

Runshaw College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) 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 inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate 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.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

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

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Runshaw College

North West Region

Inspected January 2001

Runshaw College is a large tertiary college in Lancashire. It recruits most of its students from the boroughs of South Ribble and Chorley. The self-assessment process is well established at the college and is carried out rigorously. The self-assessment report draws on a comprehensive range of evidence, including the findings from lesson observations. It contains detailed action plans to address weaknesses. Many of these weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection. All staff were involved in the production of the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements and grades in the report.

The college offers courses in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. The inspection covered provision in five of these together with aspects of cross-college provision. Since the last inspection, the college has made substantial improvements to its accommodation and diversified its curriculum to meet the needs of more adult students. Accommodation and resources for teaching and learning are now outstanding. Teaching continues to be

particularly good. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding is 12% above the national average. Student achievement rates are high on most courses. Attendance rates are above the national average. The quality of provision in science, mathematics and computing, and the social sciences is outstanding. There are excellent and well co-ordinated systems for supporting learners. These systems ensure that individual students have their needs identified, are set demanding goals and that their progress towards reaching these is monitored carefully. Quality assurance is outstanding. All staff are strongly committed to improving the quality of provision. Governors work closely with managers to determine the direction of the college and monitor its performance. Managers provide strong leadership, set high standards and ensure that effective planning improves the experience of students. The college should: improve retention rates on some courses for adults; implement fully its strategy for basic skills; continue to develop links between 16 to 19 and adult teaching teams; ensure that managers have access to accurate data; and improve some aspects of governance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	1	Support for students	1
Mathematics and computing	1	General resources	1
Leisure and tourism	2	Quality assurance	1
Health, social care and childcare	2	Governance	2
English and modern languages	2	Management	1
Psychology, sociology and history	1		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Runshaw College is situated in Leyland. It recruits predominantly from the districts of South Ribble and Chorley though it also attracts students from a wide area of central Lancashire. It was established as a sixth form college with 350 students in 1974. In 1983, it was reorganised as a tertiary college. It amalgamated with Leyland Motors Technical College and took over responsibility from the local education authority (LEA) for adult education in the South Ribble and Chorley areas. The college's main campus is situated in Leyland and the Runshaw Business Centre is about a mile away. It also has a newly built adult community college in Chorley and provision in 43 outreach centres. In addition, it provides an education service to Garth and Wymott prisons.

2 The combined population of South Ribble and Chorley in 1991 was 195,000, projected to rise to over 200,000 by 2006. In October 2000, the unemployment rate in South Ribble was 2.0% and in Chorley it was 2.8%, compared with the regional rate of 3.9% and the national rate of 4.4%. However, there are pockets of deprivation in both boroughs where unemployment rates are higher. The strong industrial base of central Lancashire has undergone considerable change over the past decade. Employment in manufacturing has fallen. Over two-thirds of the labour force in central Lancashire are now engaged in service activities. In 1999, 66% of 16 year olds stayed on in education or entered training.

3 The college operates in an area with a large number of post-16 providers within a 15-mile radius. These include five sixth form colleges, five further education colleges, an 11 to 18 denominational school and several independent schools. In recent years, the college has attracted an increasing number of students and it has expanded and improved its accommodation and facilities. These have included new science laboratories, two teaching blocks and specialist

accommodation for languages, creative arts and information technology (IT). In 1999, the college opened a new, purpose-built community college for adult students in the centre of Chorley. This has specialist accommodation for beauty and hairdressing.

4 As far as possible, courses for each category of student take place in a specific location. For example, students aged 16 to 19 are based at Leyland where they are provided with a sixth form centre experience. Provision for adult students is available in Chorley, the Runshaw Business Centre or in outreach centres. Courses for employers take place in the business centre or the workplace. Currently, there are 3,200 full-time students aged 16 to 19, 900 full-time adult students and 12,000 part-time students. Students aged 16 to 19 follow courses at advanced, intermediate, foundation and entry levels. The full-time provision for adults includes access and higher education courses. Part-time students study a wide range of courses in the college's main campuses and outreach centres. The Runshaw Business Centre offers courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and business and professional qualifications. It also offers training for modern apprentices and commercial clients.

5 In its mission statement, the college states that it 'aims to be a nationally recognised leader in the provision of education and training ... with outstanding results, excellent facilities and a friendly, caring environment where the student always comes first'. It aims to treat each learner as an individual with a unique set of needs, who is to be enabled to fulfil his or her potential. The college has imaginative strategies for achieving its mission. These include the annual setting of a clear theme for curriculum development and the designation of 48 teachers to serve as mentors to their colleagues and help them improve the quality of teaching and learning. In collaboration with the University of Central Lancashire, the college has funded two research studentships. The holders of these

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will, respectively, investigate whether students of one gender perform better or differently from those of another gender, and explore factors affecting retention rates at the college.

6 The college has won Beacon Awards in business studies and biology. It won the Excellence North West quality award in 1996 and its Millennium Award in 2000.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 29 January 2001. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and information held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Initially, inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. Some of these data proved inaccurate, particularly in respect of student retention rates, and inspectors used data provided by the college to help them form their judgements. Such data are not included in this

report. In the light of these problems with ISR data, a table showing students' achievements is not included in this report. Inspectors checked the college's data on students' achievements for 2000 in advance of the inspection, using primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies, and found them to be generally reliable. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors working for 53 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspection team members scrutinised a wide range of documents and held meetings with college governors, managers, staff and students. They also consulted a number of representatives of local bodies.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons observed, 74% were judged to be good or outstanding and 3% were less than satisfactory. This proportion compares favourably with the national average for all colleges inspected of 62% and 6%, respectively. The proportion judged to be outstanding, at 29%, is considerably above the national average of 17%.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	16	9	3	0	0	28
GCSE	1	4	2	0	0	7
GNVQ	5	9	5	1	0	20
NVQ	1	2	3	0	0	6
Other vocational	5	16	9	2	0	32
Tutorials	1	5	1	0	0	7
Total (No.)	29	45	23	3	0	100
Total (%)	29	45	23	3	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report*

Note: percentages subject to rounding

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9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Runshaw College	13.7	86
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 1

10 Inspectors observed 12 lessons and a tutorial. The inspection covered general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) biology, chemistry, human biology and physics, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced science, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) science, GCSE human physiology and health and an access to higher education programme. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- effective and enthusiastic teaching
- careful, regular review of individual students' work and progress
- well-designed learning materials to meet individual students' needs
- good attendance and retention rates on courses for students aged 16 to 19 years
- excellent results on GCE A level courses and the GNVQ advanced programme
- success of students in progressing to science-related courses in higher education
- effective curriculum management
- thorough practical work in well-serviced laboratories

Weaknesses

- insufficient equipment for all the students in some larger classes

11 As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, much of the teaching is excellent. Teachers diagnose students' learning needs and frequently review the extent of students' acquisition of knowledge and skills. All teachers use a range of imaginative methods to excite the students' interest and strengthen and extend

students' knowledge. They carry out practical demonstrations skilfully and question the students frequently to ensure they understand key points. The students consolidate their learning by undertaking well-designed practical exercises and tackling demanding problems. In a GCE A level physics lesson, the teacher demonstrated the concept of internal resistance to the class. Students then worked in small groups to make their own practical measurements to verify the theoretical principles. Students then tested their understanding by attempting to solve a range of related problems on their own. In a biology lesson, students were given a written test on previous work and reviewed their answers with the teacher. The teacher then moved on promptly to introduce new material to the students. In another lesson, student activities included brief sessions of role-play and model making, that illustrated and consolidated students' understanding of biological processes that cannot be observed directly.

12 As the self-assessment report states, students are punctual, attend regularly and retention rates are good. The attendance rate in the classes inspected was 89%. The retention rate on GCSE science courses has been above the national average for the sector for the last two years. The retention rate on all four GCE A level and the GNVQ advanced science courses have been above the national average for the last three years. Retention rates on part-time courses for adults have been less good. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that students' achievements are excellent. The pass rate on the GNVQ advanced science course has been above the national average for the last three years. Over the same period, pass rates on all GCE A level courses have been above the national average, and the proportion of students obtaining grade C or above has been well above the national average. For the last three years, all students have passed the GCE A level human biology

Curriculum Areas

course and on the GCE A level physics course, the pass rate has been 97%. Most students obtain higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE grades. Students are successful in achieving places in higher education. In 2000, 92% of all GCE A level physics students progressed to higher education and 70% joined science-related programmes. Many GCE A level chemistry students progress to higher education and their destinations are prominently displayed in the laboratory to motivate other students to follow their example.

13 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the teams of science staff manage the curriculum well. New courses reflecting the requirements of curriculum 2000 have been introduced effectively. Students learn key skills as an integral part of their courses. Students benefit from visits to higher education institutions, industry and field study centres. They are encouraged to participate in scientific competitions such as the physics and biology Olympiads. Their performance is assessed regularly. Students are set target grades to

achieve in their GCE A level examinations. These are determined in the light of their GCSE grades. Students are offered additional work and support if their performance falls below expectations.

14 Science teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic about their subjects. Accommodation is well furnished and concentrated in one block. Within the science block there are effective displays of some excellent work by students, posters about progression routes for students and subject-specific information. Technicians support students' practical work in laboratories well. On some occasions when classes in the laboratories are large, there are not enough pieces of certain equipment to enable all students to work on their own or in pairs. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that learning materials, particularly in biology, are well designed. Materials developed by college teachers and used in the classroom are also available in the science students' study centre, college library and on the college intranet.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in science, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE science	2	Number of starters	40	66	59
		Retention (%)	70	88	83
		Achievement (%)	82	55	73
GNVQ advanced science	3	Number of starters	22	15	18
		Retention (%)	86	73	94
		Achievement (%)	94	100	88
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	102	134	124
		Retention (%)	87	85	94
		Achievement (%)	96	90	93
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	94	98	91
		Retention (%)	85	*	96
		Achievement (%)	93	91	89
GCE A level human biology	3	Number of starters	68	46	48
		Retention (%)	90	87	83
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	65	71	73
		Retention (%)	*	92	82
		Achievement (%)	100	97	97

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Computing

Grade 1

15 Inspectors mainly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- outstanding pass rates on many courses
- excellent retention rates on full-time IT courses
- wide range of IT and mathematics courses
- much effective teaching
- good range of accessible IT resources

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) level 2 IT courses

16 The college offers a wide range of mathematics and computing and IT courses to meet the needs of both full-time and part-time students. They include courses from entry level to higher national diploma. Students may work towards achieving parts of, or the full advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE). There is community-based provision in over 20 centres, including local libraries, at which students may study for IT awards up to the level of the British Computer Society's European Computer Driving Licence. A number of students combine the study of GCE A/AS level subjects with work towards the AVCE. For example, some GCE A level business students are also working towards the new single award AVCE in information and communications technology.

17 Courses are well organised. There are detailed schemes of work and plans for each lesson. All students are set homework regularly which involves them in a variety of projects. This work is carefully marked and students

receive constructive feedback. Extra help with mathematics and IT is readily available to those students who need it. Students agree a 'contract' with the trained staff of the study support unit, who give them help and monitor their performance. In addition to this support, the teaching staff also set aside time for students to attend extra sessions. These attract more able students as well as those who require extra support. The college assists students who wish to undertake periods of work experience.

18 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Most of the teaching of IT and mathematics is good or outstanding. Teachers clearly identify learning objectives and share these with the students. Classroom activities are appropriately varied and suitably matched to the needs of the students. In one GNVQ foundation lesson, students learnt to use a wordprocessing package by designing a ship on the screen and annotating their drawings with words. The teacher provided encouragement but also challenged the group to try new ideas and extend their knowledge of the package's capabilities. In an IT lesson, students worked together on ideas for a control system. They then used the Internet individually to search for suitable equipment before coming back to share their ideas. Mathematics students use IT for assignments outside the classroom. However, there is insufficient use of information and learning technology in the teaching of mathematics. In a few lessons, more able students were not given the opportunity to work at their own pace.

19 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, students' achievements on most courses are well above the national average for the sector. Over the past three years, achievement rates on advanced IT and computing courses have been close to 100%. Over 80% of GNVQ foundation and intermediate students also gain merits and distinctions and progress to the advanced courses. Over three-quarters of GCE A level students gain high

Curriculum Areas

grades. Around 75% of the students on advanced IT courses progress to higher education in degree subjects such as business and finance or computing. This progression route is strengthened by a compact with a local university. Retention rates of full-time IT courses are excellent. The retention rate on the C&G IT certificate courses has fallen over the last three years and is now below the national average. The college acknowledged this weakness in its self-assessment report.

20 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that there are good resources to help students undertake work in mathematics and IT on their own. Students are able to work by themselves using learning packages in purpose-built, learning workshops. Good use is made of self-study packages in purpose-built support workshops. Students

make good use of the library, IT, including good paper-based learning materials and other resources, to study outside timetabled lessons.

21 Within the mathematics section there are six full-time staff and five part-time staff, all of whom are well qualified in mathematics or other relevant disciplines. Five of the team also have experience of marking examination papers for an awarding body. Within the computing section, there are some staff who teach mainly the 16 to 18 year olds on full-time courses, and staff in a separately managed team teach adult part-time students. In total, there are 22 full-time staff, 23 part-time tutors and six IT facilitators, the latter being responsible for helping students in the IT workshops and learning centres. All computing staff are well qualified or suitably experienced.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics and computing, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G numeracy	1	Number of starters	172	190	176
		Retention (%)	89	84	86
		Achievement (%)	73	78	71
OCR computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	907	1,027	762
		Retention (%)	93	95	95
		Achievement (%)	92	82	88
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	447	426	430
		Retention (%)	83	81	81
		Achievement (%)	45	38	39
GNVQ intermediate information and communications technology	2	Number of starters	43	46	40
		Retention (%)	93	96	80
		Achievement (%)	75	86	96
C&G 7261 IT certificate	2	Number of starters	323	249	240
		Retention (%)	88	80	71
		Achievement (%)	96	52	65
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	*	*	188
		Retention (%)	*	*	74
		Achievement (%)	*	*	92
Advanced IT courses†	3	Number of starters	145	192	197
		Retention (%)	88	89	94
		Achievement (%)	98	97	99

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*data unreliable

†includes GCE A level computing, GCE A level IT and GNVQ advanced

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 13 lessons on NVQ sport and recreation, GNVQ intermediate and advanced leisure and tourism, AVCE leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism courses. They agreed with most of judgements in the self-assessment report but felt that two of the strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- students' high achievement rates on most courses
- good work experience placements
- wide range of enhancement activities
- good learning materials and study packs
- effective course management

Weaknesses

- some undemanding teaching
- insufficient differentiation of tasks in some lessons to suit learners' aptitudes

23 There is much good teaching. Of the 13 lessons observed by inspectors, eight were good or outstanding. Curriculum planning is detailed. Lesson plans and subject and unit outlines are carefully prepared. In a few instances, schemes of work were not sufficiently thorough. At the start of lessons, teachers share the learning objectives with the students. In the best lessons, teachers check students' understanding through careful questioning and discussion. The self-assessment report acknowledged, however, that in some lessons, the activities are insufficiently demanding and students lose interest. Teachers regularly set the students specific tasks to extend their knowledge and skills. In some lessons, teachers take account of students' preferred learning styles. In other lessons, however, the teachers do not ensure that the learning activities meet the needs, and suit the

abilities, of individual students. Students' assignment work is of a good standard. Assignment briefs are clear and show how the students can use and develop their key skills. Teachers provide students with written suggestions on how they can improve their work. Students make good use of the Internet for research. All tutors provide the students with details of websites which will give them information relevant to their NVQ units. There is reference to websites in handouts and course materials. Staff have good external links with employers and external organisations and through these, they are able to find relevant work experience opportunities for students on most courses. These include the FA Cup Final, Henley Regatta, international rugby matches at Twickenham, and the Open Golf Championship. In addition, opportunities are provided for students to gain additional qualifications such as cabin crew certificate, English Tourism Board Welcome Host Award, first aid, the Association of British Travel Agents Certificate.

24 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that student achievement rates on most courses are high. Achievement rates on courses at level 2 and level 3 have been well above the national average for the sector for the last three years. The number of students achieving high grades is significantly above the national average. In 1998-99, student achievement rates on leisure and tourism courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 exceeded the national average by 34%, 25% and 30%, respectively. The student achievement rate on the NVQ sport and recreation course at level 1 has been declining and is now below the national average. Inspectors did not agree with the finding in the self-assessment report that the retention rate is above the national average on all courses. In 1999-2000, the retention rates on GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism and NVQ sport and recreation courses were around the national average. On completing their studies, most students progress to employment,

Curriculum Areas

or to higher or further education. For example, of students on the GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism course, 49% progressed to higher education, and 35% went on to employment or training.

25 Leisure and tourism courses are well managed. Communication channels for staff are very clear. Annual self-assessment reviews are thorough and staff are fully involved in all aspects of the review process. Staff meet with the head of school several times a year to review their performance and progress towards reaching agreed targets. There are schedules for regular staff meetings at course, school and faculty level. Minutes of meetings are detailed. There is, however, no systematic procedure for checking that actions decided at meetings and specified in the self-assessment action plan, are carried out. Every month, all students receive a review of their progress towards meeting the examination grade predicted for them. Adult

students receive a review of their progress towards reaching individual milestones. Students' attendance is monitored closely. Unexplained absences are followed up promptly. Students are kept informed about their progress throughout their course. The parents of students aged 16 to 19 are also informed of their child's progress. Student focus groups meet several times a year with the head of school.

26 Teachers are appropriately qualified and have a range of vocational experience. Most have full-time posts at the college. The staff have produced some particularly good study packs which students can use on their own. Students use unit workbooks effectively on NVQ courses to extend their skills and knowledge. Classrooms are spacious and pleasant to learn and work in. Good use is made of the wall space to display students' work, photographs of trips, course and tutorial information.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in leisure and tourism, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ sport and recreation	1	Number of starters	11	23	16
		Retention (%)	91	78	81
		Achievement (%)	100	83	69
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	50	50	34
		Retention (%)	90	82	79
		Achievement (%)	100	90	96
Association of British Travel Agents Certificate primary	2	Number of starters	46	53	31
		Retention (%)	74	87	84
		Achievement (%)	68	72	85
NVQ sport and recreation	2	Number of starters	13	31	44
		Retention (%)	62	100	82
		Achievement (%)	100	84	86
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	Number of starters	79	51	54
		Retention (%)	87	71	72
		Achievement (%)	98	100	95

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Health, Social Care and Childcare

Grade 2

27 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that several strengths had been overstated. Of the two weaknesses identified by the college, one had been rectified by the time of inspection, but the other had not.

Key strengths

- high motivation and enthusiasm of full-time students
- much good teaching
- students' excellent achievement rates on most courses
- well-organised and well-managed full-time courses
- good range of specialist resources

Weaknesses

- students' low achievement rate on NVQ programmes

28 There is a good range of health and social care courses for students aged 16 to 19, and adult students. Currently, however, there is no early years provision at level 2 but the college intends to rectify this omission in September 2001. Full-time courses are well organised and well managed. Staff work effectively in their teams. Managers promote high standards and set students ambitious targets to achieve. The students are set grades to exceed in their final examinations and the monitoring of students' progress towards reaching these is an integral part of course management. Staff hold effective team meetings to identify ways of improving the curriculum.

29 The quality of teaching and learning is good, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Of the 18 lessons observed by

inspectors, 13 were good or outstanding. Lessons are well planned. The objectives of lessons are clearly communicated to students. Teachers use a variety of appropriate learning activities. A strong work ethic is evident in lessons and students work responsibly and with a sense of self-discipline. Students work with enthusiasm and are highly motivated. Good learning materials are used in lessons. In one lesson, students used realistic case study materials to identify and explain reasons for delayed child development. The exercise involved a critical appraisal of a range of emotional and social factors affecting child development. In the subsequent discussion, the tutor skilfully amplified the well-considered points that students made. In a few lessons, there is an over-reliance on handout materials. On some occasions, teachers miss the opportunity to address relevant equal opportunities issues. A good range of work experience opportunities are available to students on all full-time courses. Students' progress is monitored regularly and it is carefully assessed. Work experience is an effective and integral part of courses, particularly childcare courses. All full-time students receive training in first aid. Students broaden their experience through involvement in a variety of relevant community-based projects.

30 The self-assessment report acknowledges the excellence of the student achievement rates on many courses. All students on GNVQ level 2 and level 3 courses passed in two years of the past three years. The student achievement rate on the national diploma course in childhood studies has been high for the last three years. Many students on GNVQ courses achieve high grades and the proportions who do so are: GNVQ foundation, 55%; GNVQ intermediate, 68%; and GNVQ advanced, 90%. Statistics provided by the college showed that student achievement rates on the National Open College Network (NOCN) programmes are above the national average. Many students on GNVQ

Curriculum Areas

courses progress to further courses. In 1999, 70% of students on GNVQ advanced courses progressed to higher education. Many of the other GNVQ students progress to further courses in the college. For example, 82% of students on intermediate courses progressed to a GNVQ course at advanced level, and 76% of students on foundation courses progressed to a GNVQ course at intermediate level. Student retention and achievement rates on NVQ care courses over the past three years have been poor. College data show that of 447 students who were expected to complete the qualification between 1998 and 2000, only 118 did so. These data also show that retention rates on NVQ courses are below the national average. In 2000, retention rates on level 2 courses had risen slightly but still averaged only 46%. These poor retention rates were not recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Some

action had, however, been taken by the time of the inspection to improve the monitoring of learners' performance in the workplace and ensure that accurate data are compiled and used.

31 All staff are appropriately qualified and most have experience in early years education or health and social care. All full-time staff are teacher trained and have participated in in-house professional development activities or have attended external conferences relevant to their subject. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, accommodation contains appropriate equipment and is well maintained. Suitable specialist resources are available. There is a good range of textbooks and multiple copies of key learning materials in the library. There is an adequate number of computers for use by students, both in the library and in the suite of rooms where these courses take place.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health, social care and childcare, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ health and social care	1	Number of starters	39	28	21
		Retention (%)	79	82	86
		Achievement (%)	97	91	72
NVQ in care	2	Number of starters	*	*	188
		Retention (%)	*	*	46
		Achievement (%)	*	*	*
GNVQ health and social care	2	Number of starters	69	82	60
		Retention (%)	84	87	93
		Achievement (%)	100	84	100
GNVQ health and social care	3	Number of starters	89	67	75
		Retention (%)	85	88	88
		Achievement (%)	90	100	100
National diploma childhood studies	3	Number of starters	57	68	60
		Retention (%)	96	76	78
		Achievement (%)	98	98	100
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	20	27	18
		Retention (%)	100	74	72
		Achievement (%)	*	94	100

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

English and Modern Languages

Grade 2

32 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in GCE A level and GCSE English, and in Spanish, Italian, French and German at various levels. They mainly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. They identified one additional weakness.

Key strengths

- good use of the language being taught as the medium of instruction
- responsiveness of English and modern languages teachers to students' needs
- students' high retention and pass rates on the GCE A level English literature course
- students' good retention and achievement rates on GCE A level foreign language
- innovative use of the intranet in English

Weaknesses

- many students' poor results in GCSE English
- insufficient opportunity for adults to speak a foreign language in lessons
- retention rates below the national average on some language courses for adults

33 There is a wide range of provision in modern languages, which includes French, German, Spanish to GCE A level and Greek, Arabic, Portuguese and Italian. In English, key skills communication is offered at levels 2 and 3 in addition to GCSE and GCE A level language, GCE A level combined and GCE A level English literature. Enrolments on courses for adults in foreign languages and English are increasing. Adults can progress from beginners' courses to advanced level courses. Both curriculum areas are well managed and schemes of work are devised carefully.

34 As stated in the self-assessment report, English teachers structure lessons well and prepare them thoroughly. Most lessons were good or outstanding. Students are strongly encouraged to express their ideas with confidence. In a GCE A level English literature lesson, students came to the front of the classroom to explain whether they felt an adjective provided by the teacher was a good description of the character of Edmund in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Students justified their decision by reference to the text. Students enjoyed this exercise in character analysis and it was successful in encouraging quieter members of the group to speak. In a GCSE English class for adults, the students engaged in brainstorming on characteristics of detective fiction drawn from books and television programmes with which they were familiar. The teacher cleverly built up interest in the text being studied by re-telling other suspense stories she had read. Students in English are able to express well their ideas on literary themes.

35 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that it is a strength of GCE A level modern languages courses that lessons are conducted entirely in the language being learned. Most teaching is good or satisfactory. In a GCE A level Spanish lesson, students carried out a role-play exercise successfully in pairs about an incident at the Spanish border. By the end of the activity, the students were speaking Spanish with fluency and confidence. In lessons on courses for adults, the students were not given enough opportunity to speak the language they were learning. This weakness is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

36 Student retention and pass rates on most courses are good. Retention rates are good on all GCE A level English and modern language courses. Pass rates in GCE A level English literature and foreign languages are above the national average. In most years, a high

Curriculum Areas

proportion of students obtain grade C or above. The student achievement rate on the GCSE French course has been consistently above national average for the last three years. Enrolments for the GCSE Spanish course are increasing. In 2000, the student achievement rate in GCSE Spanish improved. The proportion of students who obtain grade C or above in GCSE English has declined over the last two years and is now below the national average. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, retention rates on some part-time courses for adults are below the national average.

37 On courses in English and modern languages, teachers ensure they meet the learning needs of individual students. They help students on a one-to-one basis. Students also work together in small groups. They are given informative booklets on the texts they are studying and these guide them through their assignments. Students aged 16 to 18 could talk lucidly about their individual progress and

learning targets and they had a clear idea of how to improve their work. One student made good use of the discussion page on Frankenstein on the college intranet, set up by the English department in the library. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that use of the intranet is productive and innovative.

38 Staff are well qualified. A teacher of German has written a GCE A level German coursebook for curriculum 2000 and several staff are external examiners. As reported in the self-assessment report, there is considerable staff development activity for teachers of English and modern languages. Resources are good in both curriculum areas. All classrooms where English is taught have attractive displays on key writers and the modern languages rooms are well equipped with listening stations, an electronic whiteboard and satellite television. There is a thriving exchange programme with schools in France, Germany and Spain.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and modern languages, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE Spanish	2	Number of starters	32	21	68
		Retention (%)	53	76	71
		Achievement (%)	100	38	71
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	372	359	315
		Retention (%)	83	86	83
		Achievement (%)	63	59	42
GCE A level French	3	Number of starters	63	*	52
		Retention (%)	86	*	79
		Achievement (%)	87	*	90
GCE A level Spanish	3	Number of starters	*	31	33
		Retention (%)	*	77	82
		Achievement (%)	*	86	80
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	29	*	36
		Retention (%)	72	*	83
		Achievement (%)	75	*	93
GCE English language	3	Number of starters	217	206	284
		Retention (%)	88	82	90
		Achievement (%)	92	85	87

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Psychology, Sociology and History

Grade 1

39 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in history, psychology and sociology on GCSE and GCE A level courses. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much outstanding teaching
- the focus on individual students' learning and support needs
- students' excellent achievements and good retention rates on most courses
- good curriculum management
- good accommodation and specialist resources

Weaknesses

- students' poor results in GCSE psychology

40 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching is good. All lessons were good or outstanding. Teachers use a wide and appropriate variety of classroom activities. Work schemes are comprehensive, thorough and imaginative. Relevant and contemporary material is used in lessons. Teachers encourage students to take a suitably critical approach to data and to extend their learning beyond lessons. Good, and in many instances, excellent learning packs are available to students and they can work through these on their own.

41 Lessons are well organised. Teachers enable students to understand complex theories and assimilate an extensive new amount of knowledge. Handouts and overhead transparencies are clear and well presented. 'Gapped' handouts are used well in lessons to

test students' understanding of a particular topic. Students are encouraged to explore and develop their ideas through classroom discussion. Lessons are lively and have a sense of purpose and momentum. The students are given appropriately varied activities which excite their interest and motivate them to learn. In one excellent lesson, adult learners were introduced to classical theories of conditioning. After a well-delivered exposition by the teacher, made with the use of excellent overhead transparencies, the students carried out an experiment on conditioned responses in pairs. They found this both enjoyable and instructive. The teacher then skilfully led a discussion in which the students identified the insights they had gained from carrying out the experiment. The teacher encouraged the students to draw on their own experience and explore their ideas. The students clearly found the lesson of absorbing interest.

42 Teachers use assessment well as a means of helping students to learn. They provide careful and constructive written comments on students' work. Criteria for assessment are discussed with students. For example, in one psychology class, students had to grade a piece of coursework themselves, using the chief examiner's assessment guidelines, and to justify the grade awarded to the rest of the class. This helped the students to understand what was required of them in coursework and how it would be assessed.

43 Curriculum management is good. All students have clear course handbooks. Teachers identify students' individual learning needs carefully and provide students with good academic and pastoral support. The support for adult students is particularly effective. There are good links between staff who teach 16 to 19 year olds, for the purpose of sharing ideas and good practice. Similar links between teachers of adults are not so well developed. Notes of team meetings show that staff are well informed about current curricula and that they discuss the

Curriculum Areas

quality of teaching and learning and ways of meeting students' needs. They are able to contribute to the development of college policy.

44 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that student retention and achievement rates on most courses are excellent. In the last three years, pass rates in GCE A level history, psychology and sociology were well above the national average. In 1999-2000, the proportion of students achieving high grades in these subjects was also well above the national average. In all three subjects, students achieved higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE grades. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, however, students' results in GCSE psychology are mainly

poor. Most students attend regularly and are punctual for lessons.

45 Subject teachers are well-qualified and many are external examiners. They make good use of opportunities to update their specialist knowledge and visit relevant departments in other colleges. Teaching accommodation at both the main college campus and at the Chorley Adult Education Centre is good. Classrooms are well furnished and suitably equipped. Library and IT resources for social sciences subjects are good. Staff identify and generate appropriate web-based resources for students. One teacher at the Chorley Adult Education Centre has developed a personal webpage devoted to teaching and learning materials for his students.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in psychology, sociology and history, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE psychology (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	85	69	44
		Retention (%)	73	59	64
		Achievement (%)	70	61	39
GCSE sociology (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	8	22	17
		Retention (%)	63	64	82
		Achievement (%)	60	36	86
GCE A level history (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	78	90	110
		Retention (%)	90	90	90
		Achievement (%)	97	99	99
GCE A level psychology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	146	127	163
		Retention (%)	83	86	81
		Achievement (%)	92	93	90
GCE A level sociology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	95	77	89
		Retention (%)	*	82	71
		Achievement (%)	95	96	87

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

46 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in basic skills. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- some well-planned teaching
- good use of individual learning programmes on basic education courses for adults
- wide range of basic skills provision

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory recording of students' achievements in community centres
- disproportionate use of worksheets unrelated to students' personal and vocational interests
- some inappropriate use of learning support staff

47 The scope of the inspection covered literacy and numeracy provision below level 2. It covered courses in basic skills, lessons on key skills, additional learning support and the teaching of basic skills as an integral part of vocational courses. Basic skills provision is offered on two college sites, and in a number of community venues. It includes daytime and evening sessions, for part-time and full-time students. In its self-assessment report, the college recognises that basic skills provision is arranged flexibly to meet a wide range of students' needs. Governors have recently approved a strategy to improve and extend basic skills provision. The basic skills strategic group is chaired by the principal. A college policy on basic skills has been developed and approved by the group. Following the respective appointments of a basic skills co-ordinator and a

community development officer, communication about basic skills provision has improved across the college. Networks have been established to enable staff to share good practice. Some working practices are not standardised sufficiently. For example, the achievements of students on courses in community centres were not recorded in sufficient detail to enable staff to review the students' progress effectively.

48 Of the 13 lessons observed by inspectors, six were good or outstanding. In some lessons, teachers employ a variety of suitable teaching methods, use teaching materials which stimulate the students' interest and give the students appropriate learning tasks. In other lessons, the range of teaching methods is narrow and there is over-reliance on printed materials which do not usually relate to students' personal or vocational interests. Many mathematics worksheets were insufficiently demanding for the students. In basic education lessons for adults, students usually have individual programmes, matched to their identified needs. There was some good teamwork between specialist teachers, volunteers and support workers.

49 Help with numeracy or literacy is readily available to those who need it. The results of diagnostic assessment are used effectively. Links with vocational teams are good. These ensure that students can obtain additional learning support promptly. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, resources for additional learning support are good and details of the support provided for students are recorded carefully. However, there is insufficient liaison between basic skills teachers and course teams to develop learning support plans for individual students or to produce learning materials that have a clear vocational context. Some students are not given clear goals to achieve through the learning support they receive. They do not always understand that this support is intended to enable them to succeed on their main course.

Curriculum Areas

50 As the self-assessment report recognises, methods of recording students' achievements are inadequate. After initial assessment, students are set short-term learning goals and long-term aims. They can work towards external awards or a college certificate. There are too few students working towards external awards to enable a table of students' achievements to be included in this report. Many students achieve their short-term goals. Retention rates are continuing to improve and the average level of attendance is 78%, which is above the national average. Some files of students' work are maintained well. They contain constructive comments from teachers on

students' work. The students can refer to these comments to find out how they can improve their performance. Others files were badly organised and unstructured.

51 Specialist staff are adequately qualified in basic skills. The college is attempting to address a shortage of numeracy specialists through a comprehensive staff development programme. The programme of teaching and learning observations covers basic skills classes. The main centres are well resourced with designated basic skills areas which provide a welcoming environment. They are well organised and well equipped. Some outreach venues were not so well equipped.

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Support for Students

Grade 1

52 Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's judgements on support for students. The weakness identified in the self-assessment report had been substantially rectified prior to the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-co-ordinated and effective arrangements for pre-course guidance and admissions
- effective induction arrangements
- good personal tutorial system for full-time students
- outstanding reviewing and recording of students' progress and action-planning
- comprehensive study support for learners
- good information, counselling, welfare and careers advice services
- students' high participation rate in an extensive programme of enrichment activities

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

53 The college provides outstanding support for students. Staff value all students as individuals and make every effort to help them succeed and fulfil their potential. Support is well co-ordinated. Student services and study support managers are led by a recently-appointed assistant principal. They meet weekly with heads of studies who have responsibility for the pastoral and curricular aspects of students' programmes.

54 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the schools liaison and admissions service is well established and highly valued. A specialist team visits 36 high

schools each year to make presentations and interview pupils. Prospective students visit the college to sample courses and they attend special musical and sporting events. Students aged 16 to 19 are invited to 'a new students' day' in July. Adult students also benefit from a responsive guidance and admissions service. There are a number of advice and guidance days specifically for adults. All persons enquiring about part-time courses are given a detailed, written description of the course in which they are interested. There are good arrangements for students who enrol late. Pastoral support workers ensure they are placed on the right course.

55 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the induction programme for students is thorough, structured, effective as a means of identifying individual students' needs, and helps those coming from school to make the transition to further education. Students undergo a diagnostic assessment to find out if they need any additional learning support. Tutors use a checklist to make sure they cover all elements of the induction programme thoroughly. Students are introduced to the college charter, enrichment opportunities, student services, study support, learning support facilities and the library. During the first three days of the academic year, only new students attend college. During these three days, staff are able to give the students their undivided attention and help them to settle into the college quickly. Both young people and adult students value their introduction to the college and their course.

56 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that full-time students benefit from an effective tutorial system. All full-time students are allocated a personal tutor. Part-time students have a contact tutor who has a pastoral role. Personal tutors follow a tutorial curriculum which is suitably adapted to the needs of their students. In tutorials, students receive personal support and their academic

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progress is monitored. Students are given careers education and guidance within tutorials to help them progress to further or higher education and employment. Full-time students have a weekly tutorial. They also meet individually with their tutor at least once every six weeks for a review of their progress. Monitoring of their progress is rigorous. All students receive a review of their performance, which ascertains whether or not they are likely to attain the GCE A level grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. Students whose work is falling below the standards required for these grades are counselled to accept additional learning support. A private study facility is provided where they can work under supervision. Vacation schools in February, Easter and in the summer are provided for students requiring extra support. The college undertakes research into ways of providing additional learning support for students. For example, it is engaged in a project which aims to find out why male students perform less well than female students in certain subjects.

57 Students make good use of a well-organised and comprehensive study support service. It is based in a specialised suite adjacent to the library. A team of 56 tutors and educational support workers help students in the study support centre and during their lessons. Over 800 students of all ages and from a wide range of courses received additional support in 1999-2000. They included students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and Oxbridge applicants. Students may be referred for help following early diagnostic assessment or by their tutors, or they may choose to seek it themselves. In its self-assessment report, the college identified as a strength, the careful monitoring of students' attendance and progress by personal tutors.

58 The student services team provides a comprehensive range of counselling, welfare and careers advice and guidance services. Its

members are appropriately qualified. Students make good use of these services and rate them highly. Since the self-assessment report was produced, considerable progress has been made in improving the support arrangements for adult and part-time students. Facilities for student services are now located at all three centres and are staffed during the evenings. During tutorials, students receive careers guidance and help in filling in their Universities and Colleges Admission Services (UCAS) forms. There is a welfare fund and students who have young children may receive financial assistance with childcare costs.

59 In its self-assessment report, the college identified as a strength, the extensive programme of enrichment activities available to students. Many students participate in these activities and they include a choir with over 70 members, rock bands, with training from Elton John's drummer, and many cultural pursuits, sports and games. The programme also includes professional studies courses in subjects such as media, medicine, law and teaching and these are very popular. The college is responsive to students' requests for activities. For example, Japanese was recently introduced and there are currently 25 students learning the language.

General Resources

Grade 1

60 Inspectors mainly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- excellent resources
- well-maintained accommodation
- good information and learning technology resources
- good catering, social and recreational facilities

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- well-equipped library and learning resource centres
- accessibility of buildings to students with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

61 Inspectors agreed that the college has improved its general resources substantially since the last inspection. It has devised a clear accommodation strategy which reflects the aims of the strategic plan and the scope of the curriculum. There has been a substantial programme of building and refurbishment. Many students now work in modern, attractive surroundings in the main college centres where classrooms are well decorated, comfortably furnished and equipped with modern teaching aids. By comparison, the 12 mobile classrooms at the Langdale site, although clean and well maintained, are less attractive and not as well equipped. The Chorley Adult Education Centre has been developed and extended to provide excellent accommodation for all the courses there. Students appreciate the calm and adult atmosphere at the centre. The Runshaw Business Centre site is used for adult courses and corporate clients. It has good, well-furnished accommodation and provides an appropriate business environment.

62 Good use is made of displays of students' work throughout the college. Photographs depicting students' achievements are also well displayed. Routine maintenance is given high priority and has been subject to major improvement. The college has appointed zone supervisors who have a number of roles including supervision of communal areas, maintaining cleanliness, and first aid. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that most of the accommodation at all sites is accessible to persons with restricted mobility. The college

ensures that classes with students who have restricted mobility are timetabled to use rooms that are easily accessible.

63 The college has made substantial investment in its computer equipment. All the college centres are connected by an intranet. There are 700 computers available for students' use which are connected to the Internet. This gives an overall ratio of students to computers of 6:1. Computers are well used by students. There is a good range of software to meet the students' needs. The college learning intranet is in the early stages of development. It is well used in some curriculum areas. The college aims to provide students on every course with access to relevant learning materials on the intranet by September 2001. There is a well-developed intranet for staff. All teachers have their own individual space in curriculum work areas. Some of these areas are small. There is, however, also a staff 'haven' close to them which is a quiet area equipped with IT equipment for use by staff. Staff value these arrangements highly. There are a good number of computers available to staff.

64 There are good library facilities including learning resource centres at all sites. The main library in the Leyland centre is well used. It has seating for 250 in two silent areas, quiet work areas and a group work room. A practical booking system controls the use of the 96 computers available to students. They are heavily used. There are good arrangements for keeping staff informed of the books and materials students need on their courses. Prompt action is taken to ensure the availability of key texts. The library at the Chorley Adult Education Centre provides a very welcoming environment. It has a good range of texts relevant to the courses students are following at the centre. Although small, the library facility at the Runshaw Business Centre meets the needs of students. All centres have access to the computerised library catalogue and texts from other centres can be obtained at any site within

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24 hours. At all sites, there is a good range of learning packs which students can use on their own. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that library staff are not fully aware of all the resources held within curriculum areas.

65 The college provides good catering facilities for students and staff. At the main Leyland centre, there are two restaurants for students which offer a wide range of food. In addition there is a hotdog stand and 'La Baguette', serving baguettes and baked potatoes which is open late in the evening for part-time students. At the Runshaw Business Centre, there is a limited restaurant service which meets the needs of most students. Catering facilities at the Chorley Adult Education Centre are limited to vending machines. Most students prefer to go into the town for lunch. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that restaurant areas are crowded at peak times.

66 The college arranges bus services for students. These are heavily used. There are some good sports facilities, including a large multi-purpose sports hall at the main centre. A substantial floodlit synthetic pitch is a recent addition and is well used.

Quality Assurance

Grade 1

67 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- well-established and excellent quality assurance process
- rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning
- good arrangements for staff appraisal
- extensive staff development programme

- systematic gathering of feedback from students, parents, employers and the community
- good monitoring of provision at venues away from the college
- effective self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- failure of some course teams to record implementation of agreed actions

68 The college has a well-established and highly effective quality assurance process. In 1996, the college was awarded the Excellence North West quality award and in 1998 the college was highly commended in the competition for United Kingdom quality awards. The 'quality council', chaired by the principal, reviews and steers the quality assurance arrangements. Senior managers emphasise the importance of quality assurance in briefing sessions for staff on quality assurance procedures and in clear presentations on issues related to the quality of provision. The quality assurance process is comprehensive and is set out clearly in writing. There is a helpful calendar of key activities. All aspects of students' experiences are monitored and judged according to clear criteria. The college has a unit which facilitates the quality assurance procedures effectively.

69 The quality assurance systems have led to significant improvements in many areas of the college's work. According to the statistics maintained by the FEFC, the college is placed in the top quartile of colleges, in terms of students' achievements. Students' average point score for GCE A level has risen from 17 points in 1996 to 23.3 in 2000. In this inspection, the college obtained higher grades for four curriculum areas than it did in the previous inspection. The proportion of lessons graded 1 or 2 was 12 percentage points above the national average. Although retention rates on many courses are

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above the national average they have not improved overall. The college has employed a researcher to investigate reasons why some students leave their courses early. Staff are using the researcher's findings to identify ways of ensuring that students on courses with retention rates below the college average, want to stay at the college and complete their studies. In all curriculum areas, targets are set for student achievement and retention rates on courses. The rates attained are compared with national averages. All course teams have to produce action plans for improving student achievement and retention rates. Managers monitor the implementation of these plans closely.

70 The college gives high priority to maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and learning, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. A substantial and rigorous programme of lesson observations is an essential part of the self-assessment process. All full-time teachers are observed three times a year and part-time teachers are observed once a year. There was little difference between the percentage of good or outstanding lessons recorded by the college observers, and by inspectors. The college has recently established a group of 48 teaching mentors, who help other staff to improve various aspects of teaching and learning. All mentors have received training in observation techniques and in giving constructive feedback. Good practice observed by mentors is disseminated through the staff newsletter.

71 Inspectors agreed that the college systematically seeks the views of all who use its services. A wide range of methods such as questionnaires, focus groups and student council meetings are used to obtain the views of students, parents, employers and the community. The principal and senior managers hold meetings regularly with focus groups. Action is taken on feedback. For example, the assessment policy has been improved. Following suggestions made by focus groups of parents and the college's neighbours, there is

now additional off-the-road parking space for buses. The college has charters for students, parents, employers and staff. These are reviewed regularly. Surveys are carried out to check that the college is honouring the commitments it makes in the charters.

72 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the provision and management of staff development are good. The staff development programme reflects the college's strategic priorities and key goals. All staff are entitled to 16 days' training, have easy access to IT training and are able to enrol on any college course and receive a £100 discount on fees. The college also encourages all staff to participate in 'Best in Class' placements for two days in order to compare their practice with that of other organisations. In 1999, 143 staff participated in this initiative. Staff are required to evaluate their own training. There are good management training opportunities for staff. For example, support staff have received leadership training for their role as members of 'continuous improvement teams'. All staff, including hourly paid employees, receive regular reviews of their performance. The findings from these reviews are recorded in an individual training plan for the member of staff concerned, who is set targets for improving his or her performance. The college has been successfully re-assessed for the Investor in People award.

73 There are good arrangements for carrying out quality assurance of provision away from the college, including prison education and courses in community centres. Reports on such provision, including the findings from lesson observations, are taken into account in the self-assessment report. The views of students on courses away from the college are collected and analysed in order to identify ways in which the provision can be improved. There are clear guidelines for staff who teach on courses held in community venues.

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74 The college's self-assessment report is comprehensive, detailed and thorough. In it, the college compares its performance with national benchmarks. The self-assessment report contains effective action plans for rectifying weaknesses and improving provision. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Self-assessment reports are produced for every area of the college. Progress in implementing action plans is monitored regularly. The self-assessment report, however, failed to acknowledge that the minutes of some curriculum team meetings do not always include a record of the monitoring of the implementation of agreed action.

Governance

Grade 2

75 Inspectors mainly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good use of the collective expertise of governors
- governors' systematic and rigorous monitoring of the college's performance
- effective induction of new governors
- governors' thorough involvement in determining the strategic direction of the college
- governors' clear understanding of their role
- good arrangements for monitoring the performance of the corporation

Weaknesses

- insufficient analysis of the skills and training needs of governors
- some deficiencies in the operation of statutory committees
- unsatisfactory arrangements for the appraisal of senior postholders

76 Governors are thoroughly involved in setting the strategic direction of the college. They review annually its vision, mission and goals. They are fully involved in the development of the strategic plan and the validation of the self-assessment report. Governors' meetings are scheduled to consider and approve the plan in a clear set of stages. The July corporation meeting is extended to allow governors sufficient time to consider the plan as a whole and the college's self-assessment report.

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

78 The corporation has a determined membership of 12 which includes four business governors, three co-opted governors, one local authority nominee, one community governor, a student governor, a staff governor and the principal. There are six women and six men on the corporation. Two governors are in their third term of office. Inspectors agreed that governors bring a wide range of expertise to the college, which is well used. Governors attend a wide variety of college events. Governors set themselves personal goals and these include establishing good contact with staff and students. They work effectively with groups of persons who use the college's services. The corporation recently held a successful open meeting to which members of the general public were invited.

79 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the governors' monitoring of the performance of the college is systematic and rigorous. There is a published schedule of corporation and committee meetings. The corporation meetings have standard agenda items, which include

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monitoring reports on key issues such as recruitment, and student retention and achievement rates. Reports have standard formats and indicate clearly the decisions required of the corporation. Progress on implementing the current strategic plan is reviewed termly. The standards and curriculum committee monitors performance against benchmarks and reports to the corporation.

80 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that governors monitor their own performance well. After each meeting, governors complete an evaluation form on which they assess the effectiveness of their participation at the meeting, and identify training needs they may have. A governance committee regularly reviews the performance of the corporation. The corporation carries out an annual self-assessment. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings has been good and exceeded the target of 80%.

81 The induction of new governors is systematic and effective. They are given a detailed information pack and are expected to complete their initial training within six months. An experienced governor acts as a mentor to a new governor. Governors' training needs are identified annually and a training plan is drawn up to meet them. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge, however, that there is no systematic means of checking that governors receive the training they need to help them fulfil their respective roles on committees. At every other meeting of the corporation, governors receive a presentation on the work of one particular area of the college.

82 The externally appointed clerk is directly accountable to the chair of the corporation. Agendas and papers are sent out in good time, in advance of relevant meetings. The minutes of one meeting of the audit committee, however, were not presented to the corporation for approval. Consequently, the current year's internal audit plan has not been approved.

Procedures for the appraisal of senior postholders have not been formally approved by the corporation. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that the findings of these appraisals are not always reported to the corporation.

83 The governors' clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management, was not recognised in the self-assessment report. The importance of this distinction is emphasised in the job description of governors and the chair, a well-presented booklet on governance, and the model of governance practice adopted. Governors and designated staff update the register of interests annually. The corporation has revised its code of conduct to reflect the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. Agendas, papers and minutes are available for public inspection in all college libraries. Staff are regularly informed about the outcomes of meetings.

84 There are six committees: finance; standards and curriculum; remuneration and organisational development; audit; search; and governance. Those governors whose term of office is drawing to a close but are willing to serve on the corporation for a further period, do not have their performance assessed adequately by the search committee before being re-appointed. The search committee has carried out an audit of governors' skills but it has not used the findings from this to identify gaps in the corporation's collective skills and any particular skills new governors ought to have. The audit committee minutes do not indicate that it has monitored performance in accordance with the internal audit plan, during 1999-2000. The terms of reference of the audit committee indicate that it can operate outside the remit specified in Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. These weaknesses in the operation of the college's two statutory committees were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

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Management

Grade 1

85 Inspectors agreed with the most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found a weakness the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- strong leadership by managers
- effective communication
- well-established, effective planning cycle
- good use of targets
- rigorous and detailed analysis of local needs to assist strategic planning
- effective strategies to widen participation

Weaknesses

- deficiencies in the recording of data on students

86 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the principal and senior management team provide strong and effective leadership. The management structure is clear. The college's values and strategic aims are understood and supported by staff at all levels. Strategic planning is rigorous and highly focused. As recognised in the self-assessment report, it is based upon careful analysis of local needs and trends and a highly detailed assessment of its competitors. Labour market information is evaluated carefully, and the likely impact of government initiatives is assessed. The report of the committee chaired by Sir Claus Moser on the national development of basic skills, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start* has influenced strategic planning and target-setting. Strategic targets are clear and have been achieved. The recruitment of adults has been increased and the students' high achievement rates have been consistently maintained. The college achieves its primary

aim of ensuring that the needs of individual students are always met to the full.

87 Communication is excellent. Team briefings by managers take place every month. Teams evaluate the effectiveness of these briefings and their findings are analysed by staff in the personnel section, who produce a report for senior managers. Managers encourage staff to put forward ideas and raise issues with them. An agenda item at college management meetings is 'what's on the grapevine', and this enables managers to identify and explore issues that are current in the college.

88 Inspectors agreed that the curriculum is well managed. The college has comprehensive procedures for monitoring students' attendance and work. Course teams follow a well-structured and effective planning cycle. Their plans reflect the college's strategic objectives. These plans identify the budget and resources needed for each course and the performance indicators against which the quality and effectiveness of the course will be judged. Staff and other resources are deployed efficiently. There are ambitious targets for the use of teachers' contracted hours. It is one of the college's central tenets that management should serve the best interests of the students. The effectiveness of management is judged by the extent to which students reach their goals, achieve success and are provided with inspirational teaching.

89 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college is financially sound, having, as at 31 July 2000, net current assets of £872,000 and reserves of £1,847,000. Whilst the financial reports submitted to the senior management team and governors do not include any out-turn forecast for the college as a whole, there is detailed coverage of the out-turn of the business units and the college's overall cash position. Reports from internal and external auditors do not indicate any

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significant weaknesses in financial management and control. The resources made available for internal audit have increased in 2000-01 because the internal auditors did not complete their approved annual plan for 1999-2000. The 1999-2000 financial statements have been submitted in accordance with the required timetable. The college has a good record for submitting student data returns to the FEFC on a timely basis. The financial regulations have been recently updated with the assistance of the internal auditors.

90 Inspectors agreed that the college works effectively with a wide range of external agencies and partners. Relationships between the college and its feeder schools are excellent. Widening participation in education and training has been a central aim of college strategy for some time. The current target is to increase recruitment of adult students by 50%. The college has successfully fulfilled its intention to take learning into disadvantaged communities. It has done this by making good use of its links with schools and using its information and learning technology resources flexibly.

91 Inspectors did not agree that the information produced by the management information system is accurate. Following a review by external consultants in 1999, a decision was made to replace the college's home-produced software for the management information system with a commercial package. Good progress has been made in introducing the new software. Managers have begun to implement effective processes for checking the accuracy of data. Data produced by the college's management information system over the last three years show students still on registers even though they had, in fact, left or finished their course. Prior to the inspection, the college was able to update these data. The revised data show a significant reduction in the student retention on some of the courses. These inaccuracies in the data that has, hitherto, been produced by the management information

system were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

92 There are thorough equal opportunities and anti-harassment policies and a comprehensive disability statement. Their effectiveness is monitored systematically. A member of the senior management team is responsible for chairing the equal opportunities subcommittee of the academic board. The college carries out rigorous checks to ensure that equality of opportunity is upheld and promoted through all its activities and every aspect of its daily life. All individuals are valued and cultural diversity is celebrated through special events.

Conclusions

93 The college's self-assessment report provided an excellent basis for planning the inspection. The self-assessment process is consistently rigorous throughout the college. Judgements in the self-assessment report were substantiated by clear evidence. The self-assessment report included thorough action plans for rectifying weaknesses. The college produced an updated version of the self-assessment report shortly before the inspection and this showed that improvements had been made in all areas. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report. The grades, proportionately, the college awarded for lessons were similar to those the inspectors gave. Inspectors agreed with the grades the college gave for five of its seven curriculum areas. Of the grades they awarded for the other two curriculum areas, one was higher and the other was lower than the grade given in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with four of the grades the college gave for the five areas of cross-college provision, but the grade they awarded for one area was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

94 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 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	46
19-24 years	8
25+ years	46
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	17
Level 2 (intermediate)	36
Level 3 (advanced)	37
Level 4/5 (higher)	5
Level not specified	5
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 2000)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	751	1,283	17
Agriculture	5	663	5
Engineering	122	635	6
Business	484	991	12
Hotel and catering	254	1,191	12
Health and community care	397	1,937	19
Art and design	393	112	4
Humanities	786	1,846	22
Basic education	52	318	3
Total	3,244	8,976	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 13% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	194	54	0	248
Supporting direct learning contact	50	13	0	63
Other support	150	17	2	169
Total	394	84	2	480

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£13,184,000	£13,573,000	£15,353,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£15.06*	£16.20*	£16.69
Payroll as a proportion of income	63%	60%	59%
Achievement of funding target	100%	107%	104%
Diversity of income	24%	21%	24%
Operating surplus	£105,000	£4,000	£616,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1998-99 (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

**provisional data*

FEFC Inspection Report 59/01

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
© FEFC 2001**

March 2001

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Reference INSREP/1230/01