

Further Education



FURTHER EDUCATION

Introduction

247. In 2004 DEL published FE Means Business, which sought to secure for further education a particular mission and vision within The Northern Ireland Economic Vision (2004) and DEL's Skills Strategy (2004). All three documents⁹, while recognising the particular difficulties faced by Northern Ireland in the past, focus on the need for the region to face the future through catching up and competing with strong international economies. In particular, FE Means Business re-affirms the sector's aims to strengthen economic development, increase its provision in the six skill areas identified as priority, promote Lifelong Learning, enhance social cohesion, and advance the individual's skills and learning. Over the 2004-06 period, DEL has worked with the sector and other key stakeholders to turn the strategy document into relevant and coherent policies.
248. The immediate challenge is in managing the transition to a sector with a clear remit of being increasingly responsive to the needs of the economy, including a reduction in the number of individually managed college units. This restructuring has the potential to ensure greater alignment with the Skills Strategy through increased collaboration within the sector itself.
249. The realisation of these aims depends on good collaboration at all levels of Government and across the education and training sectors. If achieved, all of the above will have a profound and positive effect on the economic development of Northern Ireland. While the evidence from inspection shows that organisations are starting to work more collaboratively, there is still much to be done to develop joined-up thinking and action if the vision for a highly skilled workforce is to be achieved by 2015.

Further details of demographics and sustainability are contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: Demographics and Sustainability

⁹ Available on the DEL website: www.delni.gov.uk

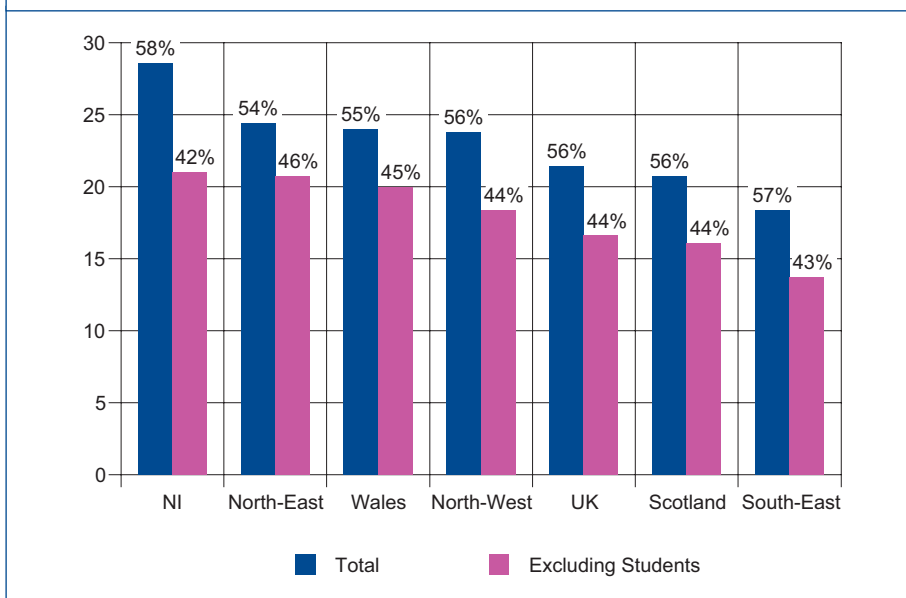
250. There are just under 7,300 staff employed in the further education sector in Northern Ireland. More than two-thirds of these are teaching staff, the majority of whom are part-time, whereas management positions are almost exclusively full-time. Seventy percent of lecturers have a teacher training qualification at some level. Currently, only full-time or associate lecturing staff are required to have a post-graduate professional teaching qualification. It is timely that steps are being taken to introduce a framework of teaching qualifications for all those working in the further education and training sectors.

Figure 50: Staffing in colleges of further education 2004-05

2004-05	Full-Time Staff			Part-time Staff		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Sector	1,051	1,161	2,212	1,160	1,939	3,099

251. Almost 70% of total enrolments are adults; most are enrolled on a part-time basis. The remainder are 16-19 year olds; just under 30% are full-time students. The percentage of 16-17 year olds in further education remains constant at approximately 26% of the total cohort and these students tend to be those who have fewer than five GCSEs at A*-C. The need for these young people to progress successfully through their education becomes all the more apparent when viewed alongside current statistics for economic inactivity in Northern Ireland. While employment figures continue to improve, the country still has the highest levels of economic inactivity in the United Kingdom.

Figure 51: Rates of economic inactivity¹⁰



252. Most stakeholders continue to place less value on vocational education and on professional and technical training than they do on academic studies, despite many schools taking advantage of KS4 Flexibility and of the particular expertise in further education colleges. In preparation for the introduction of the Entitlement Framework in 2009, DEL and DE responded to these concerns by introducing a pilot programme of Vocational Enhancement (VEP) in September 2004 for 16-19 year olds, extending it further to include in 2005 the KS4 Flexibility programme for 14-16 year olds.
253. VEP is a significant initiative in building the capacity of the further education and schools sectors to work better together to provide an effective response to the learning requirements of young people. Further education colleges and schools have worked together, in a responsive and flexible manner but with varying degrees of success. There has been a significant increase in the number of young people participating in the scheme. The participants' learning programmes have broadened but what is less certain is the degree to which the additional elements relate to the rest of the young people's studies and the extent to which they influence subsequent learning choices.

¹⁰ Figures taken from DFP information

Figure 52: The Vocational Enhancement Programme 2004–06

Year	No of ELBs	No of colleges	No of schools	No of courses	Total Participants
2004-05	All	6	35	68	1,227
2005-06	All	16	192	339	12,500

An evaluation of the provision for 14-19 year olds is contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: 14-19 Provision

254. What are the main strengths in further education?

The main strengths are:

- the relationships between staff and students;
- the suitably broad range of vocational courses provided by most colleges;
- the quality of most of the teaching;
- the suitably qualified staff who are deployed appropriately;
- the mostly effective management at course team level;
- in the majority of colleges, the provision of well-equipped learning resource centres;
- the excellent to good quality of provision in those Centres of Excellence inspected over the 2004-06 period; and
- the good or better quality of the accommodation, increasingly reflecting the best standards in the world of industry and commerce, as a result of the significant investment by DEL in the college estates.

255. What improvements have been brought about during the period 2004-06?

Improvements are evident in:

- the good progress made by the majority of colleges towards collaboration across the sector, increasing links with business and industry, and responding to the needs of the local community, in line with the key objectives of FE Means Business;
- the success rates for those who complete their course of study;
- the good or better progression rates to employment and further or higher education in almost all colleges, for those students who complete their course of study;
- in the majority of colleges, the effectiveness of the strategic leadership and the governing bodies' supportive involvement in the strategic planning process;
- the increasing investment by the colleges in a wide range of appropriate continuing professional development programmes for managers at all levels;
- the positive impact of DEL's significant investment in Information and Learning Technology (ILT), resulting in the good quality infrastructure across the sector, and, to a lesser extent, in the improved levels of staff confidence and competence in using ILT;
- the increasing collaboration with the post-primary sector, in particular through the VEP and KS4 Flexibility programmes;
- the quality of learning and teaching in essential skills; and
- the emerging provision in science-based courses in key areas such as biotechnology.

256. What further improvements are needed?

The main actions needed to bring about further improvement are:

- for a significant minority of colleges, strengthening the links with industry;
- increasing the percentage of enrolments in the priority skills areas from its current level of approximately 25%, and also in vocational areas and courses which lead to externally regulated qualifications;

- ensuring a sufficiently broad interpretation of the requirements of course specifications so that young people gain the vital transferable skills and competences they need, irrespective of the curriculum area followed;
- using ILT more effectively to support and improve the quality of the students' learning experiences and to exploit fully the potential of the new technologies;
- making more skilled use of the analysis and interpretation of the relevant data, in particular that related to enrolment trends and targets, and retention and achievement rates, to inform decision-making and quality improvement;
- developing more effective quality assurance arrangements, including the monitoring and evaluation of cross-college areas, such as the range of support services for learners and the provision for essential skills, ILT and careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG);
- aligning more closely the course review, staff development, quality assurance and college development planning processes;
- providing effective strategic leadership, planning and co-ordination of the essential skills provision for both part-time and full-time students;
- establishing and consolidating a culture of inclusion across all provision and co-ordinating effective learning support services for all students with learning difficulties and disabilities;
- providing CEIAG that is more coherent and of a consistently high quality;
- ensuring effective tutorial provision and learner support for all students that will help them to understand the coherence of their learning programme and begin to take responsibility for their own learning; and
- revising and extending pastoral care and child protection policies to take account of the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003 (POCVA).

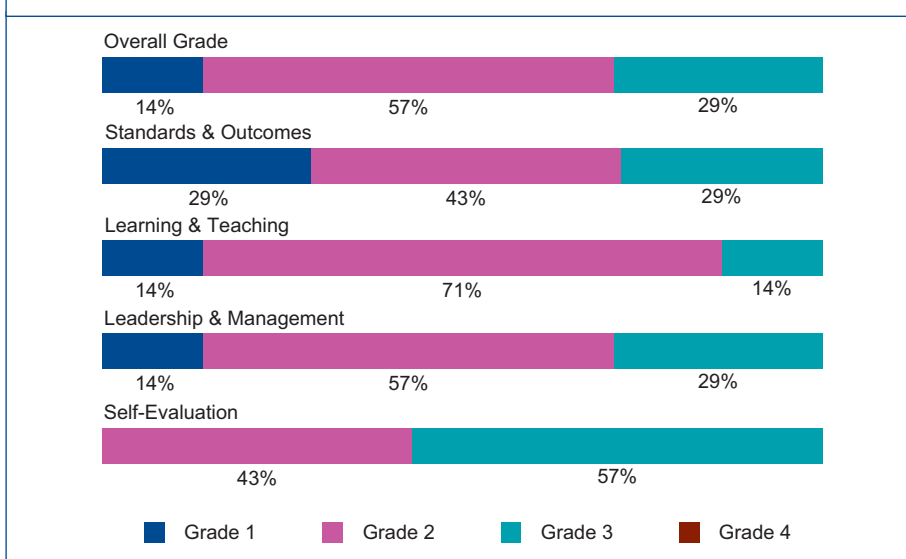
The scope of the Inspectorate's work in further education over the period 2004-2006

257. The Inspectorate carries out inspections of, and specialist visits to, further education colleges, in addition to undertaking work commissioned directly by DEL. The main focus of inspection activity has continued to be on the totality of the provision for

learners in individual colleges and increasingly, through a range of survey inspections, on the impact of new initiatives or curriculum development.

258. Over 920 teaching sessions were observed in the course of seven inspections of colleges, involving the evaluation of 76 curriculum areas. In addition, three Centres of Excellence were inspected. The Inspectorate scrutinised the annual development plans for each college and completed a wide range of survey inspections.

Figure 53: Grades awarded to further education colleges



Overview of further education

259. The outcomes of the focused inspections are broadly similar to those reported for 2002-04. It remains a matter of concern that, as in 2004, generic and cross-college issues, including student support, tutorial provision, key and essential skills, and careers education and guidance, continue to feature prominently as areas for improvement. Inspection evidence indicates that often the narrow approach to the delivery of course specifications is at the expense of young people gaining the vital transferable skills and competences they need, irrespective of the curriculum area followed.
260. Similarly, while progress has been made in workforce development, there is a need to align closely the staff development, quality assurance and college development planning processes. The significant number of part-time lecturers need to be better supported in developing further their teaching competences.

Standards and Outcomes: how well do learners achieve?

261. In the majority of colleges, the standards achieved by students are satisfactory or better. In two colleges, the standards of work are less than satisfactory. Approximately 75% of the work has more strengths than weaknesses and around 30% has significant strengths. This compares favourably with the previous Chief Inspector's Report where around 20% had significant strengths.
262. Retention rates across the colleges and courses remain variable, ranging from poor to excellent. Often this wide variation is evident within a single college. In the period 2004-05, there is a variation of 21% between the lowest and the highest performing college in relation to the average retention rates for full-time students. There is a much smaller difference of just 10% in the same figures for part-time students.
263. In almost all the colleges inspected, the success and progression rates are good or better for those who complete their course of study. The success rates within and across courses and colleges vary from 52% to 90% on full-time courses and from 56% to 80% on part-time courses.
264. Leaders and managers need to do more to analyse the reasons for the wide variations in performance across curriculum areas and to disseminate widely the existing good practice. They need to use more effectively all the available data on enrolment trends and targets, and retention and achievement rates to inform decision-making and quality improvement.

How effective are the arrangements for pastoral care?

265. All of the colleges continue to place a strong emphasis on the pastoral care of their students and staff, and inspection evidence indicates that, increasingly, they are developing a range of appropriate programmes to support students and staff experiencing specific difficulties. All have pastoral care and child protection policies and procedures in place, and are now making progress in updating these in line with POCVA¹¹ to include provision for vulnerable adults.

¹¹ The Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003 (POCVA)

266. Although all colleges have established a tutorial programme, the provision in almost all of them is underdeveloped. The students' experiences are variable, there are insufficient opportunities to share good practice and the systems for monitoring and evaluating the provision are inadequate. There is often insufficient emphasis on supporting students to develop appropriate personal time management. One college, inspected during the reporting period, has well-established and effective tutorial provision which is used by almost all the course teams to track the students' progress and to identify those in need of additional help.

Further evaluation of pastoral care and child protection is contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: Pastoral Care and Child Protection

How effective is the provision for special educational needs and the arrangements for inclusion?

267. The sector has responded positively to the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDI). In preparation for its implementation, staff from all 16 colleges participated in well-planned awareness-raising training.
268. Colleges respond at an early stage to remove barriers to learning for students who have severe disabilities or learning difficulties. The screening of the enrolment forms of students who have less obvious difficulties or special needs is not happening quickly enough to ensure that any necessary learning support is put in place early in their programme.
269. There remains much to be done to establish securely a culture of inclusion across all of the colleges' provision and to ensure that all students are fully integrated into college life and work. Colleges need to co-ordinate effective learning support services across their provision, and to put in place more effective monitoring, review and evaluation procedures for all students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

How effective are learning and teaching in individual curriculum areas?

Figure 54: Grades awarded to curriculum areas in further education colleges

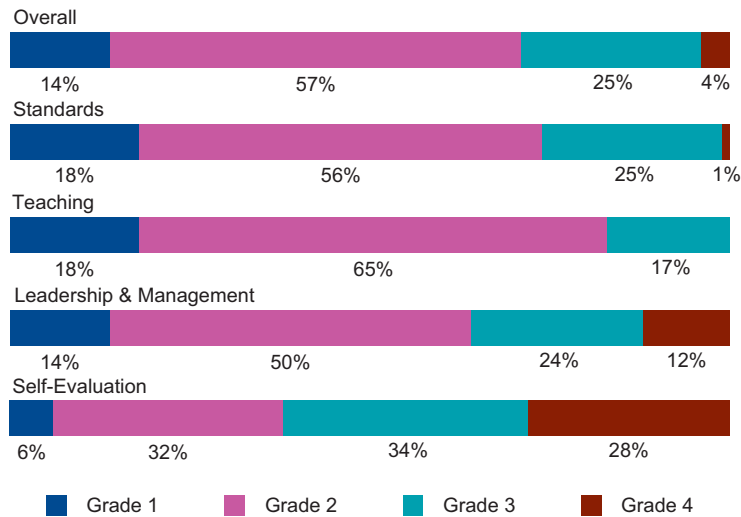
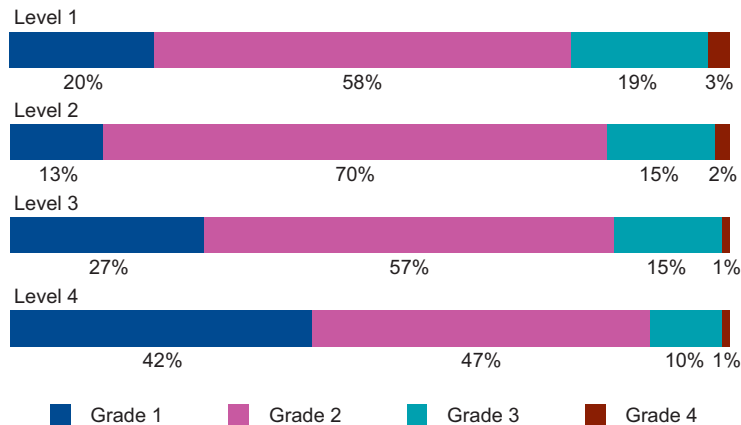


Figure 55: Lesson grades by level of course



270. Through the inspection questionnaires, and in discussion with inspectors, students comment favourably on the good relationships that exist between themselves and their lecturers. They generally find their work interesting and challenging. These views are reflected in the quality of the teaching observed during the 2004-06 period.

271. Standards in learning and teaching show significant strengths, or more strengths than weaknesses, in around 84% of the work inspected. The spread of lesson grades is similar to those of previous years. Where teaching shows significant strengths, the staff have high expectations of themselves and their students. They display the ability to make accurate assessments of what the learners have achieved and to design coherent programmes which meet the learners' needs. Often, the staff's expertise is evident in their up-to-date understanding of the world of work and their creative teaching strategies that help the students to become more independent learners. They achieve an appropriate balance across the course in developing the students' specific curricular skills and their transferable skills and lead by example in being able to evaluate their own performance and to improve on what they do.
272. The percentage of lessons graded 1 has not improved substantially; the majority of teaching tends more towards the adequate than the outstanding. The most frequent shortcomings are overly-directed teaching approaches or a narrow focus on fulfilling the minimal requirements of the course specifications. The grades reflect a wide variation across colleges; in one, only 4% of lessons had areas for improvement that outweighed the strengths, while in another, around 35% of the lessons were of a low quality. Similar variations are evident between colleges in the proportion of lessons with significant strengths.

Essential skills: how effective are the learning and teaching?

273. In 2004, key skills at levels 1 and 2 in communication and application of number were replaced with essential skills in literacy and numeracy respectively. This change is reflected in an increase of approximately 20% in the number of learners enrolled in essential skills during the reporting period. The target of 18,500 essential skills qualifications to be achieved by March 2007 has been exceeded. Most of these qualifications were at entry level. The statistics available at June 2006 indicate a success rate of 76%, which is a 15% increase over the previous year. The essential skills provision in five of the six colleges inspected had more areas for improvement than it had strengths. In most cases, the findings of the follow-up inspections have shown improvement although there continue to be significant areas for further development.
274. Inspection evidence points to the need for improved initial assessment to inform the planning for teaching and to ensure that learners are suitably challenged to work at the levels of which they are capable. For those on vocational courses, their literacy and numeracy provision is most commonly being developed separately from the

vocational programme with too little support for the development of these skills from lecturers and management in the vocational areas. In approximately half of the colleges, the tutors do not have a clear understanding of the adult core curricula and rely too heavily on worksheets rather than on helping the learners to apply their skills in meaningful contexts. In most colleges the curricular leadership and management of the provision has many shortcomings. There is negligible review and evaluation of the provision or appropriate mechanisms to track progress made by the learners through, for example, the essential skills levels or to determine to what extent the learners' newly-acquired skills benefit them, their family or their employer.

The Provision of Additional Vocational Courses (Additionality): what is the quality of the outcomes for learners?

275. Over the period 2004-06, only a minority of full time 16-19 year olds in further education gained either an additional vocational qualification or a qualification in the key or essential skill of application of number, communication and IT. The proportion of students taking additional vocational subjects alongside their main programme of study has reduced significantly. In 2004-05, only 11% of full-time students enrolled for additional vocational subjects, increasing slightly to 19% in 2005-06. The remainder of the additionality enrolments were in key or essential skills, with the majority at level 2. The outcomes from the key or essential skills additionality provision have been poor. Appropriately, as part of the implementation of FE Means Business, DEL is reviewing its funding of this type of provision.

How good is the provision for science in further education?

276. There has been considerable progress in improving the science provision in the sector. The Learning and Skills Development Agency's (LSDA) (NI) action research project¹² examined the training needs of the science industry in Northern Ireland. The findings have stimulated the development of science-based courses focused on the need for sound practical skills and for enhancing the students' theoretical knowledge in line with new developments, including biotechnology. A continuing challenge is the need to work with local industry and higher education to provide courses in areas where skills and knowledge are rapidly changing.

¹² Meeting the Training Needs of the Science Industry in Northern Ireland, LSDA (NI)

What is the quality of the work of Centres of Excellence?

277. The Centres of Excellence are well resourced and their work is of a good to excellent standard. They are required to maintain a high level of provision across the full range of their courses and their staff must keep at the forefront of developments in their respective disciplines. There is particularly good work in a number of disciplines, involving effective collaboration with a range of stakeholders, to develop the curriculum, to identify suitable staff development opportunities and to build links with industry and other sectoral bodies. The centres need to engage more fully with the further education and training sectors to disseminate good practice and promote further improvement in academic and work-based standards.

How good is the provision and use of ILT?

278. The positive impact of DEL's significant investment in ILT is most noticeable in the good quality infrastructure across the sector, and, to a lesser extent, in the improved levels of staff confidence and competence in using ILT. While blended learning (including a mix of on-line and face-to-face experiences) is becoming more prevalent across the curriculum areas, ILT remains more widely used for learning support and independent learning, rather than enhancing the key aspects of teaching and learning.
279. Staff development in ILT remains a key area for improvement. The use of ILT as a teaching tool for whole-class work has improved but in almost all colleges, there should be a sharper focus on teaching methods that blend effectively traditional approaches and e-learning, rather than concentrating on the content and resources accessed by students through the Internet or in virtual learning environments (VLEs). There is great variation in the use, quality and performance of college VLEs and in their integration with the sector-wide management information system.
280. In too many colleges, establishing the systemic, widespread and effective use of ILT remains at an early stage. There is not yet a sufficient return from the substantial investment in ILT, as measured by improved performance, raised standards of learning and greater flexibility and innovation in teaching. DEL remains committed firmly to the further development of ILT and e-learning and, in partnership with the key stakeholders, an appropriate strategy has been put in place to address the outstanding issues and constraints on progress.

How good is careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG)?

An evaluation of careers provision is contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance

How appropriate and effective are the arrangements for staff development?

281. In the majority of colleges, most staff are appropriately qualified and deployed; a significant minority are not sufficiently up-to-date with industrial developments and skills within their field of expertise. Staff development, particularly for part-time staff, needs to become a more integral part of the colleges' development planning processes to ensure that all staff are appropriately expert and well-trained in teaching methods that promote the learners' confidence, motivation, and ability to apply their learning.
282. The Lecturers into Industry scheme includes four new strands; Business IT, Creative Technologies, Motor Vehicle and Bio-Science. In two of the three Centres of Excellence inspected, there has been significant investment in, and benefits from, this scheme. There is a need to increase the participation of lecturers across the sector, and to disseminate the benefits to other staff, and maintain the important links established with the host business or industry.

How effective are the leadership and management?

283. There have been improvements in the quality of the strategic planning across colleges, although more remains to be done to develop the capacity for effective leadership, at both strategic and operational levels, throughout the sector. In particular there is a need for the senior management teams to refine their procedures for evaluating their own performance and use the outcomes of these evaluations to inform planning for improvement.
284. In the majority of colleges, there has been an increased focus in college development plans (CDP) on the implementation of strategies to improve learning and teaching, and raise standards. In the best practice, aims are shared widely at all levels among management and staff, there is strong strategic and operational curriculum planning, key performance objectives are linked effectively to targets, and management teams monitor and record systematically the achievement of these targets. There is a clear

focus on learning outcomes for students and information on performance is linked effectively to strategies to promote improvement in learning and teaching approaches.

285. In a significant minority of colleges, development plans are not sufficiently focused on the needs of the students and the curricular emphasis is shaped excessively by the availability of funding rather than the needs of the learners. There is inadequate leadership at all management levels to implement, review, and assess effectively the quality and appropriateness of the provision in each area.
286. The quality of course reviews has improved in the majority of colleges, with less descriptive material, and more systematic monitoring of the learning and teaching and standards achieved. In the best practice, colleges have introduced coherent improvement strategies, including college-wide staff development on teaching issues, and increased opportunities for the development of good classroom practice through team teaching, peer assessment or structured mentorship schemes.
287. Further improvement is needed, within and across colleges, in the availability, and use made, of accurate data on performance indicators. Better procedures need to be developed for the self-evaluation of important cross-college functions, including student services, provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, essential skills, and quality assurance.
288. There is considerable variation in the effectiveness of colleges' procedures for the collation, analysis and use of relevant management information, particularly to benchmark performance against local and national standards and set realistic targets for improvement. In a significant minority of colleges, there is not yet a sound enough basis of data to inform development planning.
289. The need for improved strategic planning at both local and regional levels, and for stronger relationships with schools and employers, has been recognised in FE Means Business and a number of projects are currently addressing the issues. It will be important for colleges to make informed use of their own data in evaluating their effectiveness. These actions will be key to developing and implementing coherent and cost-effective provision, linked to the needs of local communities, industry and commerce.