need to improve the lecturer contract tracking system, most of the action on this has hitherto been taken at senior management level. Despite the costs of investment, there is no strategy to determine the way in which teaching is supported by information technology. Some heads of faculty are now beginning to use information on unit costs to assist them in course planning. The provision of management information has improved over the last year and managers now have timely information to use in monitoring expenditure and students' retention against targets.

74 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the financial

Cross-college Provision

management of the college is good. The size and structure of the finance team is appropriate to the needs of the college. Financial forecasts and strategic plans are integrated. Effective financial control systems have been introduced to accompany delegation of budgets to the faculties, including clear, frequent monitoring reports to budget holders, the finance committee and the corporation. Monthly management accounts are produced promptly and are of a high standard, though the process of monitoring the college's financial situation at senior management team level is not supported by sufficient recorded evidence. The results of the work of the internal and external auditors indicate the college has a satisfactory internal control system. The college has achieved reductions in its average unit of funding since 1994, though, at £19.26 per unit, this is still well above the median for 1997-98 of £16.72 per unit for general further education and tertiary colleges.

75 The college has effective links with a number of external organisations. Links with schools and higher education institutions are particularly good. The college works well with the local TEC and the two operate in a borough-wide partnership which has been successful in attracting funds from the European Union and from the government's economic regeneration budgets. The college has benefited from these. The marketing and business development units provide faculties with relevant information to inform their curriculum planning and review. This information is not always used effectively. Changes in demand are not always responded to, and recruitment targets are therefore missed.

Conclusions

76 The inspection team found the self-assessment report to be comprehensive and a valuable basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. In general, the findings of the self-assessment report are in agreement with those of the inspection team. Weaknesses in

students' achievements were those most commonly understated. To produce the overall college report, reports from teams across the college had been condensed. In the process, some of the strengths and weaknesses which inspectors regarded as less significant had been edited at the expense of others which inspectors considered to have a greater impact on quality of provision. The profile of grades awarded by the college's internal inspectors to lessons observed was significantly more generous than those awarded by FEFC inspectors. Inspectors agreed with about half of the grades awarded to curriculum and cross-college provision by the college in the areas inspected. In most, but not all cases, where there was a difference in grades, inspection findings indicated the college had overemphasised its strengths.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	32
19-24 years	15
25+ years	51
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	23
Intermediate	26
Advanced	31
Higher education	13
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	7
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	864	2,342	15
Agriculture	18	121	1
Construction	268	647	4
Engineering	774	1,395	10
Business	769	3,641	21
Hotel and catering	308	149	2
Health and community care	590	1,404	9
Art and design	657	991	8
Humanities	875	4,950	27
Basic education	90	512	3
Total	5,213	16,152	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	417	153	0	570
Supporting direct learning contact	134	5	46	185
Other support	177	8	0	185
Total	728	166	46	940

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£25,397,000	£26,695,000	£25,438,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£21.19	£19.48	£20.38
Payroll as a proportion of income	79%	71%	*
Achievement of funding target	100%	107%	*
Diversity of income	29%	27%	*
Operating surplus	-£2,570,000	-£588,000	*

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

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

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

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

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

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

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	439	411	496
	Average point score per entry	4.0	4.1	4.3
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	529	474	608
	Percentage achieving qualification	71%	65%	56%
	Position in tables	bottom third	bottom third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	228	321
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	55%	45%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	bottom third

Source: DfEE

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

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

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

College Statistics

Three-year Trends *(continued)*

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97+
Advanced academic	Pass rate (%)	75	78	81
	Retention (%)	*	77	71
Intermediate academic	Pass rate (%)	43	55	49
	Retention (%)	84	70	78
Advanced vocational	Pass rate (%)	71	77	65
	Retention (%)	74	70	76
Intermediate vocational	Pass rate (%)	60	78	73
	Retention (%)	87	88	83
Other awards	Pass rate (%)	64	70	65
	Retention (%)	84	87	88
Professional and higher education	Pass rate (%)	79	78	71
	Retention (%)	75	79	79

Source: college data

*reliable data not available

*subsequent achievement not included

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