

INSPECTION REPORT

First College

11 November 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**)

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

First College

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for First College	2
Grades	2
About the inspection	4
Key Findings	4
What learners like about First College	11
What learners think First College could improve	11

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	12
Equality of opportunity	13
Quality improvement	14
Health, public services and care	16
Retail and commercial enterprise	20
Preparation for life and work	24
Business administration and law	28

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. First College was established in September 2000 through the merger of two local training organisations. Another training provider in Peterborough merged with First College in 2002. First College works with a number of partners ranging from employers to local learning partnerships. It is a not-for-profit organisation limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It operates from sites at Gainsborough, Louth, Peterborough and Skegness.

2. First College offers apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships, work-based learning for young people and preparation for work programmes. The training is funded by Lincolnshire and Rutland Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Jobcentre Plus. First College currently has 298 learners, 115 of whom are franchised from Boston College and Lincoln College. The unemployment rate in September 2005 was 1.6 per cent in the area covered by Lincolnshire and Rutland LSC area and 2.6 per cent in Peterborough, compared with the national average of 2.3 per cent. According to the 2001 census, 1.3 per cent of the population of Lincolnshire are from a minority ethnic group compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent.

3. First College was inspected in March 2002, when the quality of the provision was judged to be adequate. More specifically, the quality of work-based learning was satisfactory in information and communications technology (ICT), retailing and customer services, hospitality and childcare. Business administration and foundation programmes were unsatisfactory. Leadership and management were satisfactory overall, the approach to equality of opportunity was good and arrangements for quality assurance were unsatisfactory. Following reinspection in September 2003, all aspects of the provision were judged to be satisfactory or better.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** First College's leadership and management are good and its arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. In retail and commercial enterprise, the provision is outstanding. The quality of provision in business administration and law programmes is good, as it is in preparation for life and work. The health, public services and care training is unsatisfactory.

5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is effective and identified many key strengths and weaknesses in the areas of learning and, leadership and management. Self-assessment has been completed annually for the past three years. First College uses employers' and learners' views sufficiently to contribute to an accurate evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** First College has been effective in carrying out a number of actions to promote

FIRST COLLEGE

improvement, and the quality of provision has improved in most areas of learning. Action plans to improve quality include specific details and realistic timescales. First College has introduced good recent strategies to improve retention rates in most areas of learning, particularly in hospitality programmes. However, the achievement rates on early years programmes are unsatisfactory.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR FIRST COLLEGE:

- maintain the quality of hospitality training
- improve retention and achievement rates, particularly in early years and customer service
- improve learners' access to high-quality learning resources
- continue to work effectively with external partners
- improve target-setting for learners
- improve the monitoring of learners' progress
- maintain good support for staff development
- fully integrate literacy and numeracy training with vocational programmes
- further develop a systematic approach to quality improvement
- continue to promote equality of opportunity
- improve the analysis and use of data

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

Health, public services and care			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Early years			
Apprenticeships for young people	32	4	
NVQ training for young people	25	4	

Retail and commercial enterprise			1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Hospitality and catering			
Apprenticeships for young people	21	1	
NVQ training for young people	45	1	

Preparation for life and work		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability training</i>		2
New Deal for young people	23	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	21	2

Business administration and law		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Accounting and finance</i>		2
Apprenticeships for young people	9	2
NVQ training for young people	36	2
<i>Administration</i>		2
Apprenticeships for young people	54	2
NVQ training for young people	14	2
<i>Customer service</i>		3
Apprenticeships for young people	16	3
NVQ training for young people	2	3

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 33 days at First College in November 2005 and visited each of the training centres. The programmes in health, public services and care, retail and commercial enterprise, preparation for life and work, and business administration and law, including the franchised provision were inspected. ICT was not included in this inspection as it was included in the earlier Lincolnshire and Rutland hub inspection.

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	33
Number of learners interviewed	140
Number of staff interviewed	62
Number of employers interviewed	32
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	4
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	7
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Rates of retention, achievement and progress are good in hospitality, administration and accounting programmes.** They have significantly increased since the previous inspection. Achievement rates are satisfactory in customer service programmes, **but unsatisfactory for early years programmes.**

9. **Progression routes from level 1 to level 3 qualifications are very clear in most areas.** For example, many learners progress from level 2 to level 3 programmes in accounting and administration and 21 learners have progressed from a Saturday cookery course onto hospitality and catering training. All early years learners who attended a recent taster subsequently enrolled on courses. Many learners gain employment and are promoted into supervisory positions in their workplace while still in learning.

10. Hospitality learners typically make good progress towards their qualifications, with some completing their main qualification in only six months. However, most early years and some customer service learners are making slow progress towards completing their qualifications.

11. Many of the participants on preparation for life and work programmes work towards qualifications in literacy and numeracy. **Their achievement rate on numeracy programmes is good.** Of the participants entered in 2004-05, 74 per cent achieved level 1 and 2 numeracy qualifications.

12. **The development of learners' vocational skills is good, particularly within hospitality**

programmes. Learners are able to link background knowledge to their practice in the workplace.

13. Most learners' portfolios are organised and presented well. The work is generally satisfactory and some is of a high standard.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Health, public services and care	0	2	0	0	2
Retail and commercial enterprise	2	2	0	0	4
Preparation for life and work	0	5	2	0	7
Business administration and law	0	3	0	0	3
Total	2	12	2	0	16

14. **Teaching and learning are good.** All observed sessions were judged to be good or outstanding. Sessions are well planned, interesting and lively. Key skills qualifications are integrated very well with learners' programmes.

15. Resources to support learning are generally good. All training centres are comfortable and welcoming. **Specialist facilities in hospitality are particularly well equipped, and learning resources in preparation for life and work are also very good.** However, access to some learning resources is inadequate on business administration and law programmes. **Learners are not always aware of available resources, or how to access them.** There are insufficient textbooks and other reference sources. First College recognises this weakness in the self-assessment report.

16. **First College matches unemployed learners particularly well to jobs and works well with an extensive network of employers.** It carries out a detailed job role analysis with each employer, and then assesses learners for their relevant skills, aptitudes and career aspirations, before sending them for interview by the employer.

17. **Personal support for learners is good.** Assessors visit apprentices frequently in the workplace and can be contacted at any time by e-mail or telephone. Problems encountered in the workplace are quickly dealt with and learners who would otherwise leave remain in employment and training.

18. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessments are well planned and observations are well recorded, detailed and clearly referenced to the relevant national vocational qualification (NVQ) units. Learners receive written and verbal feedback after assessments.

19. Literacy, language and numeracy skills support is adequate. Additional support is provided for learners in individual sessions.

20. **Targets set at reviews and assessment meetings are not specific enough.** Learners do not understand the individual learning plans, which are not updated in response to the review process. Formal review interviews do not always identify targets or goals to assist in raising the level of a learner's literacy or numeracy skills. First College has recognised aspects of this weakness.

21. **Employees have insufficient involvement in training.** Workplace supervisors are not routinely involved in formal review interviews with learners and assessors. Some have little knowledge of the apprenticeship programme and its requirements.

22. **Monitoring of learners' progress is weak.** While learners' progress towards NVQ units is documented well in portfolios, team managers do not effectively monitor learners who make slow progress. This weakness is being dealt with by First College.

Leadership and management

23. **First College provides strong local leadership to promote work-based learning.** It works well with a group of 17 other local training providers to develop a county-wide work-based academy to promote work-based learning as an alternative to full-time further education. First College has invested heavily to develop high-quality learning environments for learners.

24. **First College works very effectively with a wide range of external partners.** It maintains close links with over 300 local employers to identify local skills needs and provide good learning opportunities for learners. It also has effective partnership arrangements with regional organisations to provide good initial advice and guidance to learners across Rutland, Lincolnshire and Peterborough.

25. **Support for staff development is good.** First College has completed a very detailed training needs analysis which identifies essential and desirable qualifications for each staff role. Staff are encouraged to gain relevant qualifications. Staff success and achievement of qualifications, and their success, is celebrated through a quarterly newsletter distributed to staff, learners and employers.

26. **First College carries out some particularly good actions to promote equality of opportunity.** The equality and diversity working group meet regularly to plan changes and improvements to working practice and communicate updates on recent legislation. Forty-one per cent of staff hold an equal opportunities qualification.

27. **First College has been very effective in improving the quality of the provision in most areas of learning.** Some areas of weakness identified at previous inspections are now judged to be strengths. Since the previous inspection in 2002, First College has successfully improved retention and achievement rate trends in business administration and law, preparation for life and work, and retail and commercial service programmes. Learners' and employers' feedback is effectively collected and is used to make changes to improve the provision.

28. Management of resources is satisfactory. All accommodation is appropriate and comfortable. Some areas, most notably hospitality, have high-quality learning resources.

29. First College has an appropriate, clear strategy and procedures for literacy and numeracy skills development. All learners have access to a literacy and numeracy skills test, a learning style analysis and a skill scan. Support is provided by assessors and the personal adviser for skills for life. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. The provider has a range of very good resources to

support literacy, numeracy and language skills development.

30. First College's arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. The equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and recognises and reflects current legislation. The policy is reviewed on an annual basis and its effectiveness is monitored by the working group. Data on performance is collected across a range of groups and circulated to all staff. However, insufficient use is made of this data to analyse and identify trends and differences in the performance of different groups of learners.

31. First College offers a range of courses to meet the needs of local employers and schools. For example, it has recently introduced an accredited introductory cookery course for 14 to 16 year olds.

32. Access to training centres is satisfactory. First College has implemented a three-year action plan to improve access to training centres and has carried out all the actions. First College has a range of adaptive technologies available, including hearing loop systems, adjustable desks, large keyboards and screens, and chair lifts.

33. Internal verification is satisfactory. First College has a clear internal verification strategy and a detailed sampling plan. Assessors' practice is observed, although information from these observations is not consistently used to plan staff development. Regular meetings are held to standardise assessors' and internal verifiers' practice.

34. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and includes the views of all staff, learners and employers. Many of the grades, strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report matched those identified by inspectors.

35. Communication is satisfactory. Weekly team meetings include discussion about individual learners. Staff are encouraged to widen their skills and experience through good staff development.

36. Learners are fully aware of the NVQ appeals procedure and generally have an acceptable awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity. Staff have a good understanding of the wider issues of equality and diversity. However, equality is not sufficiently discussed or reinforced during progress reviews.

37. The management information system is relatively new. The ability to create a range of accurate and reliable data across all groups of learners has only been available since April 2004. **Staff in most areas of learning make insufficient use of data to plan and manage the provision.**

38. **Quality improvement arrangements are insufficiently systematic.** First College has an extensive quality assurance manual with a large range of policies and procedures, many of which are new. However, there is no clear quality cycle which identifies the timing of the quality activities and which all staff, learners and employers understand.

39. **Individual learning is not sufficiently recorded.** Learners' reviews are very descriptive and do not adequately identify the skills learnt. Staff do not routinely record skills development during on- or off-the-job training. Additional literacy and numeracy skills support is not routinely recorded in learners' files.

40. **Literacy and numeracy skills training is not sufficiently integrated into vocational areas of learning.** Plans to develop resources through project work are in place, but it is too soon to measure their effect on learners.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong leadership to promote work-based learning
- very effective partnership arrangements
- good support for staff development
- particularly good actions to promote equality of opportunity
- very effective actions to improve the quality of the provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data to support management decisions
- insufficiently systematic quality improvement arrangements

Health, public services and care

Early years

Grade 4

Strengths

- good development of vocational skills
- good progression between programmes
- very effective team-working

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory achievement rates
- insufficient involvement of supervisors in training
- weak action-planning
- insufficient workplace assessment

Retail and commercial enterprise

Hospitality and catering

Grade 1

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- particularly good development of vocational skills
- very good teaching and learning
- excellent resources to support learning
- very good progression through qualifications

- highly effective external partnerships

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory target-setting for some learners

Preparation for life and work

Employability training

Grade 2

Strengths

- good rates of achievement in numeracy qualifications
- very effective working with employers
- good teaching and learning
- good induction
- very good resources to support learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of individual learning
- insufficient integration of literacy and numeracy training with vocational programmes
- inadequate contingency planning for staff absence

Business administration and law

Accounting and finance

Grade 2

Strengths

- good rates of achievement
- good matching of learners to jobs
- good teaching
- particularly good personal support

Weaknesses

- insufficient access to learning resources

Administration

Grade 2

Strengths

- good matching of learners to jobs
- very effective initial assessment
- good teaching
- particularly good personal support

FIRST COLLEGE

Weaknesses

- insufficient access to learning resources
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress

Customer service

Grade 3

Strengths

- good matching of learners to jobs
- good teaching
- particularly good personal support

Weaknesses

- low rates of achievement
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress
- insufficient access to learning resources

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT FIRST COLLEGE:

- the friendly and helpful staff
- the good work placements
- being treated as adults
- the good range of activities during lessons
- the good training rooms
- developing good work skills
- 'my mathematics has improved'
- finding a job
- having lessons in small groups
- 'improving my confidence'
- 'I have got a lot of additional qualifications'
- working in a good restaurant
- 'I learnt more in literacy and numeracy than I did in 12 years at school'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK FIRST COLLEGE COULD IMPROVE:

- management when staff leave
- ICT resources
- the speed at which qualifications are completed
- the amount of textbooks available
- 'we should not have to queue to see tutors'
- the amount of assessment in the workplace - there's not enough of it
- canteen provision in Gainsborough
- the amount of time each learner gets with assessors
- the speed at which marked work and written feedback are returned
- the teaching rooms - they are too cramped
- the car parking at Peterborough

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- strong leadership to promote work-based learning
- very effective partnership arrangements
- good support for staff development
- particularly good actions to promote equality of opportunity
- very effective actions to improve the quality of the provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data to support management decisions
- insufficiently systematic quality improvement arrangements

41. First College provides strong local leadership to promote work-based learning. It works well with a group of 17 other local training providers to develop a county-wide work-based academy which is used to promote work-based learning as an alternative to full-time further education. This collaborative new body is used to improve the information available to the local population about the range and location of training opportunities. The body is supported by an effective strategic plan. Work-based learning is also promoted by First College's staff at careers events, and a Saturday cookery club is used very effectively to introduce year 10 and 11 learners to careers in the hospitality industry. First College has invested heavily to develop high-quality learning environments for learners.

42. First College works very effectively with a wide range of external partners, including over 300 employers, to identify skills needs and provide good placements for learners. It also works with local authorities and schools, and delivers presentations and demonstrations in support of the healthy eating programme in schools. First College has effective partnership arrangements with regional organisations to provide good initial advice and guidance to learners across Rutland, Lincolnshire and Peterborough. Partnership resources and expertise are effectively shared to support development of the staff and provision. Many learners who first come into contact with First College for information, advice and guidance transfer to more formalised training routes. The provider achieved the matrix quality standard for information, support and guidance in June 2005.

43. First College has completed a very detailed training needs analysis which identifies essential and desirable qualifications for each staff role. Managers use this to prioritise and meet identified development needs. Staff are encouraged to gain relevant qualifications which will improve the quality of the learners' experience. For example, they are encouraged to achieve qualifications in key skills, assessment and teaching as well as in equality of opportunity. These achievements are effectively monitored through an annual appraisal system. Staff value the structured system and opportunity to develop continuously. Informal mentoring and coaching is available from more experienced staff. Staff receive a detailed and thorough induction which provides information on their job role and the company. They also undergo a period of work shadowing. Staff members' achievement of qualifications is celebrated through a quarterly newsletter to staff, learners

and employers.

44. Management of resources is satisfactory. All accommodation is appropriate and comfortable. Some areas, most notably hospitality, have high-quality learning resources. In contrast, some administration and customer service learners do not have access to adequate ICT equipment or other learning materials.

45. First College has a clear strategy and procedures for literacy and numeracy skills development. All learners have a literacy, numeracy and key skills assessment as well as a learning style and occupational skills analysis. Support is provided by assessors and the skills for life personal adviser. Where an additional learning need is identified, further diagnostic assessment and support is provided by the learning mentor team. Two staff have literacy and numeracy skills support qualifications and two other staff are working towards a level 4 qualification. First College has a range of very good literacy, numeracy and language support resources.

46. The management information system is relatively new. The ability to create a range of accurate and reliable data across all groups of learners has only been available since April 2004. Staff are still exploring the range of data reports available. Most areas of learning make insufficient use of data to plan and manage the provision. Staff performance is not systematically monitored against performance targets. Performance data for various groups of learners is not systematically analysed and reviewed to set targets for retention and achievement rates.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

47. First College carries out some good actions to promote equality of opportunity. An equality and diversity working group meets regularly to plan changes and improvements to working practice and communicate updates on recent legislation. The equality working group keeps staff aware of legislation and good practice for providers. Learners' induction has been improved to include interactive learning activities to challenge attitudes and beliefs. Statements and guides are written in plain English. Simple definitions of equality and diversity are displayed in training rooms. Staff members' training needs in equality and diversity are identified in the business planning process and in the working group. Forty-one per cent of staff hold a formal equality of opportunity qualification. Effective use is made of external courses and best practice as sources of knowledge and information for staff and learners. Visual images used in marketing materials challenge gender stereotypes in work roles. All literature and external advertisements include an equal opportunities statement.

48. Responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and review of the equal opportunities policy lies with First College's chief executive. Policies and procedures are satisfactory. The current equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and reflects current legislation. It is reviewed each year and its effectiveness is monitored by the working group. A simplified version is contained in the learners' induction booklet and recruitment pack. A well-designed leaflet outlines the harassment and grievance policy and procedures. A disability statement outlines resources and support for learners with disabilities, contacts for specialist organisations, and support available for tests and assessments.

49. Learners have an adequate introduction to equality of opportunity through induction. Harassment and bullying issues are included and are reinforced through the employment

rights and responsibilities workbook given to apprentices. Learners understand the complaints and grievance procedures and are encouraged to reflect on their personal behaviour and conduct in the work environment. However, many learners are unable to recall the content of induction and some learners have a limited understanding of equality of opportunity. Learners' knowledge and understanding are not effectively checked and reinforced. Discussions during formal review interviews do not enable assessors to measure accurately the learners' knowledge and understanding of equality issues.

50. Access to all training centres is satisfactory. First College has implemented a three-year action plan to improve access to training centres. All prioritised actions have been carried out. First College has a range of adaptive technologies available, including hearing loop systems, adjustable desks, large keyboards and screens, and chair lifts. Employers' premises and policies are assessed through health and safety procedures by staff with appropriate qualifications.

51. Data on performance is collected across a range of groups of learners. It is discussed at meetings and used to monitor under-representation. Some targets are set in the current development plan to increase the participation of men in apprenticeship programmes. Recruitment data has been monitored and advertisements for new posts encourage applications from members of minority groups. However, insufficient use is made of this data to analyse and identify trends and differences in the performance of different groups of learners.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

52. First College has been very effective in improving the quality of the provision in most areas of learning. Some areas of weakness identified at previous inspections are now judged to be strengths. Since the previous inspection in 2002 First College has successfully improved retention and achievement rate trends in business administration and law, preparation for life and work, and retail and commercial service programmes. A strategic management decision was taken to halt recruitment in health, public services and care when the area was identified as not meeting the company's standards. The quality improvement group has developed an improved learner monitoring system. Representation of staff from all areas of learning has enabled effective standardisation of some practice and resulted in improvements to existing documents. Staff discuss new ways of analysing and using data to improve performance. Learners' and employers' feedback is effectively collected and used to make changes to improve the provision. All actions carried out are monitored. Suggestion boxes are placed in all centres. Staff regularly contribute to updating the quality improvement procedures.

53. Overall arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. A clear internal verification strategy and a detailed sampling plan are in place. Assessors' practice is observed, but information from these observations is not consistently used to plan staff development. Feedback from internal verifiers to assessors is good and areas for improvement are clearly recorded. Regular meetings are held to standardise assessors' and internal verifiers' practice.

54. The self-assessment process is satisfactory, including the views of all staff, learners and employers. Many of the grades, strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment plan match those identified by inspectors.

55. Quality arrangements are insufficiently systematic. First College has an extensive quality assurance manual with a large range of policies and procedures, many of which are new. However, it has no clear quality cycle which identifies the timing of the quality improvement activities and which all staff, learners and employers understand. Some activities are carried out on an informal basis. Staff are uncertain of when specific activities take place. Observations of key training processes are new and have insufficient rigor and objectivity. They are not systematically carried out across all areas of learning. No criteria exist for assessment and grading. Classroom observations contain detailed comments against specific points and are graded, but no criteria exist to support the grading activity. Action plans are brief and contain few targets. Good practice is not effectively identified or shared.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 4

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Early years		4
Apprenticeships for young people	32	4
NVQ training for young people	25	4

56. Fifty-seven learners are on work-based learning programmes in early years care and education. Twenty-five learners are franchised from Boston College and are following NVQs. These learners are not included in the performance tables. Twenty-seven are apprentices and five are advanced apprentices. Three learners are men. All advanced apprentices are employed, but only seven apprentices have employed status. Forty-four learners have identified additional learning or social needs.

57. Learners are placed or employed in a variety of early years settings including day nurseries, nursery classes, playgroups, primary schools and after-school clubs. Off-the-job training is carried out one day each week at the training centres in Louth and Skegness. Assessors visit the learners in the workplace approximately once a month and carry out progress reviews every 12 weeks. There are no work-based assessors. Before starting on the programme, learners attend a recently extended induction lasting one week. Learners complete an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and key skills.

Early years

Grade 4

Strengths

- good development of vocational skills
- good progression between programmes
- very effective team-working

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory achievement rates
- insufficient involvement of supervisors in training
- weak action-planning
- insufficient workplace assessment

Achievement and standards

58. The development of learners' vocational skills is good. Learners are knowledgeable about children's needs and development. They skilfully manage children who exhibit difficult or unacceptable behaviour and grow in confidence and show initiative in dealing with challenging situations. Learners develop good observational skills and are able to link background knowledge to their practice in the workplace. Most learners' portfolios are organised and presented well. The standard of this work is generally satisfactory and some

is of a high standard, especially that of some learners on the foundation award in caring for children. The development of these learners' personal and social skills is very marked.

59. Rates of achievement are unsatisfactory. Only one of the 15 advanced apprentices starting since 2001-02 has successfully completed the programme, with three still in learning. Only 15 of the 58 apprentices who started between 2001 and 2003 successfully completed their programmes, and one-third of those who started in 2004-05 have already left. Learners' progress towards achieving their qualifications is slow. Many exceed the target dates agreed in their individual learning plans, some by a considerable amount. Despite being in training for more than a year many learners have achieved very few units of the NVQ or the technical certificate.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	3	100	1	100	7		7										
Retained*	0	0	1	100	5		6										
Successfully completed	0	0	0	0	1		0										
Still in learning	2	67	1	100	2		0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	29	100	23		32		3										
Retained*	0	0	15		19		3										
Successfully completed	0	0	8		7		0										
Still in learning	19	66	6		2		0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

60. Learners' progression is good. All those who attended the recent bite-size taster courses funded by the European Social Fund subsequently enrolled on the foundation award in caring for children or on children's care, learning and development courses. **Increasing numbers of learners progress from foundation to level 2 programmes. Most of the apprentices who successfully complete their programmes enter full-time employment. Others go into further education or training.**

61. Off-the-job training is satisfactorily planned. Lesson plans identify learning objectives and these are evaluated with the learners at the end of each session. Tutors use a good variety of activities to sustain learners' concentration. Effective links are made with occupational settings to support learning and maintain learners' interest. Tutors check frequently that learners fully understand the content. Learners participate well and make

FIRST COLLEGE

good contributions.

62. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. Teaching rooms are appropriately equipped with teaching aids. However, some rooms are small for the size of group and reproduction of resources is sometimes poor.

63. The recently extended induction programme is successful in helping learners adequately to understand their programme. Induction includes an initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Most learners on the early years courses are identified as needing support. They regularly receive individual support during off-the-job training. Most learners value the support and guidance they receive from their assessor.

64. Supervisors have insufficient involvement in training. Workplace supervisors are not routinely involved in formal review interviews with learners and assessors. Some have little knowledge of the apprenticeship programme and its requirements. They are unaware of how well the learner is progressing towards their qualification and how they could make an active contribution to the progress of the learner.

65. Action-planning is weak. Many action plans are not completed. Targets set at reviews and assessment meetings are insufficiently specific. In progress reviews, the previous action plan is often not discussed. The same action plan is sometimes repeated on several occasions. For example, one learner was set seven tasks to complete by the assessor's next visit. There was no prioritisation of the tasks or interim dates agreed for the completion of each one. Learners do not understand the targets.

66. Insufficient assessment takes place in the workplace. Too much reliance is placed on written work in portfolios. Assessors are unable to visit as often as required. Some visits are very brief with insufficient time to discuss learners' progress and agreed targets with supervisors. Some assessors' visits and progress reviews are not carried out within the agreed timescales.

Leadership and management

67. The assessors work very effectively as a team. More than 20 per cent of staff are new to the provider and have not worked as assessors previously. All staff are given a thorough induction to the company and their job role. They are provided with much support, including formal and informal mentoring, coaching and work shadowing. Staff meet regularly with their team manager to discuss learners' issues and identify further developmental needs. Staff development activities have been planned well to ensure that the new, inexperienced assessors work towards appropriate assessment, teaching and key skills qualifications.

68. Issues regarding equality of opportunity and diversity are fully integrated with early years programmes and practice, and are covered appropriately.

69. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. A recently introduced system for monitoring learners' progress and staff performance provides some very useful data. However, data has yet to be analysed critically enough and used to improve learners' progress.

70. Inspectors' judgements matched those in the self-assessment report that achievement

and progress rates are poor, but inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Retail and commercial enterprise**Grade 1**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Hospitality and catering</i>		<i>1</i>
Apprenticeships for young people	21	1
NVQ training for young people	45	1

71. First College is a centre of vocational excellence in hospitality and catering. It has 66 learners on programmes in hospitality and catering. Sixteen are on apprenticeships and five are on advanced apprenticeships. Forty-five learners are on an NVQ-only programme subcontracted from Boston College. These learners are not included in the performance tables. Of the 66 learners, 19 are on level 3 programmes which include hospitality supervision, kitchen and larder advanced craft, and food and drink advanced craft. Forty-three learners are on level 2 programmes which include food preparation and cooking, bar service, reception, and food and drink service. Four learners are on a level 1 NVQ in food preparation and cooking. Learners also work towards additional qualifications in foundation, intermediate and advanced food hygiene, health and safety, a personal licence course and other short courses at levels 1, 2 or 3.

72. Most learners attend First College one day a week. They receive an induction to their programme which includes health and safety, and equality of opportunity and they complete an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Training is provided in First College's on-site kitchen, restaurant facilities and a specialist lecture theatre. Assessment takes place in the learner's workplace or one of First College's training centres. There are 11 assessors and four internal verifiers. Learners' progress is formally reviewed every 12 weeks.

Hospitality and catering***Grade 1******Strengths***

- good retention and achievement rates
- particularly good development of vocational skills
- very good teaching and learning
- excellent resources to support learning
- very good progression through qualifications
- highly effective external partnerships

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory target-setting for some learners

Achievement and standards

73. Rates of retention, achievement and progress are good. They have significantly increased since the previous inspection, particularly on NVQ-only programmes which subcontracted from Boston College and which most learners are following. Of those

learners who started level 3 NVQ programmes in 2002-03, 86 per cent gained the qualification. This achievement rate fell to 74 per cent for learners starting in 2003-04 and, of those who started in 2004-05, 25 per cent have already gained the qualification with a further 50 per cent still in learning. Eighty-eight per cent of learners who started level 2 programmes in 2002-03 gained their qualification, falling to 57 per cent for learners starting in 2003-04. Of those who started in 2004-05, 31 per cent have already gained the qualification with a further 40 per cent still in learning. Fifty per cent of advanced apprentices who started in 2002-03 successfully completed all parts of the programme. This rate rose slightly to 53 per cent in 2003-04. Of those who started in 2004-05, 83 per cent are still in learning. On apprenticeship programmes, the achievement rate was 58 per cent for both the 2002-03 and 2003-04 intakes. Twenty-eight per cent of those who started in 2004-05 have already completed the programme with a further 50 per cent still in learning.

74. Learners develop particularly good occupational skills. Level 2 learners work exceptionally well alongside level 3 learners in First College's kitchens and restaurants. More experienced learners produce more complicated meat, poultry and game dishes. They also demonstrate particularly good service skills, such as silver service, and high standards in serving and preparing food at customers tables. Learners who deal with customers develop good customer service and personal skills. Learners are friendly and professional and have a good personal appearance. Learners show a pride in their work and in the skills they are developing. They produce a high standard of work in their background knowledge work, assignments and coursework. Their portfolios contain a diverse range of evidence including menus, recipes, learners' reports and photographs.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	6		19	100	18	100	3	100									
Retained*	0		10	53	9	50	2	67									
Successfully completed	0		10	53	9	50	2	67									
Still in learning	5		0	0	0	0	0	0									

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	32	100	36	100	50	100	19	100									
Retained*	6	19	22	61	29	58	15	79									
Successfully completed	9	28	21	58	29	58	15	79									
Still in learning	16	50	0	0	0	0	0	0									

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

75. Teaching and learning are very good. All observed sessions were judged to be good or better. Sessions are well planned, interesting and lively, and use clear and informative handouts relating to the dishes on the menus. Classes are particularly well managed, meeting the needs of individual learners. Learners are challenged and produce a high level of work. Tutors use questioning very well to check understanding and learning. Highly effective demonstrations in practical sessions provide learners with clear aims and objectives. The industry experience of tutors and learners is used to clarify points and create interest. Visual aids and specialist equipment are used to very good effect in all sessions. Key skills qualifications are very well integrated with lessons. Most learners and managers are fully aware of the relevance of key skills qualifications.

76. Resources to support learning are excellent. Specialist facilities in hospitality are well equipped. A large kitchen, fully equipped to industry standards, supports the learner-run bistro. There is a very good specialist fine dining kitchen and restaurant and a purpose-built residential dining room. The restaurant is open to the public, offering modern menus and a fine dining experience, and providing a realistic working environment and a high-quality experience for learners. Good use is made of themed evenings in the restaurant to allow learners to train on aspects they may otherwise not be able to do in their own workplace. For example, a themed evening, sponsored by a wine merchant, allowed learners to experience opening and serving champagne to customers. Books and background knowledge resources to support learning are very good. Working procedures for the restaurant are detailed and clearly linked to the requirements of learners' qualifications. Learners have good access to trade magazines and articles that relate to their qualifications. Learners generally have adequate access to ICT. All staff are very well qualified with a vast range of experience.

77. Learners' progression is very good. Progression routes from level 1 to level 3 qualifications are very clear. All learners are employed. Many learners participate in a number of different qualifications at same level before progressing onto a higher level. For example, many apprentices go on to achieve a wide range of additional qualifications to widen their skills before progressing on to level 3 qualifications. Progression from the schools programmes is good. Twenty-one learners have progressed from the schools-based Saturday cookery course onto either a level 1 or level 2 NVQ. Thirty-nine learners progressed from the introductory courses onto mainstream courses in 2004-05. Many learners are promoted into supervisory positions in their workplace. Learners make good progress towards their qualifications, with some completing their main qualification in only six months. Most learners achieve a wide range of additional qualifications such as the personal license certificate, and foundation and intermediate food hygiene qualifications. Some NVQ-only learners also gain key skills qualifications.

78. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessments are well planned and observations are well recorded, detailed and clearly referenced to the relevant NVQ units. Learners receive written and verbal feedback after assessments.

79. Literacy, language and numeracy skills support is adequate. Additional support is provided for learners in individual sessions.

80. Target-setting for most learners is unsatisfactory. Learners do not understand their

individual learning plans, which are not updated in response to the review process. Formal review interviews do not result in detailed actions to improve learning. They do not always identify targets or goals to assist in raising the level of a learner's literacy or numeracy skills. Action plans are written at each visit to a learner. However, targets do not systematically link to reviews and individual learning plans, and some action plans have no target dates on them at all. First College has recognised aspects of this weakness.

Leadership and management

81. External partnerships are highly effective. First College has good partnerships with a wide network of external providers and successfully gains sponsorship and additional funding to support learning. First College has been involved in setting up an effective hospitality forum group within Lincolnshire. It has good links with local schools which encourage year 10 and 11 students to participate in taster sessions in catering and a children's cookery club. The hospitality team manager sits on the board of several local and national organisations.

82. Communication is satisfactory. Weekly team meetings include discussion about individual learners. Staff are encouraged to widen their skills and experience through good staff development.

83. Learners are fully aware of the NVQ appeals procedure and generally have an acceptable awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity. Staff have a good understanding of the wider issues of equality and diversity. However, too little discussion and reinforcement of equality takes place during progress reviews.

84. Internal verification is satisfactory. Thorough sampling plans cover the checking of portfolios, the quality of observations and speaking with learners.

85. Self-assessment is satisfactory. Staff are fully involved in the process. Most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the inspection were contained in the self-assessment report.

86. First College offers a good range of courses, covering all areas of hospitality across all levels. Programmes are developed to meet the needs of local employers and schools. First College has recently introduced an accredited introductory cookery course for 14 to 16 year olds.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability training</i>		2
New Deal for young people	23	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	21	2

87. Forty-four participants are on a range of New Deal programmes. Twenty-three are New Deal for young people participants on basic employability training programmes and 21 are New Deal 25+ participants on full-time education and training programmes. Most participants attend First College one day a week for jobsearch activities and spend four days on a work placement. All employers offer on-the-job training. The provision is staffed by four part-time staff. Jobcentre Plus refers all participants to First College and designates which New Deal option they take. No participants are currently in programme centres.

88. A number of learners are on literacy and numeracy support programmes. These learners consist of the participants on the intensive New Deal courses and those NVQ learners receiving additional learning support at all of First College's sites.

Employability training**Grade 2***Strengths*

- good rates of achievement in numeracy qualifications
- very effective working with employers
- good teaching and learning
- good induction
- very good resources to support learning

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of individual learning
- insufficient integration of literacy and numeracy training with vocational programmes
- inadequate contingency planning for staff absence

Achievement and standards

89. Achievement rates are good on numeracy programmes. Many learners benefit significantly from attending foundation courses. All of the learners work towards nationally recognised qualifications in literacy and or numeracy. Sixty-five per cent of learners entered for external examinations have achieved literacy qualifications at level 1 and 2.

Seventy-four per cent of learners entered for external numeracy examinations achieved level 1 and 2 qualifications in 2004-05. Learners make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills and are more independent as a result of learning. For example, learners on literacy and numeracy courses improve their accuracy in spelling, decoding words and completing calculations. They are more confident in carrying out tasks involving literacy in front of other people.

90. Rates of entry into employment are improving and are now satisfactory. The proportion of New Deal 25+ participants gaining jobs was 18 per cent in 2002-03, 21 per cent in 2003-04 and 38 per cent in 2004-05. On New Deal for young people programmes, the proportion of participants finding jobs was 17 per cent in 2002-03, 24 per cent in 2003-04 and 50 per cent in 2004-05. So far for 2005-06, the rate of entry into employment so far is 32 per cent for New Deal for young people participants and 27 per cent for those on New Deal 25+ programmes. Of the 1,118 participants who have started in programme centres since 2001-02, 29 per cent gained employment.

91. All participants are increasing their social and employability skills and take part in community activities. One group of participants held a sponsored car wash to raise funds for a new children's hospice in Gainsborough. This activity demonstrated good team-building and social skills.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	27		292	100	110	100	92	100	38	100						
Retained*	13		140	48	73	66	69	75	25	66						
Planned learning completed	13		140	48	69	63	64	70	24	63						
Gained job	3		112	38	23	21	17	18	7	18						
Still in training	12		8	3	1	1	0	0	0	0						

*retained participants are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal for Young People	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	38		66	100	25	100	6	100								
Retained*	6		26	39	7	28	3	50								
Planned learning completed	6		27	41	4	16	2	33								
Gained job	6		29	44	6	24	1	17								
Still in training	23		0	0	0	0	0	0								

*retained participants are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

The quality of provision

92. First College works very effectively with a wide variety of very good employers who offer very effective work placements. The range of work placements ensures that participants are well matched to placements that meet their career expectations. Work placements are offered in retail, warehousing, leisure, business administration, early years

and hospitality settings.

93. Teaching is good. No observed teaching and learning sessions were graded as unsatisfactory. Tutors are skilled at developing participants' skills in the context of topics that are relevant to their everyday lives. They have a good understanding of participants' difficulties in grasping concepts. They provide good explanations and adapt their teaching methods appropriately. In literacy and numeracy, participants are not aware of their individual targets and what they need to do to improve their skills. They enjoy the lively and challenging lessons and are actively involved. Tutors prepare appropriate materials for all ability levels and adapt them for each group. Most groups are of mixed-ability and are inclusive for those with learning difficulties. Tutors make good use of the internet to develop independent learning materials.

94. There is a good induction process where health and safety issues are explained. Participants receive a comprehensive handbook. They are challenged to analyse their own barriers to employment and use this to develop their individual programme of learning. All participants undergo diagnostic assessment using a commercial package and tutors analyse the results with them. A detailed plan for development of skills and work preparation is identified with each participant.

95. A good range of resources is available to support learning. Participants benefit from a good range of textbooks and learning materials. They also have computers with internet access to be used for research, specific skills for life software, games for numeracy concept development, journals, magazines and audiovisual resources. All ICT equipment is up to date and well maintained. There are coloured screens for learners with dyslexia, and adaptive keyboards and tracker mice for people with disabilities. Up-to-date teaching and learning resources are available in all sites and are used well. Good-quality computers and printers are available for planned sessions and individual jobsearch. Most teaching staff are highly qualified and have appropriate experience of teaching in their subjects. Accommodation is satisfactory. All venues have appropriate areas for tutors to carry out confidential interviews. A range of national and local newspapers and job news sheets is available.

96. Individual learning is not sufficiently recorded. Most participants make good progress in improving their levels of literacy and numeracy skills. However, their progress is not recorded well. Progress reviews take place every four weeks. Learning plans reflect the results of the initial and diagnostic assessments and interview records. However, targets are not set with achievable steps identified to attain the targets. Progress reviews are very descriptive and do not adequately identify the skills learnt. For example, one review records that one participant confidently uses a cash till, rather than assessing the numeracy skills which allow the participant to give and receive change. First College's staff do not routinely record skills development during on- or off-the-job training. Additional support with literacy and numeracy is not routinely recorded in participants' files.

97. Literacy and numeracy training is not sufficiently integrated into vocational areas of learning. Plans to develop resources through project work are in place, but it is too soon to measure the effect on participants. Programmes of work are mainly specific to grammar or reading and writing and not always linked to work skills. However, literacy and numeracy training is not sufficiently established within the jobsearch and work-preparation programmes. First College identifies this in the self-assessment report and detailed but not

timebound plans exist for vocational staff to work with the literacy and numeracy team.

Leadership and management

98. Data is routinely collected about participants who leave the programmes. First College's staff contact employers and participants six months after the end of the programme. They offer additional support and advice to participants and collect feedback from employers about the suitability of the preparation the participant received before entering employment. This information is used to monitor the effectiveness of the programme in gaining sustained employment and also to plan improvements to the provision.

99. Managers work with external organisations and community groups to identify significant groups of potential participants to plan new courses. Tutors have good opportunities to develop their skills. Take-up of relevant training and development is good.

100. There is a well-developed skills for life action plan. It is costed and timebound and identifies responsibilities. However, best practice, for example in teaching methods and the development of targets for individual learning plans is not routinely shared across the provision.

Business administration and law**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Accounting and finance		2
Apprenticeships for young people	9	2
NVQ training for young people	36	2
Administration		2
Apprenticeships for young people	54	2
NVQ training for young people	14	2
Customer service		3
Apprenticeships for young people	16	3
NVQ training for young people	2	3

101. First College currently provides programmes for 45 learners in accounting, 68 learners in administration and 18 in customer service. In total, there are 20 advanced apprentices and 59 apprentices. Fifty-two learners are working towards NVQs at levels 2, 3 or 4. Most are funded through franchise arrangements with Boston College and Lincoln College. Learners are recruited through Connexions, Jobcentre Plus, employers or personal recommendation, and can join programmes at any time. They all receive an initial assessment and induction, either individually or in groups. Learners attend weekly or fortnightly for off-the-job training at First College's training centres in Skegness, Peterborough, Louth and Gainsborough. They are visited regularly in the workplace for assessment and progress reviews, which are completed every 12 weeks.

Accounting and finance**Grade 2***Strengths*

- good rates of achievement
- good matching of learners to jobs
- good teaching
- particularly good personal support

Weaknesses

- insufficient access to learning resources

Achievement and standards

102. Achievement rates are good for accounting learners. Sixty-two per cent of advanced apprentices who started in 2002-03 achieved all parts of the framework. Sixty-two per cent of those who started in the following year have already completed their framework, with a further 12 per cent still in learning.

103. Fifty per cent of apprentices who started in 2002-03 completed the framework, with 75 per cent of the next year's intake doing the same. Thirty-three per cent of those who started in 2004-05 have already completed, with an additional 42 per cent still in learning.

104. Fifty-eight per cent of NVQ learners who started in 2002-03 gained their qualification. Fifty-seven per cent of those who started in the next year have completed, with a further 43 per cent still in learning. Most of the learners on NVQ-only programmes are franchised from local colleges, and are not included in the performance tables.

105. Learners have consistently achieved pass rates in external assessments which are above the national average. Eighty-six per cent of learners passed recent external examinations.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	4		8	100	8	100	2	100									
Retained*	2		6	75	5	62	2	100									
Successfully completed	2		5	62	5	62	1	50									
Still in learning	2		1	12	1	12	0	0									

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	12		8	100	20	100											
Retained*	4		7	88	13	65											
Successfully completed	4		6	75	10	50											
Still in learning	5		0	0	0	0											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	4		7		12	100	15	100									
Retained*	0		7		9	75	10	67									
Successfully completed	0		4		7	58	9	60									
Still in learning	4		3		0	0	0	0									

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

106. First College matches learners particularly well to jobs. It works well with an extensive network of employers, who regularly approach them to recruit apprentices. First College carries out a detailed job role analysis with each employer, and then assesses learners for their relevant skills, aptitudes and career aspirations, before sending them for

FIRST COLLEGE

interview by the employer. Learners generally settle into their jobs quickly and make valuable contributions at an early stage. Learners are given greater responsibilities as their skills and confidence develop and they often obtain promotion during their training.

107. Teaching is good. Teaching sessions are well planned and structured. Tutors make good use of learners' preferred learning styles within lesson planning. Homework is issued and marked promptly. Extra revision is provided before examinations and learners are able to contact tutors if they need help between sessions. Sessions on equality and diversity are particularly effective, and learners participate enthusiastically in discussion, demonstrating a good understanding of the issues involved. Learners also develop good skills within the workplace such as team-working and time management skills, the use of specialist ICT packages and customer-facing skills.

108. Personal support for learners is particularly good. Assessors visit apprentices frequently in the workplace and can be contacted at any time by e-mail or telephone. Problems encountered in the workplace are quickly dealt with. Several learners have received extra support and have remained successfully in the job as a result.

109. Assessment is satisfactory. Portfolios are organised, presented well and contain a wide range of evidence, including direct observation, product evidence, professional discussion and personal statements. Detailed witness statements provide clear evidence showing how competence has been demonstrated in the workplace. However, insufficient use is made of direct observation in the workplace.

110. Progress reviews are satisfactory. They take place every 12 weeks in the workplace and the employer is usually involved. Progress since the previous review is discussed, together with any actions needing to be taken before the next review. However, discussions about equality and health and safety issues are not sufficiently recorded.

111. Access to some learning resources is inadequate. Learners are often frustrated by poor-quality ICT resources. Access to the internet is often slow and some learners' work has been lost. Learners are not always aware of available resources in training centres, or how to access them. There are insufficient textbooks and other reference sources, particularly for level 3 and 4 programmes. Internal observation of teaching and learning identified this as an issue, and First College recognises the weakness.

Leadership and management

112. The reinforcement of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners feel well protected and are treated with dignity and respect.

113. First College has made many improvements to the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets the awarding body's requirements.

114. The self-assessment process was thorough and involved staff. Judgements are broadly accurate, and weaknesses are recognised.

Administration**Grade 2***Strengths*

- good matching of learners to jobs
- very effective initial assessment
- good teaching
- particularly good personal support

Weaknesses

- insufficient access to learning resources
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress

Achievement and standards

115. Achievement rates for business administration programmes are satisfactory and are showing signs of improvement. Forty-five per cent of those who started their apprenticeship in 2002-03 gained the qualification, as have 53 per cent of those who started in 2003-04, with a further 8 per cent of this intake still in learning. Twenty-five per cent of advanced apprentices who started in 2004-05 have already completed their framework with a further 75 per cent still in learning. Both learners who started in 2003-04 are still in learning. All current learners on NVQ-only programmes are franchised from local colleges, and are not included in the performance tables.

116. Administration learners all achieve additional qualifications in ICT. Retention strategies are proving to be effective and there are fewer early leavers on all programmes. There is good progression from level 2 to level 3 programmes.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	12		2	100	6	100											
Retained*	2		0	0	3	50											
Successfully completed	3		0	0	3	50											
Still in learning	9		2	100	0	0											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	60		36	100	69	100	43	100									
Retained*	21		23	64	34	49	29	67									
Successfully completed	32		17	47	31	45	25	58									
Still in learning	5		6	17	0	0	0	0									

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
NVQ Training	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	1	100	6	100	4	100											
Retained*	1	100	3	50	1	25											
Successfully completed	1	100	2	33	1	25											
Still in learning	0	0	0	0	0	0											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

117. First College matches unemployed learners particularly well to jobs. It works well with an extensive network of employers who regularly approach it to recruit apprentices. First College carries out a detailed job role analysis with each employer, and then assesses learners for their relevant skills, aptitudes and career aspirations, before sending them for interview by the employer. Learners generally settle into their jobs quickly and make valuable contributions at an early stage. Learners are given greater responsibilities as their skills and confidence develop and they often obtain promotion during their training

118. Teaching is good. Teaching sessions are well planned and structured. The ratio of staff to learners is high. Staff are well qualified and experienced professionally, although few have teaching qualifications. Sessions on equality and diversity are particularly effective and learners participate enthusiastically in discussion, demonstrating a good understanding of the issues involved. Key skills training has significantly improved and learners are clearly motivated by being able to communicate and use numbers effectively in the workplace. Learners also develop good skills in the workplace such as team-working and time management skills, the use of specialist ICT packages and customer-facing skills.

119. Personal support for learners is particularly good. Assessors visit apprentices frequently in the workplace and can be contacted at any time by e-mail or telephone. Problems encountered in the workplace are quickly dealt with. Several learners have received extra monitoring and support and have remained successfully in their job as a result. Where it is not possible to resolve workplace issues, First College finds another job for the learner very quickly.

120. Assessment is satisfactory. Portfolios are organised and presented well and contain a wide range of evidence, including direct observation, product evidence, professional

discussion and personal statements. Detailed witness statements provide clear evidence showing how competence has been demonstrated in the workplace.

121. Progress reviews are satisfactory. They take place every 12 weeks in the workplace and the employer is usually involved. Progress since the previous review is discussed, together with any actions needing to be taken before the next review. However, discussions about equality, and health and safety issues are not sufficiently recorded.

122. Monitoring of learners' progress is weak. While progress towards units is well documented in portfolios, managers do not effectively use First College's system to accurately monitor learners' progress. Some learners who have been on programme for six months or more have completed few NVQ units. This weakness is being rectified by First College.

123. Access to some learning resources is inadequate. Learners are often frustrated by poor-quality ICT resources. Access to the internet is often slow and some learners' work has been lost. Learners are not always aware of available resources in the training centre, or how to access them. There are insufficient textbooks and other reference sources, particularly for level 3 and 4 programmes. Internal observation of teaching and learning identified this as an issue, and First College recognises the weakness.

Leadership and management

124. Many improvements have been made to the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Rates of retention are improving and First College has improved initial assessment and support for learners.

125. Curriculum management is satisfactory. Staff share best practice at the regular team meetings.

126. The reinforcement of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners feel well protected and are treated with dignity and respect.

127. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory and meet the awarding body's requirements.

128. The self-assessment process was thorough and involved staff. Judgements are broadly accurate, and weaknesses are recognised.

Customer service

Grade 3

Strengths

- good matching of learners to jobs
- good teaching
- particularly good personal support

Weaknesses

- low rates of achievement
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress

FIRST COLLEGE

- insufficient access to learning resources

Achievement and standards

129. Achievement rates for customer service are low. Only one-third of those who started their advanced apprenticeship in 2003-04 completed the framework. All of those who started in the following year are still in learning. Forty-three per cent of those who started an apprenticeship in 2003-04 have completed the framework, with a further 14 per cent still in learning. However, of those who started in 2004-05, 20 per cent have already achieved their apprenticeship and a further 53 per cent are still in learning.

130. Customer service learners all achieve additional qualifications in ICT. Retention strategies are proving to be effective and there are fewer early leavers than in earlier years. Some learners are making slow progress. Eleven per cent of learners who started in 2002-03 are still in learning.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	3		3	100	9	100	3										
Retained*	1		2	67	6	67	2										
Successfully completed	0		1	33	4	44	2										
Still in learning	3		1	33	1	11	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	15		7	100	18	100	6	100									
Retained*	4		5	71	10	56	3	50									
Successfully completed	3		3	43	8	44	3	50									
Still in learning	8		1	14	2	11	0	0									

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
NVQ Training	2002-03		2001-02														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	14	100	21	100													
Retained*	9	64	9	43													
Successfully completed	8	57	8	38													
Still in learning	0	0	0	0													

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

131. First College matches unemployed learners particularly well to jobs. It works well with an extensive network of employers who regularly approach it to recruit apprentices. First College carries out a detailed job role analysis with each employer, and then assesses learners for their relevant skills, aptitudes and career aspirations before sending them for interview by the employer. Learners generally settle into the jobs quickly and make valuable contributions at an early stage. Learners are given greater responsibilities as their skills and confidence develops and they often obtain promotion during their training.

132. Teaching is good. Teaching sessions are well planned and structured. Off-the-job training is flexibly arranged to meet the needs of small employers. Learners are supported well by the tutor in groups or individually. Sessions on equality and diversity are particularly effective and learners participate enthusiastically in discussion, demonstrating a good understanding of the issues involved. Key skills training has improved significantly, and learners are becoming able to communicate and use numbers effectively in the workplace. Staff are well qualified and experienced professionally, although few have teaching qualifications. Learners also develop good skills in the workplace, such as team-working and time management.

133. Personal support for learners is good. Assessors visit apprentices frequently in the workplace and can be contacted at any time by e-mail or telephone. Problems encountered in the workplace are quickly dealt with. First College responds immediately to concerns and has given extra monitoring and support to several learners to help them remain in their jobs.

134. Assessment is satisfactory. Portfolios are organised and presented well, and contain a wide range of evidence, including direct observation, product evidence, professional discussion and personal statements. Detailed witness statements provide clear evidence showing how learners demonstrate new skills in the workplace.

135. Progress reviews are satisfactory. They take place every 12 weeks in the workplace and the employer is usually involved. Progress since the previous review is discussed, together with any actions needing to be taken before the next review. However, discussions about equality, and health and safety issues are not sufficiently recorded.

136. Monitoring of learners' progress is weak. While progress towards NVQ units is documented well in portfolios, managers do not effectively monitor learners who make slow progress. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report.

137. Access to some learning resources is inadequate. Learners are often frustrated by poor-quality ICT resources. Access to the internet is often slow and some learners' work has been lost. Learners are not always aware of available resources, or how to access them. There are insufficient textbooks and other reference sources. First College recognises the weakness in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

138. First College has made some improvements to the quality of provision since the previous inspection. Rates of retention are improving, as have initial assessment and

FIRST COLLEGE

support for learners.

139. Curriculum management is satisfactory. Staff share best practice at the regular team meetings.

140. The reinforcement of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners feel well protected and are treated with dignity and respect.

141. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory and meet the awarding body's requirements.

142. The self-assessment process was thorough and involved staff. Judgements are broadly accurate, and weaknesses are recognised.

