

# Preston College

**REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE**  
**1997-98**

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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## 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

## Preston College

### *North West Region*

#### **Inspected April 1998**

Preston College is one of the largest tertiary colleges in England. It is located on a main campus to the north of Preston and uses three nearby annexes, Park School, Trinity and Winkley Square, as well as 21 other centres located throughout the north of England. The college's procedures for self-assessment are based on its quality assurance system and are linked clearly to strategic planning. The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive and evaluative. It identifies strengths, weaknesses and actions for improvement. It drew on self-assessments carried out by all teams and on the outcomes of extensive and systematic reviews which included lesson observation. Inspectors agreed with the grades awarded by the college in all of the areas inspected.

The college offers a wide range of courses from foundation to higher levels, covering all the FEFC's programme areas. Provision in eight of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Standards of teaching and learning are high. Courses are well planned and provide a range of appropriate learning experiences for students. Recently

opened 'flexible learning centres' have made rapid progress in establishing effective curricular and key skills support for students. Full-time students have good opportunities to undertake supplementary courses and enrichment activities. Since the last inspection, the college has made considerable improvements to its quality assurance system, management procedures and learning support services. Comprehensive and well-managed processes for monitoring quality are understood and supported by staff. Recent restructuring has improved accountability and communications. The college is involved in several partnerships and has positive and productive links with community groups and other external bodies. Equal opportunities are effectively implemented and monitored. Good examination pass rates are a feature of many courses. Specialist accommodation and equipment are of a high standard. The college should: develop more consistent tutorial support; improve some poor attendance and retention rates; improve the accessibility and reliability of management information; and enable all governors to increase their involvement in monitoring the college's finances and the implementation of the strategic plan.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science and mathematics	2	Support for students	2
Computing and information technology	2	General resources	2
Construction	2	Quality assurance	2
Engineering	2	Governance	3
Business and trade union studies	2	Management	2
Sport, leisure and tourism	2		
Health, social and childcare	2		
Art, design and expressive arts	2		

## The College and its Mission

1 Preston College serves the central Lancashire area and has its main campus and three annexes in Preston. In addition, the college has 21 outreach centres outside the immediate locality at Gateshead, Leeds, Carlisle and Crewe. There are two large general further education colleges, two sixth form colleges, two 11 to 18 schools and several independent schools within 10 miles of the college. The college offers courses in centres across the region in pharmacy, trade union studies, motor vehicle engineering, music technology, dance, and rating and valuation. Much of this provision is offered in association with the Preston Skills Partnership, a collaborative group comprising the college, local employers, the local authority and Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). A successful recent initiative to provide national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in the workplace has resulted in the college providing over 200 NVQ courses on employers' premises.

2 In the 1991 census, parts of Preston were identified as experiencing high levels of social and economic deprivation. In 1995, 28 per cent of the college's students came from these areas. Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) statistics show that, in 1995, 63 per cent of 16 year olds in Lancashire continued in education, compared with 65 per cent in the north west and 71 per cent in England as a whole. TEC statistics show that, in 1997, the unemployment rate in Preston was higher than the national average. Many of the college's students are unemployed, have a low level of initial skills and face considerable financial pressures.

3 The college's mission is 'to provide inclusive, lifelong learning'. To this end, it offers a wide range of flexible, relevant and accessible courses. Curriculum development has concentrated on ensuring that courses are available at all levels from pre-foundation to

higher. Considerable resources have been devoted to the development of six large 'flexible learning centres', workshops equipped with networked computers, a large stock of software including CD-ROMs, and learning materials which enable students to work on their own on topics and assignments relating to their studies. The centres are staffed at all times by 'facilitators', subject specialists and technical staff who provide individual help to students. Students spend up to 20 per cent of their guided learning hours in the learning centres. DfEE statistics show that the score achieved by candidates entering general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) examinations over the last four years has increased from 12.9 to 17.4. Entry requirements for admitting students have not been raised during this period.

4 The college uses several strategies to encourage groups not usually represented in further education to participate. It provides opportunities for many trade union members to follow courses in computing and health and safety. It offers discrete GCE A level provision for girls from Muslim families who, for cultural reasons, wish to study separately. Family literacy schemes link the college with a large number of primary schools in Preston, mostly in areas of high unemployment and diverse ethnic background. The college works with young offenders, those with mental health problems, and the long-term unemployed. In addition, the college works with Lancashire Area West TEC to provide opportunities for unemployed people and women returners to develop skills in action-planning and job search. Approximately 10 per cent of college students are from minority ethnic groups. The college employs part-time staff, equivalent to 1.5 full-time posts, to provide personal and learning support for these students. In addition, the college has successfully recruited several staff from minority ethnic backgrounds to both teaching and administrative roles since the last inspection.

# Context

5 Last year the college achieved 1,014,000 units, exceeding its Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) target of 950,000 units. The college expects to exceed its target again this year. Although the college's average level of funding is one of the 10 lowest in the country, it exceeded its year-end forecast surplus, and has cumulative reserves in excess of £1 million.

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 27 April 1998. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information about the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 which were checked by an inspector against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining boards. The college was notified about two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision which was to be assessed. The inspection was carried out by 16 inspectors working for a total of 59 days and an auditor working for five days. They

examined a variety of documents and held meetings with governors, managers, other college staff, students, and representatives from Lancashire Area West TEC, the local education authority (LEA), schools and community groups. Inspectors observed 130 lessons and examined samples of students work.

7 Of the lessons observed, 75 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 3 per cent were judged to be less than satisfactory. This compares favourably with average figures for all colleges inspected in 1996-97 according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 69 per cent, below the sector average for 1996-97 of 77 per cent, according to the same report. The highest average attendance was in art and design at 81 per cent and the lowest was in engineering at 60 per cent. The average class size, at 11 students per class, was similar to the average of 10.8 recorded in the chief inspector's annual report.

The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

**Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study**

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	3	8	8	0	0	19
GNVQ	7	15	6	0	0	28
NVQ	7	12	3	1	0	23
Other vocational*	20	25	12	3	0	60
Total	37	60	29	4	0	130

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Science and Mathematics

### Grade 2

8 The inspection covered general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and GCE A level mathematics, GCSE and GCE A level sciences, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced science, BTEC national pharmacology and Open College science. Inspectors agreed in general with the college's self-assessment of the provision but concluded that it did not identify one significant strength and some significant weaknesses.

#### Key strengths

- effectively organised courses and well-planned teaching
- teachers' care in setting and assessing homework and assignments
- high standard of students' written work
- good examination pass rates in most GCE A level subjects and in GCSE sciences
- high standards of achievement in vocational programmes
- wide and developing range of vocational science provision
- excellent laboratories and specialist equipment in science

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on most courses
- poor access to information technology (IT) facilities for mathematics students

9 The college provides a broad range of subjects at GCSE and GCE A level. As the self-assessment report recognises, a wide range of vocational provision in science has been developed to meet the needs of local industry and the regional health care sector. Courses are well organised and staff well managed. Effective communications and regular meetings at course,

section and school level assist course planning and delivery. Many courses are supported by good-quality planning materials. Course booklets contain learning outcomes, outlines of course topics, worked examples and explanatory text, self-assessment questions for the students to mark, and homework questions for teachers to mark.

10 Teaching and learning activities are planned effectively, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Detailed schemes of work relate clearly to the syllabus and individual lesson plans are comprehensive and well executed. Of the 20 lessons observed, inspectors graded 12 as good or outstanding. Teachers make use of an appropriate range of learning activities supported by well-designed visual aids and learning materials. In a science lesson, students successfully used illustrations on overhead transparencies to review a problem-solving activity. The illustrations enabled molecular diagrams to be extended, hydrogen atoms to be numbered and the solution to the problem to be found visually. Students could easily verify or amend their notes, as necessary. In some of the less successful lessons, teachers failed to engage the attention and interest of all class members. In others, the approaches used did not encourage student participation.

11 Students complete written work and assignments to a high standard. Portfolios are well presented and demonstrate good understanding of the subject. Teachers assess students' progress regularly and provide detailed and helpful written feedback. Students experiencing difficulties in their subject area are helped by a combination of in-class support, one-to-one tutoring and help from specialist staff from the learning support unit. Examination pass rates at GCE A level are above the national average in mathematics, human biology, biology and chemistry. Pass rates in GCSE physics, chemistry and human biology are also substantially above national averages, a significant strength not mentioned in the self-



# Curriculum Areas

assessment report. Levels of achievement in vocational programmes are high. A significant weakness not mentioned in the report is the poor retention on courses other than GCSE. Retention rates in a number of GCE A level programmes have fallen over the last three years. In 1997, retention rates for full-time mathematics and human biology courses were 49 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively.

12 Inspectors confirmed the college's assessment that accommodation facilities in science are excellent. The newly refurbished laboratories contain good levels of specialist equipment to meet current course needs. Classrooms offer a bright, pleasant working environment and are equipped with whiteboards, overhead projectors and good-quality furniture. However, there are few curriculum displays in classrooms. Students on mathematics courses have few opportunities to use computers and appropriate computer-based materials.

## Examples of students' achievements in science and mathematics, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced academic	Retention (%)	86	72	64
	Pass rate (%)	89	92	89
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	+	100	72
	Pass rate (%)	+	73	77
Intermediate academic	Retention (%)	90	89	69
	Pass rate (%)	60	60	66
Other vocational*	Retention (%)	78	75	89
	Pass rate (%)	90	85	90

Source: college data

+course not running

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Computing and Information Technology

### Grade 2

**13 The inspection covered full-time and part-time courses at foundation, intermediate, and advanced levels. Inspectors considered that the college's self-assessment report was comprehensive and agreed with the strengths and weaknesses it identified.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of well-planned courses
- high standard of teaching
- good examination pass rates on advanced level courses
- high retention and pass rates on part-time courses
- well-equipped and high-quality IT facilities
- good learning centre used by a wide range of students

#### Weaknesses

- few opportunities for students to develop communication and number skills
- poor examination pass rates on some full-time courses at intermediate level
- limited opportunities for full-time staff to update their skills

14 The wide range of computing and IT courses include GCE A level, Edexcel national and higher national diplomas, GNVQs at all levels and a range of part-time provision accredited by Edexcel, City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and the Open College. Students are able to progress within the college from foundation to higher levels. There are courses to attract adults returning to education, including those who have no IT skills. The

breadth of this provision is recognised in the college's self-assessment report.

15 Courses are well planned and have schemes of work which are regularly reviewed by staff teams. Full-time students have the opportunity to discuss their course during the first few weeks after enrolment to ensure they have made the correct choice, and if not, to transfer to a more appropriate course. Inspectors considered that teamwork among teachers is a notable strength, one that was identified both in the college's self-assessment report and in awarding body external verifiers' comments. Course teams meet regularly to monitor provision and record students' progress. However, they make insufficient use of the data held on the college's computerised management information system to inform their course reviews.

16 The quality of teaching is high. Inspectors judged 11 of the 13 lessons they observed to be good or outstanding. Lessons have clear objectives and often include a variety of learning experiences. On a GNVQ advanced course, students prepared CD-ROMs containing information on college courses for distribution to local schools. GCE A level students used the internet to identify the personal skills required for jobs and then compared these with an audit of their own skills. Students on a national diploma course completed a spreadsheet to model data flow within a computer, using an oscilloscope to observe the electrical shape of the signals. Students are encouraged to take some control over their learning; they work for part of their time in the IT flexible learning centre where they carry out practical activities using workbooks and other materials. Specialist technical staff are available throughout the day to help students using the centre. Many full-time students spend two weeks on work placements, and these result in an assessment and feedback from employers which students find valuable. Part-time students who prefer a more flexible mode of learning, can use the

# Curriculum Areas

workshops to study at their own pace and a time that suits them for qualifications accredited by the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) and the Open College. The self-assessment report recognises that student retention on these flexible programmes is poor.

17 Students complete a wide range of assignments and receive detailed written and verbal feedback on the standards they achieve. As part of their coursework, a GCE A level group undertook the analysis of a problem for Preston North End Football Club. A manager from the club came to the college for a presentation on the analysis and to provide feedback on its usefulness. Assessments of key skills are recorded in each student's logbook and, where appropriate, their national record of achievement. The self-assessment report acknowledges that students need to improve their skills in communication and application of number. Retention and examination pass rates are above the national average for advanced

level courses but, as the self-assessment report notes, achievement rates on some full-time courses at intermediate level are poor. The large number of part-time students achieve well, particularly those on foundation and advanced level courses.

18 Students are able to use a large number of computer rooms equipped with good-quality machines linked to the college network. In addition, they have access to the library, which is well stocked with relevant books, videos, periodicals and computer-based learning materials. Some computers are outdated and there are plans to replace them. Though the self-assessment report acknowledges that teaching and support staff have good levels of qualifications, it does not identify their lack of recent industrial experience as a weakness.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced level (full time)	Retention (%)	97	85	87
	Pass rate (%)	86	72	85
Advanced level (part time)*	Retention (%)	100	100	86
	Pass rate (%)	86	100	100
Intermediate level (full time)	Retention (%)	88	74	92
	Pass rate (%)	60	70	32
Intermediate level (part time)*	Retention (%)	90	88	78
	Pass rate (%)	68	90	100
Foundation level (full time)	Retention (%)	88	89	85
	Pass rate (%)	50	47	82
Foundation level (part time)*	Retention (%)	83	88	83
	Pass rate (%)	64	90	72

Source: college data

\*part-time courses are mainly accredited by Edexcel, C&G and the Open College

# Curriculum Areas

## Construction

### Grade 2

**19 The inspection covered the GNVQ advanced programme in construction and the built environment, and NVQs in bricklaying, electrical installation, handcrafted furniture, mechanical engineering services, painting and decorating, signwork and wood occupations. Although inspectors agreed broadly with the college's self-assessment of this curriculum area, they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned courses and lessons
- good standards of teaching
- vocationally-relevant and challenging assignments
- high retention rates on most courses
- good provision for students with learning difficulties
- good specialist accommodation and equipment

#### Weaknesses

- declining examination pass rates on advanced level courses
- poor opportunities for developing key skills on GNVQ courses
- internal verification system not applied to GNVQ courses

**20** The college offers a wide range of construction programmes designed to meet employers' needs and enable students to progress from foundation to higher levels. Poor recruitment has led to the discontinuation of the GNVQ foundation and intermediate programmes in 1997-98. Courses are well managed and communications within the department are good. Course teams, which include student representatives, meet regularly. Part-time teachers are deployed effectively, they attend

team meetings and are involved in enrolment. These strengths are not identified in the self-assessment report. All courses are reviewed, but retention, achievement and attendance rates are not critically analysed and discussed.

**21** Inspectors rated 10 out of the 12 lessons observed as good or outstanding, confirming the college's assessment that the quality of teaching is high. Schemes of work are comprehensive. Lessons are well planned and linked to course aims and objectives. Teachers use a range of methods appropriate to the different stages of learning that students have reached. In a few lessons, presentations went on too long and students became inattentive. Practical work is realistic and students pay due regard to health and safety requirements. Students on an NVQ level 3 course built circuits using wiring diagrams they had produced earlier, and carried out electrical safety checks for earth continuity, short-circuit and polarity, using equipment of the standard employed in industry. A group of NVQ level 2 students working in a purpose-built, modern workshop, constructed storm-proof windows to acceptable dimensional tolerances. Students on a plumbing course designed hot and cold water systems for domestic buildings and presented their designs to the rest of the class. Students with learning difficulties make good progress. One student on a bricklaying course, constructed a good semi-circular arch and explained the function of his structure. Marking of assignments is generally thorough and consistent and students receive good feedback on their work. On GNVQ courses, assignments are well marked with helpful comments, but numerical marking is used instead of the criterion-referenced grading specified.

**22** Most students demonstrate good levels of knowledge and understanding in their written and project work. In a few cases, students' work is of a poor standard and lacks adequate technical knowledge. While students on NVQ painting and decorating courses develop good communication and numerical skills, there are

# Curriculum Areas

insufficient opportunities for students on GNVQ courses to develop their key skills. Many of them show poor understanding of basic mathematical concepts. There is inconsistent use of IT in class and course work.

Examination pass rates are at or above the national average on most courses, though there was a decline in pass rates for advanced level courses in 1996-97, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Retention rates are generally good and, as the self-assessment report states, they are high on intermediate level courses.

23 Teachers are well qualified and 79 per cent have assessor or verifier qualifications.

Although an internal verification system is in place, sampling of students' assignments has not been carried out on GNVQ programmes, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Classroom accommodation is good and workshops are well organised and safely equipped. The technology flexible learning centre has excellent facilities, but there is little technical computer software and the computer-aided design software system currently used by students and staff is outdated.

## Examples of students' achievements in construction, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Higher vocational	Retention (%)	95	70	87
	Pass rate (%)	66	100	93
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	87	85	75
	Pass rate (%)	76	72	55
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	83	88	90
	Pass rate (%)	66	86	67
Foundation vocational	Retention (%)	+	71	80
	Pass rate (%)	+	83	69

Source: college data  
+course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 2

**24 Inspectors' judgements agreed broadly with those in the self-assessment report, though they found that some strengths were overstated and a few significant weaknesses were not identified. Inspectors identified a number of improvements in engineering provision since the last inspection.**

#### Key strengths

- high standards of practical work
- good examination pass rates and retention rates on most courses
- wide range of courses at craft, technician and higher technician levels
- well-written, relevant learning materials
- well-maintained specialist accommodation and high-quality modern vehicles
- effective introduction of innovative courses

#### Weaknesses

- a significant minority of poorly planned and managed lessons
- poor attendance on many courses
- few staff appropriately qualified to conduct internal verification
- some crowded workshops and dated equipment

25 The college offers a range of courses at craft, technician and higher technician levels which provides good opportunities for progression. The department enjoys good relationships with local employers. It provides over 200 NVQ programmes on employers' premises, most of them at levels 1 and 2. Following the demise of some courses due to lack of demand, the college has introduced some innovative courses which are proving attractive

to adult students returning to study. Recently introduced specialist courses in personal computer maintenance, repair and servicing of domestic appliances, classic car restoration and 'kit car' construction have recruited well.

26 Courses are generally well planned. Schemes of work are detailed and promote effective teaching, learning and assessment. There are, however, instances of poor planning and classroom management which adversely affect the quality of students' learning. In addition, ineffective timetabling on some courses results in lengthy sessions where students are taught by the same teacher, often in the same room or workshop. These shortcomings are not identified in the self-assessment report. Course reviews are carried out regularly, though the resulting action plans are of variable quality.

27 Much of the teaching is good. Inspectors rated 10 of the 17 lessons observed as good or outstanding. In a BTEC national certificate lesson, the teacher used a variety of learning methods which skilfully integrated theory with practical activities to provide an interesting and enjoyable experience for students. Many lessons are typified by purposeful learning activities in which students take responsibility for their own work, and make good progress. They use high-quality, well-written learning materials devised by the college. Inspection findings confirmed the college's assessment that students work safely and competently in practical lessons. Some achieve exceptionally high standards in their practical work. In a minority of lessons, insufficient checks are made on students' learning and students receive only limited feedback on their progress.

28 Over the past three years, examination pass rates for most engineering courses have been at or above national averages. Last year, pass rates on two-year courses in engineering and fabrication and welding and on one-year courses in electrical installation fell below national averages. Retention rates are good on

# Curriculum Areas

most courses, though, as identified in the self-assessment report, they are poor on full-time craft-based courses for adults. Attendance is poor on many courses. The average attendance for classes observed was 60 per cent. This weakness is not noted in the self-assessment report.

29 The college employs a number of associate lecturers on fractional contracts, to complement the specialist skills of full-time teachers. This has strengthened the section's ability to develop and deliver new courses. Few staff have assessor or verifier qualifications, and this adversely affects the validity of internal verification.

30 The college has made significant improvements to specialist engineering resources since the last inspection. Accommodation is of a high standard and is well maintained. Workshop areas are kept clean and tidy. Much of the equipment is good. The college is one of four national centres that provide road transport courses for a European car manufacturer and it uses high-quality modern vehicles in its workshops. The growth

of new courses has not been fully matched by improvements in accommodation and equipment, as the self-assessment report acknowledges. For example, in the computer-aided design suite and the mechanical engineering workshop, computer software and some of the machine tools are outdated. The growth in student numbers, mainly in the last two years, has resulted in crowding of workshops with isolated instances of students having to wait to use equipment.

## Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Professional and higher	Retention (%)	88	91	91
	Pass rate (%)	79	78	85
Advanced vocational (excluding NVQs)	Retention (%)	67	91	95
	Pass rate (%)	50	82	73
Intermediate vocational (excluding NVQs)	Retention (%)	67	85	100
	Pass rate (%)	75	82	83
NVQs	Retention (%)	+	100	92
	Pass rate (%)	+	79	86
Other vocational	Retention (%)	85	80	85
	Pass rate (%)	72	69	61

Source: college data  
+course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Business and Trade Union Studies

### *Grade 2*

**31 Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, though they identified additional weaknesses in teaching and learning.**

#### **Key strengths**

- wide and developing range of courses at all levels
- well-managed and relevant teaching
- good examination pass rates on many courses
- systematic assessment, tracking and verification of students' progress
- well-planned and rigorously evaluated courses
- flexible timetabling and arrangements for accreditation

#### **Weaknesses**

- little participation by students in a minority of lessons
- poor and declining retention rates on a number of courses
- poor standard of accommodation and general resources in outreach centres

32 The college provides a wide range of courses including business, administration, secretarial, management and professional subjects and a substantial and expanding programme of trade union studies. Courses range from pre-foundation to higher levels. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress on vocational courses. Flexible attendance arrangements enable a large number of adult students to follow NVQ administration and secretarial courses. A large number of students in several business areas benefit from a range of courses accredited by the Open College.

33 Courses are well planned. Staff are clear about policies and procedures and they work well together in teams to improve students' learning experiences. Schemes of work are comprehensive and inform lesson planning. Much of the teaching is well managed and provides a range of appropriate and stimulating learning experiences. Of the 20 lessons they observed, inspectors rated 14 as good or outstanding. During a well-structured lesson on health and safety, students on a trade union studies course used simulated work situations to develop technical skills and consolidate their learning. Assignments are well designed, use relevant business examples and provide students with experience of industry standards. There are numerous examples of well-presented and relevant learning materials. Students value the systematic assessment and monitoring of their work and the regular feedback they receive on their progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on NVQ level 1 courses experience appropriate learning activities and are well supported. In a minority of lessons, there were few activities designed to allow students to contribute and their understanding and progress were not checked. Many students spent much of their time in unfocused chatter. The self-assessment report does not identify any weaknesses in teaching and learning.

34 Students have well-presented and well-maintained portfolios, which demonstrate good development of key skills, including the use of a range of IT applications. Students on GCE A level courses showed poor oral presentation skills. Most students are positive, enthusiastic and clear about their progress and aspirations. Students on the course for trade union health and safety representatives show considerable interest in their course and value its relevance to their working situation. Many students completing their GNVQ advanced course in 1997 gained merit and distinction grades. A significant number of full-time students on GNVQ advanced and NVQ level 3 administration



# Curriculum Areas

courses are taking a GCE A level as an additional study. Retention rates are high on most adult courses in administration, as the self-assessment report recognises. Recent poor retention rates on GCE A level courses, and declining retention and pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course are not identified in the self-assessment report. The report does identify poor retention rates on some NVQ courses in 1996-97.

35 Standards of accommodation and learning resources are high. Teaching rooms are well equipped to support the range of teaching and learning strategies used. Students make good use of the learning centre and the range of support materials it contains. IT equipment and software is easily accessible and of a high standard. In the outreach centres used for trade union studies, some accommodation and general resources do not come up to the required standard.

## Examples of students' achievements in business and trade union studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	*	90	58
	Pass rate (%)	53	51	78
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	89	89	85
	Pass rate (%)	87	94	67
NVQ level 3	Retention (%)	80	90	68
	Pass rate (%)	70	56	84
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	+	100	73
	Pass rate (%)	+	82	50
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	86	88	78
	Pass rate (%)	50	64	77
Other vocational	Retention (%)	93	86	85
	Pass rate (%)	94	92	88

Source: college data

\*data not available

+course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Sport, Leisure and Tourism

### Grade 2

**36 Though inspectors agreed with all of the judgements in the self-assessment report, they found it to be insufficiently detailed. It focuses generally on achievement rates, and makes little reference to the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning, disregarding much useful evidence from a large number of lesson observations.**

#### Key strengths

- well-planned courses and purposeful lessons
- good opportunities for the acquisition and application of key skills
- well-presented and carefully researched students' work
- good pass rates on GNVQ foundation courses
- the recent and relevant industrial experience of teachers
- the high quality of the realistic working environment provided for travel students
- a well-equipped resource centre

#### Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many GNVQ courses
- poor pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses
- inadequate sports facilities on the college campus

**37 The school of sport, leisure and tourism offers full-time vocational courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced level and a growing programme of part-time leisure courses for adults. As the self-assessment report recognises, full-time students follow supplementary courses to enhance their**

employment prospects. These include sports coaching and leadership awards, Spanish, Association of British Travel Agents certificate qualifications and NVQs in travel. Productive relationships with employers further enrich the curriculum.

**38 The curriculum is well managed. Teachers are well qualified and most have recent and relevant industrial experience. They work as a close-knit team. New teachers speak appreciatively of the support and training that they receive. These strengths are not included in the self-assessment report. Teams carry out effective course evaluation which draws on analysis of performance indicators and the views of students. Outcomes inform the curriculum school's operational plans.**

**39 Of the 11 lessons they observed, inspectors judged seven to be good or outstanding. Lessons are generally well structured, though not all plans specify clearly enough what students are expected to have learned by the end of the lesson or unit of work. Some innovative approaches are used successfully to involve students and maintain their interest. In a lesson on finance and budgeting, the teacher used an enjoyable and carefully prepared 'university challenge' quiz to revise and test knowledge. The questions were demanding and required teams to think quickly. Students are encouraged to contribute their own knowledge to lessons. In a lesson on governing bodies in sports, a student was able to provide valuable information on rugby league arrangements. Opportunities for students to develop key skills are frequently incorporated into coursework and class work. Teachers give careful consideration to the resources they need for each lesson and make competent and confident use of a wide range of teaching aids. Handouts and worksheets are relevant and well produced. Occasionally, dictation and copying from transparencies result in unproductive use of students' time.**

# Curriculum Areas

40 Students' skills of oral communication and use of IT are well developed. Most students produce good assignments; the best show considerable originality. Not all teachers provide sufficient feedback on assignments and other written exercises. In a few cases, written work is marked superficially, and grammatical and spelling errors are not corrected. The school's underdeveloped internal verification system is being strengthened in an attempt to address these problems. These weaknesses are not identified in the self-assessment report. Though retention rates on the GNVQ foundation course are declining, pass rates remain very good. Full-time students on the GNVQ intermediate course achieve pass rates and retention rates well below college targets and national averages, as the self-assessment report acknowledges. The apprentice footballers who attend part time achieve better results. Retention rates on the GNVQ advanced course improved in 1997, though pass rates have fallen. Most leisure and tourism students progress to employment or remain in further education at the end of their course. A small number go on to higher education.

41 Specialist resources have improved considerably since the last inspection and are generally good. The college's new travel shop, opened in the summer of 1997, provides students with work experience and assessment opportunities. It is recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. The former travel shop has been converted into a well-used and excellently equipped resource centre. The general classrooms are noisy and poorly furnished. Students who study sport as part of their programme have the use of an artificial pitch and grassed sports fields. There is no sports hall and no gymnasium.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	+	54	78
	Pass rate (%)	+	100	61
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	83	71	52
	Pass rate (%)	54	67	27
GNVQ intermediate (footballers modern apprenticeship)	Retention (%)	88	80	63
	Pass rate (%)	100	100	80
NVQ level 2 travel services	Retention (%)	85	93	90
	Pass rate (%)	65	50	78
GNVQ foundation	Retention (%)	91	72	70
	Pass rate (%)	80	78	86

Source: college data  
+course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Health, Social and Childcare

### Grade 2

**42 Inspectors found the self-assessment report to be comprehensive and accurate in its judgements. They identified a few strengths and weaknesses not included in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- good-quality teaching
- well-managed and productive work experience placements
- good pass rates on NVQ level 2 and GNVQ foundation courses
- a broad range of courses
- effective systems for supporting and monitoring students' progress
- good development and tracking of key skills on GNVQ courses

#### Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on most courses
- poor pass rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses

**43** The standard of teaching is high. Inspectors judged 12 of the 15 lessons they observed as good or outstanding. A broad range of teaching and learning activities maintains students' interest and extends their knowledge, understanding and vocational skills. Lessons are well planned, though learning objectives are not always shared with students. Learning activities make use of students' experiences in work placements to help them develop vocational competencies. As the self-assessment report recognises, work experience is well managed and makes an important contribution to students' learning. In addition, teachers regularly use examples from their own vocational experience. In a childhood studies lesson relating to the national curriculum key stage 1, the teacher gave clear examples of her

work in an infants school to help students understand the effects of the national curriculum on children's learning. Students on an NVQ level 2 care course benefited from the vocational experience of the tutor in learning how to assess and plan care. They worked on case histories and were interested and involved throughout. Towards the end of the lesson, students demonstrated clear understanding of how to develop care plans. Students meet regularly with their tutors to review and record their progress and to plan for improvement. GNVQ students have frequent opportunities to develop and track key skills, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Students on a GNVQ advanced course carried out a number of activities to extend their skills in application of number. They built on previous learning and enjoyed their success in completing the tasks.

**44** Students work well independently and in small groups. They make lively and confident contributions to lesson activities. Those on NVQ courses organise their portfolios systematically and produce work of a good standard. While students on GNVQ health and social care courses have good opportunities to develop key skills, this is not the case for students on social and childcare courses. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There have been significant improvements in pass rates on NVQ courses. On other courses, the quality of students' achievements varies. Pass rates on the national diploma in childhood studies are consistently above national averages, though those on the national diploma in health studies declined from 100 per cent in 1995 to 50 per cent in 1997. Pass rates on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing and the certificate in childcare declined from 89 and 91 per cent in 1995 to 68 and 56 per cent in 1997, respectively. Pass rates on the GNVQ foundation course have improved recently but those on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses have steadily declined. Students on Open College

# Curriculum Areas

courses achieve well. Retention rates are good on the national diploma in childhood studies but have declined to a poor level on most other courses. Although poor retention rates are identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, there are no specific plans to improve them.

45 The good range of courses enables students to progress from foundation to higher levels. Liaison with employers is extensive. Courses are well planned. Work placements are particularly well co-ordinated and monitored. Teachers are well qualified. Recently, four have taken up work placements to update their industrial experience. There is appropriate specialist equipment, although some rooms are too small for practical work, hindering learning. Classrooms are generally well equipped. Some contain displays of high-quality work by students which increase their suitability as learning environments for health, social and childcare students, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Students speak

highly of the learning centre and of the help they receive from the centre staff. Many use the library, which is welcoming and has well-arranged study areas. There is a good selection of specialist books, though some are out of date.

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	+	65	69
	Pass rate (%)	+	59	50
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	60	75	70
	Pass rate (%)	56	50	43
NVQ level 2	Retention (%)	89	85	74
	Pass rate (%)	13	82	100
GNVQ foundation	Retention (%)	65	80	77
	Pass rate (%)	36	25	90
Other vocational	Retention (%)	78	83	80
	Pass rate (%)	82	70	71
Access to further education	Retention (%)	+	100	85
	Pass rate (%)	+	78	48

Source: college data  
+course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Art, Design and Expressive Arts

### Grade 2

**46 Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the self-assessment report but additionally identified a number of significant weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of well-planned courses
- high standard of teaching
- high quality of project and production work
- good examination pass rates on courses at advanced level
- effective use of IT facilities in class and coursework

#### Weaknesses

- poor examination pass rates on courses at intermediate levels
- poor retention rates on many courses
- poor accommodation and facilities for a minority of courses

47 There is a wide range of academic and vocational courses in art, media, music and the performing arts, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Strong, productive links with local groups and employers ensure that students on vocational courses undertake projects that are relevant to industry and the community. The inspection findings confirmed the college's assessment that students have a good range of opportunities to participate in relevant local, national and international events.

48 The quality of teaching is high. Of 22 lessons observed by inspectors, 21 were judged to be good or outstanding. Lesson objectives are shared with students. Students experience a variety of appropriate techniques. In an

advanced level art lesson, students studied a painting by Cézanne and were led by skilful questioning to conclusions about the 'visual language' and construction of the painting. A well-planned lesson enabled a group of adult students to use graphic design software as part of assignment work. Most teachers encourage independent or group work for which they prepare their students well. As identified in the self-assessment report, assessment briefs are clear and informative and staff provide detailed feedback to students. In a minority of lessons, the pace of learning was inappropriate for many students and they were not encouraged to work independently at their own pace.

49 In most courses, students work well together and the quality of their project and production work is good. Examination pass rates on advanced level courses are mostly at or above national averages. Many of the students who successfully complete advanced level courses progress to higher education. All students who completed the GNVQ advanced course in 1996 and 1997 achieved the qualification. Although examination pass rates on the GCE A level art course improved from 25 per cent in 1996 to 100 per cent in 1997, the number of students completing the course fell from 100 per cent in 1996 to 14 per cent in 1997. Pass rates improved on most other GCE A level courses in 1997 and were at or above national averages, with the exception of GCE A level dance which fell to 67 per cent, significantly below the national average of 84 per cent.

50 Retention rates on advanced level courses are declining. In 1997, those on GCE A level dance and media courses were 30 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively. Retention rates on the GNVQ advanced course fell from 88 per cent in 1996 to 65 per cent in 1997. Retention rates on national diploma courses were all 50 per cent or below in 1997, with the exception of the national diploma in interior design at 59 per cent. Retention is better on intermediate

# Curriculum Areas

courses but examination pass rates on these courses are often poor. The number of students completing the GNVQ intermediate course rose from 70 per cent in 1996 to 79 per cent in 1997. Pass rates on this course fell from 57 per cent in 1996, significantly below the national average of 75 per cent, to 7 per cent in 1997. Only 19 per cent of students completing the certificate in creative studies gained the award. None of these weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report.

51 Students have ready access to IT at the main campus and the Park School annexe, where IT facilities are good. On both sites, support staff are available to give individual help to students working on practical projects. Specialist equipment and accommodation are generally of a good standard, as noted in the self-assessment report. At the Park School annexe, there is no workshop facility for three-dimensional work in wood, metal and plastics. Rehearsal space is limited at the main campus. These weaknesses were not noted in the self-assessment report. All teachers are well qualified and have relevant industrial and performance experience. About half of all staff in the school of expressive arts have computer skills varying from basic to specialist levels.

## Examples of students' achievements in art, design and expressive arts, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced academic	Retention (%)	59	91	50
	Pass rate (%)	93	67	89
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	74	78	57
	Pass rate (%)	93	98	97
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	74	71	75
	Pass rate (%)	39	31	60

Source: college data

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### *Grade 2*

**52 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses. They considered that substantial improvements had been made to this provision since the last inspection, particularly in learning support, enrolment and induction procedures, careers guidance and accommodation.**

#### **Key strengths**

- systematic and flexible enrolment procedures
- well-structured and informative induction arrangements
- strong personal and welfare support for students
- extensive provision of additional learning support
- well-established and effective careers guidance

#### **Weaknesses**

- inconsistent tutorial support
- inadequate systems for recording progress of students receiving learning support
- lack of support in learning centres for students on foundation level courses

53 Support for students is delivered by three college sections, working well together. The student liaison section has responsibility for recruiting and enrolling 16 to 19 year-old students through its school liaison teams. In addition, it manages course changes for existing students and offers interviews on opportunities for progression. The adult and community section has responsibility for providing advice and guidance to prospective students over the age of 19 and for managing the college's

childcare facilities. The student services section provides welfare and financial advice, personal counselling, careers advice and guidance and information about higher education institutions. Recent restructuring has resulted in improved co-ordination of these services and stronger links with curriculum sections. Previous duplication of functions has largely been addressed.

54 Students benefit from a wide range of guidance and welfare support services, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. An advice centre is located at the entrance to the college's main campus. It is easily accessible to both potential and existing students and is used extensively. Nurseries on two campuses provide 90 places and are open throughout the day and during holiday periods. There is a waiting list, largely for children of part-time students. Welfare and financial advice are available from a team which includes qualified counsellors. Well-established and effective careers guidance arrangements are being strengthened. The college has recently established a team to give a sharper focus to advice, guidance and support functions. This team is aware of the need to address retention issues, though strategies have not yet been developed.

55 As the self-assessment report identifies, the school liaison team has established good relationships with over 50 schools through attendance at advice and parents evenings and organisation of 'taster days' for each school. Recruitment of school-leavers increased by 11 per cent in 1996-97. School-leavers who apply to the college are given a general interview, during which additional support needs are identified. Adults enrol at the advice centres or at local libraries. Induction for full-time students is structured and informative. The process is spread over six weeks to allow students to transfer to more appropriate courses, if necessary. The learning centres provide well-designed activity-based packs



# Cross-college Provision

which have proved effective in introducing students to their facilities, a strength not mentioned in the self-assessment report. Screening has been introduced for all full-time students aged 16 to 19 years. This year, of the 33 per cent of these students identified as needing learning support, 72 per cent have taken up the support offered. A form of screening is carried out for full-time adult students by their tutors, with the assistance of the learning support team. This process has not been standardised and relies upon the judgements of individual tutors to decide whether referral is made. As the college assessment notes, the induction programme for part-time students does not include screening and varies in quality between courses.

56 Learning support is well organised and appropriate. The team of 57 staff deals with a range of needs. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that this provision is effective and provides an appropriate range of support activities for students on all types of courses. Increasing use of in-class support provides opportunities for informal training of other staff. Recording of students' progress in learning support and flexible learning provision is hindered by documents which record work undertaken, rather than progress made, and do not encourage students to monitor their own progress. Learning centres help students with their work by providing study skills and curriculum-based packs for them to work through. Students on foundation courses who find the written materials difficult to use are unable to benefit from this help.

57 The quality of tutorials is not consistently good, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. All full-time students have a personal tutor and timetabled weekly tutorials. There are mandatory topics for tutorials, covering systematic review of work, completion of records of achievement, and careers guidance. There are instances of excellent tutorial work in these areas. In addition, there are optional

topics, with supporting materials, on personal development and social issues. Coverage of these varies in quantity and quality. Monitoring of tutorial provision is not systematic.

## General Resources

### *Grade 2*

**58 Inspectors concluded that the self-assessment report accurately identifies strengths and deals openly with weaknesses, including some relatively minor ones. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the report.**

#### Key strengths

- accommodation strategy that is linked to curriculum needs
- welcoming, well-landscaped main campus
- specialist areas refurbished and equipped to a high standard
- realistic plan for maintenance of buildings and replacement of equipment
- good, networked IT equipment
- well-equipped and well-used learning centres

#### Weaknesses

- some poorly decorated accommodation, particularly in annexes
- library in need of refurbishment and improvement to some stock
- poor signposting and confusing room numbering

59 The accommodation strategy has clear links to the strategic plan and to curriculum needs. The college has a maintenance and investment plan to improve standards in all buildings which it intends to retain. As identified in the self-assessment report, the college is in the top 25 per cent of sector colleges for efficient use of space. The college

# Cross-college Provision

currently owns six centres in Preston, two of which have been cleared for disposal, and it leases or rents a further 21 outreach centres in other towns. The welcoming and well-landscaped main campus at St Vincent's Road has nine major buildings. There is also an artificial all-weather sports pitch and a large outdoor amphitheatre built as a training project from reclaimed local stone. There are four playing fields at some distance from the college. Indoor sports provision is dependent on arrangements with other organisations.

60 The self-assessment report recognises that, since the last inspection, the college has carried out major refurbishments of accommodation to a high standard in a number of areas. At the main campus, these comprise a new entrance and reception area, enhanced accommodation for student services, new science laboratories, modification of the technology block, a new travel shop and five learning centres. The car park has been extended and improved. At the Park School annexe, new dance studios, recording and broadcasting studios and a combined library and flexible learning centre have been built. The other two town centre annexes are mainly in good decorative order, though some accommodation is poorly maintained. At the main campus, signposting is unsatisfactory and some room numbering ambiguous. Leased outreach accommodation is of poor quality. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, access for wheelchair users to some parts of the annexes is difficult. Although the new car parking facilities have resolved most access difficulties at the main campus, a few key areas such as parts of the library are inaccessible. Proposals for the next phase of building include a lift to resolve this difficulty.

61 A significant strength of college provision, noted in the self-assessment report, is the six flexible learning centres, which together provide some 470 study places. There is one large centre, and five smaller ones conveniently

located to provide for art, design and performing arts; IT; languages; sport, leisure and tourism; and technology. A range of learning materials and computer-based equipment is available in the centres. Centre facilitators liaise with staff from subject areas to determine which curriculum aspects the facilitators will deliver. Though considerable progress has been made by staff in most curriculum areas in devising appropriate learning materials and liaising with the centres, others have been slow to use the centres as an integral part of their curriculum delivery.

62 The self-assessment report acknowledges that the library requires refurbishment. Its computers are some of the oldest networked machines in college. Recent staff and student surveys indicate that the bookstock is inadequate in some curriculum sections. However, the library provides a wide range of services which are highly regarded by staff and students. These include on-line information, loans of books and some professional journals, a variety of working environments, including quiet study places, and catalogues of the resources available in the learning centres. The library and the learning centres work co-operatively to the benefit of students.

63 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the college has invested extensively in IT equipment and software since the last inspection. Currently the college has over 1,000 computer workstations. Of these, three-quarters are available for use by students, and over half are networked. A ratio of three full-time equivalent students to each workstation is achieved in some specialist areas. Sensibly, these computers as well as those in learning centres can be used by students from all disciplines. The major sites in Preston are, or are about to be, linked to the college network for academic as well as administrative work. Workstations are provided for some of the outreach centres, but they are not linked to the network.

# Cross-college Provision

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 2

**64 Inspectors found that the college has made significant improvements in the effectiveness and consistency of quality assurance procedures since the last inspection. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.**

#### Key strengths

- comprehensive and well-managed arrangements for quality assurance
- methodical and effective internal inspections
- involvement of all staff in the self-assessment process
- systematic and well-supported staff training and development arrangements
- effective complaints procedure

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient use of performance indicators and targets in planning for improvement
- course evaluation and action-planning of variable quality
- inadequate emphasis on retention issues in action plans

65 There is clear commitment to continuous improvement at all levels of the college. Strong leadership is provided by senior managers who actively promote and monitor quality assurance throughout the institution. Whole-college and course team planning is informed by the outcomes of the quality assurance processes. There is evidence of improvements in the quality of the students' experience at the college as a direct consequence of review and action-planning. The quality assurance system covers all curriculum areas and support services. It has been matched against the characteristics of effectiveness indicated in the FEFC's good

practice report on quality assurance and refinements have been made. All teams work to standard procedures for monitoring and reporting. The best team reviews compare their performance against national benchmarks and result in detailed and thoughtful action plans. In a minority of curriculum areas, reviews are incomplete and lack evaluation. Some action plans are cursory and pay little attention to teaching and learning issues, though there is evidence in minutes of meetings that these are discussed. Performance indicators are not used routinely to aid planning. Students' achievements and retention rates are monitored by curriculum teams and senior managers, but there is little evidence in action plans of strategies to maintain or improve them, a weakness included in the self-assessment report. In response, the board of studies is currently setting retention targets in order to monitor performance in a more focused way.

66 A quality review team made up of both teaching and support staff has carried out internal inspections of most of the college's work and has made a substantial contribution to the self-assessment process. It reports formally to the corporation. The team reviews the extent to which staff comply with quality assurance procedures. Weaknesses identified are followed up by line managers. As part of its activity, the team observes staff at work, using an agreed framework for its assessment. Lesson observations yield thoughtful and detailed reports and have encouraged staff to reflect critically on their teaching. The percentage of lesson observations made by inspectors that were rated as good or outstanding has increased from 67 per cent to 75 per cent since the first inspection.

67 Senior managers demonstrate a strong commitment to staff appraisal and training. The principal sets targets for appraisal and monitors them through his termly meetings with heads of department and heads of function. Appraisals are carried out by line managers.

# Cross-college Provision

Recent restructuring has disrupted appraisal for some staff. The appraisal process places emphasis on development and training. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the process does not contain a rigorous performance review element and there are plans to rectify this. The college achieved the Investor in People award in 1995. Staff training and development arrangements in the college are systematically organised and well managed. Training priorities are identified against strategic objectives. All staff have equal access to training opportunities, which are widely publicised. Training and development is a regular agenda item at weekly team meetings. Frequent optional workshops on matters of general interest are well attended. Training events are evaluated by individuals and managers, and detailed records are kept. The college induction programme for new staff is carefully designed and delivered by senior managers, including the principal. More localised inductions into departments or functional teams vary in their quality and usefulness. There is no formalised mentoring scheme.

68 College charters for students, parents and employers set out their entitlements and responsibilities clearly. Students' views are collected systematically by both curriculum and support teams and are used in planning. Student representatives participate in review meetings and their contributions have been effective in promoting improvements. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the college has had little success in obtaining feedback from parents or employers. The college's complaints procedure is widely advertised and easy to use. Complaints are dealt with efficiently and action taken where appropriate. Monitoring of complaints is methodical and the board of governors receives a quarterly report.

69 Procedures for self-assessment are based on the college's quality assurance system and are linked clearly to strategic planning. The self-assessment report drew on strengths and

weaknesses identified in self-assessments carried out by all teams, including the corporation. The report was discussed at meetings of the academic board, the senior management group and the corporation. Some elements of the report were validated by external advisers and the internal quality review team. Evidence supporting the judgements was clearly referenced and action plans which addressed weaknesses were included.

## Governance

### *Grade 3*

**70 Governors played an active role in assessing their performance before inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, though they found additional key strengths and weaknesses. The board has developed an action plan for improvement. However, at the time of the inspection, only limited progress had been made to implement the action plan.**

#### Key strengths

- effective financial monitoring by the finance and general purposes committee
- comprehensive 'whistleblowing' policy and code of ethics for governors
- active monitoring of equal opportunities, health and safety, and students' complaints

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient financial information considered by the corporation
- inadequate monitoring of progress towards implementing the strategic plan
- poor attendance at training events for governors

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance

# Cross-college Provision

with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

72 The corporation has a membership of 20, comprising one student and two staff representatives, one TEC nominee, one community, five co-opted and nine independent governors, as well as the principal. There are two vacancies for co-opted governors. Governors have expertise in education, construction, personnel, business and banking. They have not formally undertaken a skills audit to identify any gaps in expertise. The self-assessment report states that attendance at corporation meetings is good. Inspectors were unable to confirm this, finding that the overall level of attendance at corporation meetings was adversely affected by the poor attendance of some individual governors. The corporation has started to address this issue. As identified in the self-assessment report, some governors have insufficient knowledge of the workings of the college or the sector. The college has provided training opportunities for governors, but many of these events have been poorly attended. Induction procedures have recently been improved and newly appointed governors found these helpful.

73 Governors and college managers understand their respective roles and this has contributed to positive and constructive working. As the self-assessment report states, the corporation conducts its business openly. Corporation and committee agendas, papers and minutes are publicly available, as is the register of interests. There is a code of practice on 'whistleblowing' and a particularly comprehensive code of ethics which reflect the principles in the Nolan report. Clerking arrangements for the corporation and committees are, on the whole, efficient and effective. Meeting agendas and papers are well presented and minutes are prepared and distributed promptly. There are no standing orders.

74 Governors consider and formally approve the strategic plan. They receive termly reports from the principal which review progress towards the achievement of the objectives contained in the plan. The progress reports, however, concentrate on the percentage of targets met rather than on whether the key strategic objectives have been achieved. The format of the progress reports does not match that of the annual operating plan, which makes it harder for governors to monitor systematically the achievement of specific objectives. Although examination pass rates are scrutinised, retention rates receive insufficient attention. These weaknesses are not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Governors have not yet established any performance indicators by which to measure their own performance.

75 Until recently, the corporation operated a two-tier committee structure to enable it to discharge its responsibilities. There were five committees which met frequently and four other committees which met as required. In general, the committees operated effectively and satisfied their terms of reference. The finance and general purposes committee was responsible for the detailed monitoring of the college's financial position and discharged this responsibility by meeting each month to consider the college's management accounts and key financial indicators. The audit committee developed an effective mechanism for monitoring the implementation of internal audit recommendations. However, its most important meeting during 1997, at which a number of significant reporting and planning issues were due for consideration, was inquorate. Recently, the corporation has reviewed its committee structure. In order to eliminate overlap between committee functions and improve the efficiency of the conduct of corporation business, it has amalgamated four of the existing committees into a single policy and resources committee and formed a new strategic group. The audit committee was not affected by this change. The new committees have yet to meet and terms of

# Cross-college Provision

reference have not been agreed. The proposed inclusion of a staff member on the new policy and resources committee does not comply with the articles of government.

76 Although the corporation received the minutes of the finance and general purposes committee's meetings, it only considered the college's management accounts on one occasion during 1997-98. This weakness has been recognised and is being addressed. The corporation has monitored non-financial matters assiduously. Governors pay close attention to monitoring equal opportunities, health and safety matters and students' complaints. The equal opportunities committee, which existed until the recent reorganisation, has provided an effective forum for governors and managers to develop the college's student, parent and employer charters and a policy on harassment and bullying.

## Management

### *Grade 2*

**77 Inspectors found that the college has made substantial improvements in this area since the last inspection. They considered the college's self-assessment was honest and objective, and they generally agreed with its judgements.**

#### **Key strengths**

- open and collaborative style of management
- effective management structure
- strong systems for strategic and operational planning and monitoring
- extensive links with community groups and external bodies
- positive promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities issues
- comprehensive and well-presented management accounts

#### **Weaknesses**

- shortcomings in the computerised management information system
- marketing strategy not fully implemented
- poor monitoring of student retention and no strategy for improvement
- corporation not always informed of the financial consequences of some significant management proposals

78 The college management structure has been revised to ensure that all managers can contribute to decisions which affect them. A reduction in the number of departments and committees has improved the co-ordination of cross-college functions. Staff appreciate the collaborative management style which encourages them to contribute to decision-making. They can do so both through their regular team meetings and through their representatives on the college academic board. In response to a review carried out last year, the college has taken measures to improve communication systems. Staff recognise that cross-college communications have improved as a consequence. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, further refinements are needed to ensure that communications remain fully effective.

79 The strategic planning process is well managed and involves staff at all levels. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that an effective monitoring system enables managers to identify progress towards strategic objectives. Targets and timescales are identified in work plans which form the basis for regular progress reviews. The level of detail in the work plans does not help managers to differentiate between key tasks and more routine aspects. The college has recognised the need to make more use of benchmarks and to incorporate qualitative judgements in the review of the work plans. Student retention data are gathered at

# Cross-college Provision

departmental level but are not monitored effectively at cross-college level. The college has not developed any strategies to address the poor retention rates on many college courses.

80 The self-assessment report recognises that lack of progress in developing aspects of the college information system is a significant weakness. Managers at all levels can request a range of reports from the management information system but not all have direct access to the database. There is no agreed calendar of reports to underpin operational planning and review. Software limitations have restricted the development of computerised systems to support human resource management, marketing and room allocation. Since the self-assessment report was written, a head of information systems has been appointed at a senior level. Though the college marketing unit makes good use of research data in promotional activities, it pays insufficient attention to co-ordinating its activities with the marketing activities in curriculum departments.

81 The college attaches a high priority to equal opportunities. Specialist staff provide personal and academic support for students from minority ethnic groups; other staff have had awareness training on differing cultures; curriculum managers check for bias in learning materials; the student charter is available in large print, in Braille and on tape; and staff appointment procedures are monitored against equal opportunities criteria. As the self-assessment report states, the college has close and productive working relations with a range of external bodies, including the local TEC. The college manages the Preston Skills Partnership, which includes representatives from the health service, the local authority and the TEC. Through its business training group, the college provides a broad range of training for local firms and its international unit is engaged in extending links overseas.

82 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The finance team is appropriately qualified and experienced. There is an appropriate scheme of financial delegation and an effective system for reviewing financial performance. Management accounts are prepared promptly each month to a high standard. Managers closely monitor the college's overall financial position by formally reviewing management accounts, and they have taken action to control the college's budget. At one of the corporation's recent meetings, two governors expressed concern that they were asked to approve a significant management proposal without knowledge of the associated financial implications. The college has a low average level of funding and in recent years has not consistently generated operating surpluses. Consequently, the college is particularly vulnerable to deviations from budget. The college has sound financial controls in place as demonstrated by the report of the internal and external auditors.

## Conclusions

83 Inspectors found that the college self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Though some curriculum sections in the report gave insufficient attention to teaching and learning and many did not report retention and attendance rates, there was broad agreement between the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and inspectors' overall judgements. Many weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspection findings confirmed all the grades awarded by the college.

84 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)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	2
16-18 years	9
19-24 years	13
25+ years	74
Not known	2
Total	100

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Foundation	62
Intermediate	16
Advanced	14
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	6
Total	100

*Source: college data*

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	533	5,846	19
Agriculture	0	4	0
Construction	526	822	4
Engineering	440	1,068	5
Business	267	13,962	43
Hotel and catering	239	546	2
Health and community care	776	2,521	10
Art and design	440	320	2
Humanities	490	3,623	12
Basic education	94	779	3
Total	3,805	29,491	100

*Source: college data*

## Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	258	135	0	393
Supporting direct learning contact	203	43	0	246
Other support	27	14	12	53
Total	488	192	12	692

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



# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£16,012,000	£16,262,000	£18,926,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£14.30	£14.49	£15.22*
Payroll as a proportion of income	70%	75%	68%
Achievement of funding target	95%	91%	106%
Diversity of income	27%	26%	24%
Operating surplus	£91,000	-£595,000	£216,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

\*not yet formalised

### Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	294	247	206
	Average point score per entry	4.7	4.8	5.1
	Position in tables	top third	top third	top third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	200	242	247
	Percentage achieving qualification	92%	90%	86%
	Position in tables	top third	top 10%	top third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	95	42
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	73%	76%
	Position in tables	*	top third	top third

Source: DfEE

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

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

\*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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