

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Basildon College

March 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- *grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- *grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- *grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- *grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 42/96

BASILDON COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected September-December 1995

Summary

Basildon College has a strong commitment to tertiary education and provides a wide range of general education and vocational courses. It works closely with the adult education service and some major local employers to promote vocational and other courses to adult students. The corporation has broad representation from the local community and is committed to openness of governance. There are comprehensive specialist counselling and welfare services. Examination results are generally satisfactory and there are some high levels of achievement in vocational areas for those who complete their courses. The academic board has a clearly-defined role for monitoring courses and the work of the divisions. Teaching and support staff work effectively together and there is good support for students with disabilities and sensory impairments. The college library has a wide range of books. Accommodation is well maintained and there is a suitable range of equipment to support courses. The college should address the following issues: levels of attendance; poor retention and completion rates in some areas of work; liaison between teachers, support staff and the staff responsible for marketing; opportunities for progression for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; support for students with identified weaknesses in literacy and numeracy; the consistency of induction and tutorial support for students; the management arrangements for covering absent staff; and the development of the quality assurance system in securing improvements in teaching, learning and students' achievements.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		2
Governance and management		3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		3
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Sciences, mathematics and computing	3	Health and social care	3
Engineering technology	3	Creative and performing arts	3
Business studies	2	English, communications and modern languages	2
Office technology	2	Other humanities	3
Leisure and tourism	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 Basildon College was inspected between September and December 1995. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September, curriculum areas in October and November and cross-college aspects from 4 to 8 December 1995. Eighty-five and a half days were used for the inspection. A total of 176 teaching sessions were observed. Inspectors examined students' coursework and held discussions with staff, students, parents, members of the corporation and representatives from local schools, industry, the Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the chief executive of Basildon District Council.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Basildon College is a tertiary college which was established in 1991 following the reorganisation of post-16 education in the Basildon and Wickford area. It was formed from a partnership of Basildon College of Further Education and the sixth forms of nine local secondary schools; three of which now have sixth forms. There are now six local 11-16 partner schools. Full-time staff from the former college and some school sixth forms were brought together to form the staff of the new college. The college occupies the single site of the former further education college in Basildon, a new town in south-west Essex, which was developed in the post-war period to attract people wishing to move away from Greater London.

3 Full-time students are drawn from over 50 schools and part-time students from across South Essex. There are six other further education sector colleges within a 15-mile radius of the college. These are Barking College, Chelmsford College, Palmers College, Seevic College, South East Essex College of Arts and Technology and Thurrock College.

4 The district of Basildon is part of the South West Essex administrative area. There are 21 maintained secondary schools, five of which have sixth forms. In 1995, almost 25 per cent of school leavers from the six local partner schools enrolled as full-time students at the college. The percentage of post-16 year olds continuing in full-time education has increased significantly in Essex from 54 per cent in 1990 to 71 per cent in 1994. There are wide variations within the county. In 1994, Basildon, at 62 per cent, had the lowest participation rate of any Essex district.

5 In 1992, the population of the district of Basildon was estimated by the Office for Population and Censuses at 162,000. It is predicted to rise by 3 per cent by the year 2001. The population of the county of Essex was recorded as just over 1.5 million in the 1991 census. Compared with Essex as a whole, Basildon has proportionately higher numbers of younger people under 19 years of age and proportionately smaller numbers of those over 60. In 1991, the resident minority ethnic population in Basildon was 2.1 per cent. Over 3 per cent of students at the college are from minority ethnic groups.

6 Historically, manufacturing industry has provided significant employment in the area. Many large multi-national employers are located in the vicinity including New Holland, GEC Marconi Avionics, Yardley Lentheric and York International. Other major employers are Basildon District Council and Basildon Hospital. The area is within commuting distance of London; over 40 per cent of local residents commute to work.

7 In August 1995, the unemployment rate in the district of Basildon was 8.3 per cent. This was higher than the average unemployment rate for the county, which was 7.2 per cent. The Jarman Indicators for 1995 and 1996 show that Basildon is one of two Essex towns with the highest levels of social deprivation and underprivilege in the county. The recently-published Department for Education and Employment tables on school performance indicate that 70 per cent of Basildon schools have rates of unauthorised absence which are above the county average.

8 In the academic year 1994-95, the college had 5,570 enrolments. Of these, 1,374 were full-time students and 4,196 part-time students. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively. The curriculum of the college covers eight of the Further Education Funding Council's programme areas and is managed through seven divisions: business studies; communications and languages; creative and performing arts; engineering technology; humanities, social and health care; office technology; and science, mathematics and computing. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

9 The college's mission is: 'to provide and continuously develop a high-quality education service which enables all students to identify and realise their individual goals and encourages them to develop their potential to achieve the highest standards of performance; is relevant to the needs of industry and the community; and is developed and improved through partnership with students, local schools, parents, employers and the community.'

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college has a strong commitment to tertiary education. It offers a wide range of general and vocational programmes for school leavers and adults, and to meet the needs of employers. Some minority subjects and courses are offered in order to maintain the college's breadth of provision. The majority of provision is at intermediate and advanced level. It includes 30 subjects offered at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), 26 at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and 18 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects. The vocational provision includes General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels and a good range of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) programmes at first and national diploma levels, a few at higher national level and an

increasing number of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) from levels 1 to 4. There are access courses for adult returners and some limited programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

11 The college is widening opportunities for access. Programmes of study are available in a wide variety of attendance modes. Open learning, weekend and short courses each accounted for almost 4 per cent of enrolments. In the 1994-95 session, 250 students enrolled on open learning courses. Autumn term enrolments on these courses in the current session are almost 70 per cent higher than in the same term last year. The college has set a target of 50 per cent growth in open learning enrolments during each of the next three years.

12 The college is responsive to changing markets. For example 19 new full-time courses were introduced at the beginning of the current session, the majority of which were GNVQs or NVQs. GNVQ programmes are offered in health and social care, in information technology, and in science. Collaboration with an Essex County Council training centre, SEAX Training, has enabled courses to be launched in painting and decorating, in catering and in carpentry and joinery. Discussions with a nearby sixth form college have led to an arrangement for joint teaching of the GNVQ advanced level programme in science which is intended to preserve science provision in the area. A number of new short courses, including courses in information technology and accounting, are offered on Saturdays.

13 The college has good links with special schools. The college is a member of a consortium formed with three local special schools for the planning and co-ordination of provision for students aged 14-16 with moderate learning difficulties and students aged 16-19 with severe learning difficulties. Students from some of these schools attend the college one day each week and are able to choose from a limited range of vocational options. In addition, there are two full-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, a pre-foundation course and a youth training work preparation course. Students on the pre-foundation course are able to study for a range of qualifications that are recognised nationally. Opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress to vocational courses are less developed.

14 The college offers some higher education courses. There are formal links with Anglia Polytechnic University and London Guildhall University. The college is an associate college of Anglia Polytechnic University for which it operates three franchised courses: two higher national certificates, one in business and finance and the other in childhood studies, and a diploma in health studies. Two other higher national certificates in engineering are offered. The college is a member of the North Thames higher education consortium which involves four local further education institutions. The purpose of the consortium is to increase the availability of higher education provision for students who are unable to attend courses outside their local area. The college is also a centre for the Open University.

15 In addition to its own provision for adults, the college sponsors Basildon Adult Education which is part of the county's community education service. Following a review of this service the management of Basildon Adult Education was devolved to the college in January 1993 for a three-year period. The director of adult education and all adult education staff are seconded to the college. To assist with the development of adult education a consultative committee was established, currently chaired by a member of the college corporation. These arrangements have increased the range of opportunities for adults and there has been a substantial growth in adult participation in the last two years. The college and Basildon Adult Education produced a joint prospectus for 1995-96 and had common procedures for students to reserve a place on a course.

16 Links with Essex TEC have improved substantially over the past few years. The college is represented on a number of the TEC's committees and is benefiting from a number of TEC-funded initiatives. For example, the college has been involved in the development of an Essex-wide household survey. The college also has effective links with the TEC's marketing group and these have resulted in the college obtaining useful information from market research.

17 The marketing unit has overall responsibility for relations with employers and there is a full-time, employer-liaison manager. The college has established a number of business advisory committees with financial support from Essex TEC although their effectiveness varies. All teaching divisions have at least one business advisory committee, some, such as office technology, have established two committees. A significant feature of the business advisory committees is that members of staff attend committee meetings on companies' premises rather than business members having to attend meetings at the college. The college is a member of an appropriate range of employer-based organisations such as The Basildon Association and the South West Essex Business Partnership. Despite the range of initiatives with employers, the overall level of short courses and consultancy activities is low. Teaching divisions have not been set individual targets for their work in these areas.

18 The college is responding well to the needs of local employers. It has promoted the development of employer compacts. A recent example of effective co-operation includes the joint advertising, selection and training of engineering modern apprenticeships for a major electronics company. There is also the on-going delivery of a series of GNVQ intermediate programmes in health and social care for staff employed as nursing auxiliaries at Basildon Hospital. This GNVQ programme has been particularly well received by the hospital management because the college responded rapidly, were flexible, ensured the course content met specific needs and involved hospital staff in the teaching programme. The success of this joint initiative has been recognised by a regional award in this year's Department for Education and Employment national training award competition.

19 There are extensive links with other countries, mainly in Europe, but also with the United States of America. In total there are links with 10 countries. The college has a European Steering Group and a member of the teaching staff co-ordinates European projects. During the last two sessions, students from the college's drama production club have staged successful tours in northern France. Other students have undertaken work placements in a number of countries: business studies students in Milan, engineering students in Germany and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in France. Overall, there is a good variety of activities which promote European awareness and encourage the take-up of languages amongst students other than those on language courses.

20 The college is involved in a number of activities to improve its links with schools. In total, the college has liaison activities with 33 post-16 schools and is developing further links with primary schools in its immediate area. Competition with all other post-16 providers is intense. Despite the links with its six partner schools, the number of school leavers enrolling at the college has fallen significantly from 401 in 1992-93 to 225 in 1995-96. The latter figure is equivalent to some 25 per cent of the partner schools' 16-year-old students.

21 The college has links with a significant number of community groups. For example, it is a member of groups such as the Unemployed Workers Centre, Basildon Out of School Childcare co-ordinating group and Basildon Twinning Association. It also organises the Basildon and District Careers Exhibition. Many students have been involved in community activities which help to promote awareness of the college in the community.

22 Marketing is given a high priority. The marketing unit has led the development of new curriculum areas, including catering and construction. There is an ambitious marketing operational plan for 1995-96. It identifies a named member of staff and target dates for the completion of each objective. However, there has been no attempt to determine whether there are sufficient resources to meet these objectives. The unit is involved with a large number of projects and initiatives including a TEC-funded project to enhance information, advice and guidance, especially for adults. In some cases, poor co-ordination between the marketing unit and teachers and support staff has reduced the impact of marketing initiatives.

23 The college prospectuses are attractive and easy to use. The development of a combined college and adult education part-time prospectus provides a useful source of information for adult students. Publicity material for some courses is less detailed.

24 The college's equal opportunities policy statement and programme for implementation are well established. There are procedures for dealing with appeals and students' grievances. Responsibility for promoting, managing and monitoring equal opportunities lies with the director of student services. She is assisted in this role by a steering group, by two teaching staff who share the role of equal opportunities research and

development officer, and a significant number of teachers who have been involved in working groups. The college is aware of the need to develop other codes of practice, for example a code governing the recruitment of staff, and to extend its work in promoting and monitoring the effectiveness of its commitment to equal opportunities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

25 There are 20 members of the corporation including the principal. They represent a wide cross-section of the local community. Nine of the members hold positions in local industry. Community representation is provided by the head teacher of a local school and by the chair of the College Parents and Friends Association. There are two staff members and a student member. Members have professional skills including accountancy, banking, business development, finance, personnel, and quality management. There are five female members. There is no representative from higher education and no member from a minority ethnic group.

26 The corporation has established an appropriate range of committees including audit, employment, finance and resource planning, marketing, and remuneration. Committees work closely with the corporation board, have clearly-defined roles and appropriate delegated authority. Members of the college management team attend these committees. A review group has overseen the appointment of five new independent members in 1995, advanced members' training needs, and updated the membership of committees to make the most effective use of members' skills and interests. Pressure on members' time has meant that a few committee meetings have not been quorate. The full corporation closely monitors the work of its committees.

27 The college was visited by The Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life in response to a paper from the corporation on the role of corporation members. The corporation has introduced arrangements to support the demonstration of high standards in public life. For example, it has agreed a code of conduct, established a register of members' interests, and has already held a college annual general meeting. The chairman of the corporation has also met with committee chairmen and produced a constructive report on the governance of the college.

28 The corporation has a clearly-understood strategic role. Earlier this year, the board reviewed the college's mission and confirmed the tertiary nature of the college. The implementation of policy and day-to-day matters is left to the principal. The corporation is aware of the major issues facing the college; for example, the failure to meet enrolment targets and poor levels of retention. However, detailed scrutiny of the underlying causes of these problems has been limited. Members are involved in college life. For example, they attend college events and two members have specific

curriculum interests in science and in engineering. However, there are no arrangements under which all corporation members are involved with the teaching divisions as a means of furthering their understanding of the work of the college.

29 The college has developed a comprehensive strategic plan. It contains a substantial amount of quantitative information; for example, it includes data on historical trends and risks. It also sets out targets for many aspects of college performance, such as growth, attendance, retention, value added, progression, resource management and the number of adult students. The strategic plan contains operating statements covering the actions planned to achieve the targets. However, these statements do not provide sufficient detail to monitor progress throughout the lifetime of the plan. The strategic plan is supported by cross-college plans for some areas of work; for example, marketing and student services. There are also divisional plans although these do not always clearly identify how the division's operations will contribute to the achievement of the college's targets.

30 The college has not been effective in achieving its target enrolments. Over the last two years there has been a significant fall in full-time enrolments. In the different programme areas there are sometimes wide variations between actual and planned numbers. In business studies, enrolments are 35 per cent below target; in health and social care they are 23 per cent above. These variations have contributed to operational difficulties in course management. Between 1992 and 1994, the effect of the fall in full-time numbers was partly offset by a substantial growth in part-time enrolments.

31 The principal is supported by a vice-principal, directors responsible for marketing, student services, adult education, resources, and finance. The director of resources has been absent due to illness for nearly one year. The management team members have coped well with the absence of the directors of finance and resources, although some planned developments have been adversely affected. From January 1996, a new director of curriculum will replace the director of resources. It is intended the postholder will address current weaknesses in cross-college curriculum management; for example, the lack of consistent practice in relation to curriculum development, assessment practice and schemes of work for teaching.

32 The senior management team, comprising the principal, vice-principal and five directors, leads on strategy and policy. The college management team, comprising the senior managers, heads of teaching divisions and support staff managers, deals with operational issues and exercises a monitoring role. The support staff management team focuses on support staff communication, planning and operations. The role of these three groups is set out clearly in a comprehensive college management handbook. These groups, together with the academic board,

are supported by numerous subcommittees, steering groups and working parties. This structure involves many staff in the discussion of key issues.

33 The various groups and committees consume a significant amount of management time and can prolong the decision-making process. The contribution of some groups to the development of the college is not always evident. For example, the curriculum subcommittee of the college management team has achieved limited progress on cross-college developments such as internal verification and the accreditation of prior learning. The reliance on groups of staff to resolve issues has tended to inhibit the college's response to key issues such as enrolment, retention and the provision of learning support. Issues have not always been identified with sufficient urgency and clarity. Strategies sometimes lack the precision required to tackle the issues. Responsibilities often reside with groups, rather than with individuals who are accountable.

34 Delivery of the curriculum is managed by seven divisions. Each head of division has responsibility for curriculum, staff and resource management. Divisions are supported by the directors and by the other cross-college managers for schools liaison, employer liaison, management information and student services. The overall structure is complex and not all responsibilities, for example in relation to marketing and pastoral support, are clear and understood by staff. Some divisions are well managed, staff are aware of their responsibilities, close attention is paid to retention rates and levels of attendance, frequent meetings are held and courses are generally well run. In other areas, course and subject leadership is less effective. Some course team leaders do not have job descriptions and are unclear as to their responsibilities. More significantly, some divisions have failed to organise timetables efficiently. There are instances of poor organisation and of failure to provide cover for absent teaching staff, for example on the national certificate in computer studies.

35 Senior managers make every effort to ensure that staff are well informed about the policies, procedures and other work of the college. The participative management style promotes good levels of formal and informal communication. There is a weekly staff newsletter and termly briefings of the whole staff. Minutes of the corporation and academic boards are available in the college library. The issues facing the college are well understood by staff, although their knowledge of specific college targets varies.

36 The college has an average level of funding of £16.48 per unit of activity for 1995-96. This compares with the national median for general further education and tertiary colleges of £17.84 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

37 Resource planning requires further development. In the current year, the college budget has been determined on a historical basis with account taken of forecast income and staffing requirements. The college

undertook a benchmark study to identify areas where it could improve its efficiency. As a result, detailed guidelines on the use of staff have been developed and course hours reduced for the current year. At present, bids for revenue and capital expenditure are being examined. Partial budget allocations have been made whilst the college assesses its funding in the light of enrolments. Heads of divisions have delegated budgets for consumables and part-time staffing. Budget allocations within the divisions are determined in discussion with the course team leaders. The college intends that future budgets will be prepared at divisional level and directly related to income generation. The college has a pilot scheme for targets for resource utilisation in 1995-96. There has been no development of unit-cost information to inform resource management.

38 There is much effective use of computer information systems. There are a number of computer applications to support finance and student-related functions. The college has effectively introduced and produced the individualised student record and assessed the funding units arising from the 1994-95 provision. A large number of staff have access to budget and student information. Budget holders can directly ascertain their budget position. Heads of division and their staff can obtain information on students, courses and tutor groups. Reports are available on student applications, enrolment, achievements and destinations. The college has recognised the need to develop further the use of management information by divisional staff and for more work on the monitoring of students' attendance.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

39 Full-time students have access to a comprehensive range of specialist student services such as careers advice, counselling and welfare. Responsibility for ensuring that students receive effective guidance and support is divided between several managers. At a senior management level, the director of marketing has responsibility for recruitment and the director of student services for guidance, the tutorial system and specialist student services. Within the line management system, heads of division are responsible for course and personal tutors and section heads are responsible for support staff such as the admissions officer. The system is understood by staff but the division of responsibilities makes it difficult to ensure that students receive a consistently high standard of coherent support as they progress through their courses. Internal reviews confirm that there is some variability in the quality of support that students receive. The guidance and support services in place for full-time students are more fully established than those for part-time students.

40 The admissions process for full-time students is well organised. There is a college application form, standard letters for all full-time students and guidelines for staff on pre-course counselling and enrolment. There are also procedures for referring students to careers advisers when they need specialist advice although subject and course tutors do not always make use of these. The admissions process for part-time students is less developed. Common procedures for recruitment and initial guidance are

not yet in place. Enrolment systems for part-time students are being reviewed. Postal enrolment for part-time courses is not yet available. Part-time students have to attend an enrolment session at the college and often have to wait to take advice from tutors when deciding about subject and course choices. There is an advice and guidance centre which is open in late August and September. It handles course enquiries and refers potential students to course leaders and senior tutors for guidance and support. The arrangements for responding to such needs at other times of the year are more variable in quality.

41 There is a common approach to students' induction for all full-time courses. Induction follows central guidelines and there are clear statements of students' rights and responsibilities. Full-time students' induction programme includes a college briefing when they receive a standard set of college documents including an informative student diary which provides details of services such as advice on accommodation, finance and grants, and gives an outline of the student charter and the standards of guidance students are entitled to expect. At the end of September, full-time students sign a learning agreement confirming their choice of course and acknowledging they are aware of the services available to support their learning. The quality of induction at course and subject level varies. Students on some vocational programmes, such as the BTEC national diplomas in health and social care and the GNVQ programmes in business were provided with attractive course handbooks and were clear about the coursework requirements and the roles of subject and personal tutors. On other programmes, for example the BTEC national diploma in computer studies, students were unclear about the requirements for coursework and assessment. Some first-year GCE A level students were confused by the volume of documentation presented to them and had little opportunity to ask questions in class or to make contact with one another. The induction process for part-time students is much less extensive. The college is aware of this and has developed some well-designed guidance material for them such as the part-time student handbook.

42 The transition of students from school to college is eased by staff from the college attending open evenings at local schools and providing good pre-entry advice to students and teachers. Course leaders from the college visit schools frequently to conduct interviews and provide specialist advice. There are regular meetings between careers teachers from the partner schools and college staff to share information and agree arrangements for students' progression. School leavers from the six partner schools are guaranteed a place on a college course, although only a quarter of them actually transferred to the college in 1995-96.

43 Support for students requiring help with basic literacy and numeracy is at a very early stage of development. Initial diagnostic assessment using the Basic Skills Agency tests was introduced for full-time students up to intermediate level in 1995-96. The provision of additional tuition for students with diagnosed needs was not available for the majority of these students at the time of inspection. Insufficient teaching staff had been

trained or recruited to provide basic skills support and teaching staff within the divisions had not agreed a strategy for managing the learning process for these students. There is no system to provide basic skills support for part-time students, or for full-time students on advanced level courses, although senior tutors and course leaders recognise that many of these students need assistance with basic numeracy and literacy.

44 The college provides good support for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are specialist tutors for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and for students with physical disabilities. More than 50 students with sensory or physical disabilities attend college programmes and are supported by specialist staff. There are effective one-to-one tutorials for students with dyslexia.

45 Procedures for accrediting the prior learning of students have been developed for a few courses such as the NVQs in administration. The availability of accreditation of prior learning is limited for adult students and is not available to students on the GNVQ programmes. Students' awareness of the opportunities for gaining recognition of prior achievements is also limited.

46 All students have a designated tutor and full-time students have weekly tutorial periods within their programmes. A tutors' handbook provides useful guidance to personal tutors on students' entitlement, record-keeping and the planning of tutorial programmes. A common approach to the recording of students' achievement has been piloted and some tutors encourage students progressing from school with national records of achievement to maintain these. The standard of support provided to students during individual tutorials varied. Some examples of good tutorial practice were observed. For example, individual students on the access to higher education programme were encouraged to develop a self-critical approach to monitoring their progress through the maintenance of a diary charting progress in relation to agreed targets. There were also examples of poor practice. In one session, the tutor read out the student bulletin, a weekly newsletter for students, failed in an attempt to generate a discussion of the issues in the bulletin and provided a poor example of how to discuss progress with individual students. The college is aware of the need to improve the consistency of tutorial practice. Some staff development for personal tutors has already taken place.

47 Students have access to a wide range of specialist services including welfare, careers and a students' union support tutor. A confidential counselling service is well advertised and valued by students and staff. The welfare officer and welfare assistant advise students about grants and financial questions and the college and the students' union have set aside funds to support students in acute financial difficulty. There is good liaison with external agencies such as social services, local churches and health agencies. There is also an extensive programme of briefings to ensure that personal tutors and students are informed on such matters as child

protection and drug abuse. Full-time adult students speak highly of the care and expertise displayed by staff.

48 The system for guiding students through the application procedures for higher education is well co-ordinated. It involves library staff, personal tutors, heads of division and divisional secretaries. A special guide is available for students pursuing GCE A level courses during the evening. Specialist careers advice is available from careers advisers from the Essex Careers and Business Partnership who offer appointments to students during the day. The careers room is adequately stocked and there is access to computerised information on careers. Records of students' destinations are collected and a detailed summary prepared. The college is successful in contacting full-time leavers for information about actual destinations.

49 The college has recently improved its procedures for monitoring the attendance of full-time GCE AS/A level and GCSE students in response to evidence of poor retention rates and levels of attendance during 1994-95. Personal tutors receive regular monitoring reports from a central register assistant which include details of students' attendance in every subject. There are well-defined procedures for dealing with persistent unauthorised absence including informing parents of students aged under 18. On vocational and part-time courses, the monitoring of students' attendance falls to personal tutors and is not always so effective. There is a well-designed process for tracking student withdrawals and transfers, which is co-ordinated by the officer responsible for the college management information system.

50 Parents and carers are provided with many opportunities for information on students' progress. An induction evening for parents is held in the autumn when parents are informed about the pastoral system and given a charter indicating parents' rights and responsibilities. There is an active parents' and friends' association which endeavours to strengthen links between parents and the college. Written progress reports are sent to parents at the end of the academic year and open evenings are held to inform them about their offspring's progress. Despite these procedures, however, parents interviewed during the inspection said they did not feel well informed about their children's progress or the operation of the pastoral system.

51 The work of the students' union is well supported by the college. Meetings of the students' union committee are attended by a support tutor who provides detailed advice on issues, including the union's constitution.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

52 Of the teaching sessions inspected, 52 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses, and a further 34 per cent had a balance of strengths and weaknesses. In 14 per cent of sessions the weaknesses clearly outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		3	15	11	6	1	36
GCSE		1	7	5	1	0	14
GNVQ		7	17	16	6	0	46
NVQ		1	8	14	5	0	28
Other vocational		5	10	6	1	1	23
Basic education		2	4	4	2	0	12
Other		3	8	4	2	0	17
Total		22	69	60	23	2	176

53 The average level of attendance in the teaching sessions observed was 77 per cent. Average attendance at the 74 GNVQ and NVQ sessions was 73 per cent and at the 50 GCE AS/A level and GCSE sessions it was 80 per cent. The college has set a target of 90 per cent for 1995-96.

54 Practical classes in science were well organised. Teachers used an appropriate combination of individual and group teaching to ensure that students developed the required practical skills. For example, in one large class, a teacher instructed a small group of students in the skills necessary to use a biological microscope while other students were working effectively on individual aspects of the practical task. The teacher demonstrated considerable organisational skills to ensure that each student knew precisely what was expected of them. In much science teaching, there was a strong reliance on teacher exposition. In some classes, time was used dictating lengthy notes when other activities would have been more profitable. Some mathematics teaching was lively and the material interesting and clearly presented. Students worked well and enthusiastically. In other instances the material failed to stimulate or the lack of interaction between students and teachers led to students becoming bored and restless. Students in some computing classes were set interesting and challenging tasks, but in many lessons they failed to make sufficient progress because the work lacked an adequate structure or was dull. Much practical work was carried out in class. Students were not encouraged to work independently using the open access computer facilities.

55 Engineering students were aware of the topics to be covered during the course. However, the aims and objectives of particular sessions were less clear. Teachers displayed a sound knowledge of their subject but used a limited range of teaching methods to present it. Most lessons involved the same pattern of teacher exposition, questions and answers from the whole class and students working on examples which were presented on a chalkboard. Laboratory work, practical examples or visual aids were not used to reinforce the theory being taught. Few teachers

checked students' understanding of learning during lessons. There were some instances where students were set similar tasks without consideration of their different levels of ability or previous learning. For example, in a practical engineering class, a high standard of machining was achieved. However, half of the students were repeating tasks they had successfully completed on a previous course. No account had been taken of this prior learning. Students generally received prompt and helpful feedback on their written work.

56 Business studies teachers had high expectations of their students. This was reflected in the suitably challenging tasks and assignments they set for students. Lessons were delivered at an appropriate level; the pace of work was appropriate and students were involved in a variety of interesting activities. Students in a class on the GNVQ advanced programme gained valuable experience of the skills required in the workplace through simulating the finance, marketing and personnel departments of a company. The 'company' traded with other similar 'companies' through a control centre located in Birmingham. This activity is sponsored by United Distillers. In a small number of classes students were not given enough encouragement to ask questions. In one class where the teacher had failed to set a suitable structure for learning, students found it difficult to follow the complex subject matter.

57 Office technology classes were well prepared and teachers had a sound knowledge of their subject. Students had good access to computers and were developing effective information technology skills. However, they were not always adequately extended by the work which teachers gave them. There was too much reliance on teaching students as a whole group. Insufficient opportunities were provided for them to work at a pace best suited to their individual abilities.

58 In the best sessions in leisure and tourism there were well-planned group activities which developed students' confidence, communication and vocational skills. Students were enthusiastic when they were engaged in planning and organising their own work. In some sessions they were expected to take dictation for far too lengthy a period. In others, questions were not directed at individual students and many students who attempted to contribute were frustrated because only the loudest response was acknowledged by the teacher. In the majority of lessons observed there was no use of overhead projectors, handouts or other teaching aids. The energy and enthusiasm of students was not always channelled effectively to help them benefit from their studies. For example, NVQ students undertaking work experience in the college sports centre were given routine and repetitive tasks. The opportunity to develop communication skills was lost. Assignment briefs were often unclear and students misinterpreted them. In most sessions no attempt was made to check students' understanding. However, the written comments on students' assignments were often constructive and encouraging.

59 Teachers of health and social care displayed sound knowledge of their subject. Material was presented with confidence and at an appropriate pace. In a session on first aid the teacher paced her presentation appropriately so that students were able to practise the skill effectively. Teachers with recent vocational experience provided students with valuable insights into practice in the workplace. The quality of schemes of work and lesson plans was uneven. Although the content of lessons was generally well prepared some teachers gave less attention to how it could be presented effectively to students. During many sessions, a significant proportion of the students were not involved either in answering questions or in discussion; activities were dominated by a few, more vocal students. Some group work was poorly managed. For example, in one session the students who were working in small groups were not encouraged to move so that they faced the person they were talking to. Some students received insufficient guidance on how their written work could be improved. Poor use of English was not always corrected.

60 Sessions on vocational courses in art and design and performing arts were well planned. Teachers used a variety of teaching methods, including formal lectures, demonstrations, studio practice and visits to art galleries. In the best sessions, students were involved in tasks which were suitably challenging, often working in teams engaged in problem-solving activities. Help from business representatives on the advisory committee for art and design ensured that students' projects were relevant to the world of work. In some sessions, the pace of the work was too slow; in others teachers made little use of appropriate visual aids. Students' use of information technology on the BTEC national diploma in performing arts was underdeveloped. Although teachers on vocational courses provided students with helpful written feedback, practice on GCE A level and GCSE courses was inconsistent; some students received verbal comments only on their work.

61 A major strength of the lessons in English and communications was the wide range of methods of working which included group work, discussion and individual research. Teaching was generally purposeful and challenging. In a GCSE English literature class, students studying Measure for Measure and Wuthering Heights responded well to the task of analysing the texts. Effective use was made of teaching aids such as video recordings and handouts. Teachers marked written work carefully and thoroughly and their comments involved an appropriate blend of correction and encouragement. There was not always sufficient concern about students who were late for lessons.

62 Most lessons in modern foreign languages were well planned and thoroughly prepared and teachers made consistent use of the foreign language being studied. Students were introduced to interesting material and work was conducted at an appropriate pace. Teachers had a high level of awareness of students' strengths and weaknesses and were sensitive when correcting errors. However, the tasks set were not always

suitable for the wide range of ability and attainment within some classes. For example, in one class where students were working in pairs, one student was unable to understand the task despite several attempts by the teacher and a fellow student to explain it. Both students were frustrated by the situation and would have benefited from more individual attention from the teacher. A successful daytime class for adults was conducted entirely in the foreign language by a native speaker; there was much humour and a great deal of relevant cultural content.

63 History teachers drew on a wide range of historical and contemporary sources to make particular episodes interesting and relevant. Teaching was well prepared and competently delivered. A few classes in humanities were small and this limited the range of teaching methods which could be used. There were few opportunities for students to develop group skills. Students' written work was thoroughly marked and teachers provided helpful written comments. Psychology and sociology teachers carefully related the topics being studied to students' immediate experiences. However, in many lessons, teachers gave lengthy expositions and students struggled to remain attentive. Some question and answer sessions were poorly structured and the pace of the work was often too slow. Written work was generally well marked. Teachers' comments helped students to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

64 The teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on specially-designed courses was sometimes of good quality. Some lesson plans were detailed. However, in a number of classes there was little planning for the individual needs of students or monitoring of their progress.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

65 Students generally enjoy their studies. Most are enthusiastic and well motivated. In some areas core skills are not sufficiently developed; students do not write clearly and some lack confidence in speaking in class.

66 In 1995, 104 students, aged 16 to 18 were entered for GCE AS/A level examinations. They achieved an average point score per entry of 3.2 (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. There has been a decline in the college's performance on this measure between 1994 and 1995. In 1994, 165 students, aged 16 to 18 were entered for GCE AS/A level examinations and they achieved an average point score per entry of 3.8.

67 The overall pass rate at grade A to E was 74 per cent which is above the national average pass rate for general further education colleges. All students aged 16 to 18 who were entered for art, chemistry, economics, geography, a modular history syllabus, and physical education achieved a pass grade. For other students aged 16 to 18, results were above the

national average in communication studies, English, government and politics, history, law, computing, mathematics and physics. However, the percentage of passes at grades A to C in English literature, history, government and politics and computing was lower than the corresponding national average and was well below the national average in French, psychology, sociology, accounts and business studies. There were a total of 175 GCE A level subject entries for full-time students aged 19 or over. For these students results in art were well above the national average and those in history, mathematics, psychology and sociology were below the national average.

68 In 1995, 39 students, most of them resitting subjects, followed a full-time GCSE programme involving four or more subjects. Eight per cent of them passed four or more subjects at grades A to C. A further 15 per cent achieved three or more A to C grades. Thirty-three per cent of students achieved no passes at grades A to C.

69 Overall, the GCSE pass rates, grades A to C, were above national averages for students aged 16 to 18 and 19 and over. The pass rate, grades A to C, for the 215 students of all ages entered for GCSE English language was just below the national average. One hundred and eighty-nine students of all ages entered for GCSE mathematics achieved a pass rate, grades A to C, in line with the national average. The results of students in other subjects, where the number of examination entries was far smaller, were variable. Students aged 16 to 18 achieved pass rates, grades A to C, above national averages in English literature, media studies, law, physical education, psychology and sociology. However, only 22 per cent of students entered for welfare and society achieved grades A to C. There were some good GCSE results for students aged 19 or over. All students entered for astronomy gained grades A to C. There were also good results in chemistry, history, information systems, law, psychology and sociology. Pass rates in other subjects were at or near national averages for general further education colleges.

70 The college has identified that retention rates are poor on many courses. A survey conducted by college staff shows that between 1 November 1994 and 12 May 1995 the withdrawal rate from courses was an average 20 per cent. The college is planning to undertake a research project into the reasons why students are leaving courses early. It has set a target of 85 per cent retention for 1995-96.

71 The overall retention rate for the two-year full-time GCE AS/A level programme for 1993-95 was 63 per cent. There was a retention rate of 80 per cent or over in only five of the 23 different GCE AS/A level subjects studied by students of all ages. Of students on the one-year full-time GCSE programme, 60 per cent completed their studies.

72 For 1993-95, the overall retention rate for two-year full-time vocational courses was 60 per cent and for one-year full-time vocational courses completing in 1995 it was 75 per cent. There were only a few

full-time courses with good retention rates. These included the one-year and two-year full-time NVQ level 2 courses in administration, GNVQ level 2 courses in leisure and tourism and art and design, and the BTEC first diploma in science. Courses with low retention rates included the GNVQ level 3 in leisure and tourism (43 per cent), the BTEC national diploma in science, health studies (47 per cent), and the BTEC national diploma in engineering (29 per cent).

73 Of students in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables 87 per cent were successful. This places the college among the top third of colleges in the further education section on this performance measure.

74 All students on the first diploma course in science gained the full award. Science students carried out practical work competently. Their written work was good and they showed an appropriate understanding of the relevant skills and knowledge. Achievements in mathematics and computing were variable. Some mathematics students demonstrated a good understanding of the subject. Eighty-six per cent of adult students enrolled on a computer literacy and information technology course stage 1 were successful. Students on some other computing classes made limited progress. Whilst retention is poor on computing courses, students who complete are generally successful: 88 per cent passed the national diploma in computing and 70 per cent passed the national certificate course. A number of mathematics and computing students write poorly.

75 Engineering students were developing a good level of practical skill in mechanical and motor vehicle engineering. Students' files and assignments were well organised and presented. However, examination results on some engineering courses were poor. Only 22 per cent of those completing the first diploma course achieved a full qualification and only 24 per cent of those enrolled on the full-time national diploma course achieved an award. There were some good results on part-time courses. For example, 92 per cent of students on the higher national certificate in electronics, and all the students on the national certificate in mechanical and production engineering achieved their awards.

76 Business studies students produced a good standard of work. Examination results on full-time programmes were generally good. There was a 96 per cent pass rate for students on the GNVQ advanced programme and 83 per cent for those on the GNVQ intermediate programme. However, on the GNVQ foundation programme only 17 per cent of the students who completed the programme achieved the award. Results in business administration at NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3 were good. Ninety-three per cent of students were successful in achieving a full award at NVQ level 3 and 84 per cent at NVQ level 2.

77 Students on leisure and tourism courses are enthusiastic and self-motivated. Although retention rates are poor, most students who complete courses are successful. All students completing the GNVQ advanced programme gained a full award. There are also some good results for students taking additional qualifications; for example, community sports leadership awards and first-aid certificates. Core skills are underdeveloped in this area.

78 There was particularly good work on the national diploma in health studies where core skills had been successfully integrated with vocational elements of the course. Eighty-nine per cent of students on the national diploma in health studies and 87 per cent on the diploma in health studies (nursing) successfully achieved their qualification. Adult students are particularly successful. All 10 adult students on the part-time GNVQ programme for health workers gained an award.

79 Students produced much good work in art and design. However, some work had not developed beyond the initial stages of investigation and showed little evidence of progression. For example, students were beginning to represent the human form with some degree of accuracy but had not developed their work sufficiently to understand the body structure and musculature and were therefore repeating mistakes. At GNVQ intermediate level, 78 per cent of students were successful. In performing arts the classes were small. Students had not developed effective teamwork and performance skills. In performing arts, 67 per cent of students achieved the first diploma.

80 Humanities students achieved some good results in GCE AS/A level and GCSE examinations. English and communication studies students produced good written work, were articulate and made thoughtful contributions to discussion and group work. They were successful in a writing competition sponsored by the local press; some of their entries were published. Written work in modern languages was of an acceptable standard and students showed some confidence in oral work. In history, students built on their GCSE work to develop a range of historical skills in analysis and interpretation of evidence. However, oral skills were underdeveloped. There were variable levels of achievement in psychology and sociology. Practical work was generally carried out to a good standard. Core skills were not adequately developed within these subjects.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

81 There is a strong commitment to quality assurance. The college has comprehensive policies and procedures covering much of its work. The quality management and development handbook describes the systems for quality assurance including course review and evaluation, internal audit, staff development and appraisal. It also sets out the college's targets for education and training. Key targets, which include targets for achievement, attendance and retention, are published on a rolling three-year basis.

Despite the efforts of senior managers, however, the targets are not fully understood by staff. In addition to the college's targets for education and training, the college has given priority to setting targets and performance standards for most areas of work. Procedures for measuring and monitoring performance against the targets are not yet fully developed. Many of the college's quality systems and procedures are relatively new and, as yet, have not had a significant impact on some of the critical issues facing the college; for example, the poor retention rates in some areas of work.

82 Students are encouraged to express their views and to air their concerns. The college provides opportunities for them to sit on several college committees. They are given support and training for their role by staff in student services. Students' views are also sought through course and college forums and through interviews when they leave courses. Many students express confidence that their concerns will be treated seriously. They believe the forums have been instrumental in leading to improvements in facilities for students. For example, there is better supervision in the refectory. The college also seeks the views of parents through a parents' forum.

83 The college introduced the student charter by building on existing good practice. Its student contract set out what students could expect from the college and what was expected of them. The charter has extended this to include standards of performance. All students are issued with the charter and many have used it to raise issues of concern. In 1994-95, the college published the charter separately but this year, in response to feedback from students, it was incorporated into the full-time students' diary and into the part-time students' handbook. Similarly, a parents' charter is now part of the parents' handbook.

84 The academic board has a significant role in quality assurance. It is responsible for the internal validation of new programmes which require external approval. Its subcommittees look at course reviews, aspects of student services and the staff-development programme. The work of the curriculum review and evaluation subcommittee is particularly strong. It reviews the work of each division every three years. Representatives from the division under review are interviewed by teachers from other areas and their work is assessed against clearly-defined criteria. In order to ensure fairness each division may invite a 'critical friend' who is not a member of that division. The committees' recommendations are treated seriously by the staff and managers involved. However, some staff remain unaware of the role the academic board plays in quality assurance.

85 In the spring of 1995, the college introduced a system of internal quality audit. Staff drawn from all areas of the college volunteered to undertake the role of an auditor. They were trained and supported in this role by an external consultant. It has been valuable staff development for those involved. There have been three audit reports each covering aspects

of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Each audit report has identified a number of areas for development. One outcome of the report on 'teaching and promotion of learning and students' achievements' is the appointment of a director of curriculum. The system of internal auditing is relatively new; as yet, the college has not introduced measures to deal with all the issues identified by the audits, such as improved guidance on the marking of students' work.

86 The college has developed a common policy and reporting format for the review and evaluation of courses. In many vocational areas, there is a tradition of annual course review. Reports on all GCE AS/A level and GCSE subjects were required for the first time at the end of the 1994-95 academic session. However, a few of these were not available at the time of inspection. Reports vary in their quality and completeness within and across divisions. Some of the reviews in business studies were particularly thorough; they identified weaknesses in current practice and pointed to the actions required to improve the quality of students' experience. Data are used inconsistently. Staff do not have a common understanding of what is meant by successful completion and retention. Course and subject reviews inform divisional plans, but these plans sometimes fail to identify clearly the priorities for action, establish targets or indicate those responsible for seeing they are achieved.

87 Common procedures to check the consistency of internal assessment on NVQ and GNVQ programmes are not yet in place. A common set of verification procedures is being developed but routine procedures to check standards, for example by sampling students' assessed work across related courses, are not yet implemented.

88 This year, the divisions and the cross-college services produced self-assessment reports based on the seven aspects of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Generally, these are appropriately critical and have been used to inform the college's self-assessment report. The college's self-assessment report is also based on the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement* framework. It is detailed and focuses well on the college's strengths and weaknesses. Many of the inspectorate's judgements are in line with those of the college.

89 The college has yet to develop clear strategies to address the weaknesses identified in its self-assessment report. Mechanisms which will assist in identifying root causes of problems or in evaluating the effectiveness of potential solutions have yet to be developed. For issues which arise at a cross-college level, such as the need to standardise internal verification procedures and the failure adequately to address students' basic skills, it is not clear to staff where responsibility lies for ensuring effective remedial action.

90 As part of its commitment to the development of staff, the college is working towards the Investors in People standard. It aims to achieve

recognition by summer 1996. New members of staff have an induction programme and are supported by mentors. Some elements of induction are common to all staff but there are also separate information sessions for support and teaching staff. The college has developed a staff-appraisal system for all full-time staff but it has not been fully implemented. Currently the college has appraisal records for 41 per cent of full-time staff. The need for further staff training in order to give new momentum to the process is recognised. Where appraisal has occurred, the outcomes have been linked to the staff-development programme.

91 The staff-development programme embraces all staff and is focused primarily on meeting needs identified by heads of divisions and cross-college managers. There is a challenging programme for middle managers to gain management qualifications at NVQ level 5 through the Management Charter Initiative. Senior managers provide support as mentors and assessors. The linkages between the staff-development programme and the college's strategic plan are not always clear. For example, the programme does not provide opportunities for staff to develop adequate skills for teaching and tutoring adult learners even though this has been recognised as an area of growth for student recruitment. There is no college strategy to ensure regular industrial updating for staff.

92 The college is improving its management of staff-development resources by increasing the scope of internally delivered programmes and by the central co-ordination of activities. The staff-development budget for 1995-96 has been reduced from the previous year's figure.

RESOURCES

Staffing

93 There is a full-time equivalent staff of 131 teachers and 71 support staff. Teachers are generally well qualified and have appropriate experience for the courses on which they teach. Almost all have a teaching qualification. Many teaching staff have relevant industrial, commercial and vocational experience for their current work although, in some areas, this is now dated. Some staff lack the relevant experience. For example, in health and social care there are few with vocational experience in childhood education apart from some teachers with nursing backgrounds. Modern language teaching is enhanced by the use of staff who are native speakers. Assistants are shared with local schools. There are assessors and verifiers in most curriculum areas although progress has been slow in computing. This year's unexpected pattern of enrolment has meant that teachers in some areas are not fully used. The college is aware of this problem.

94 Part-time staff bring knowledge of current working practices to course teams. For example, part-time staff in art and design are currently working as freelance artists and designers. The contribution of part-time teachers to programmes varies from 3 per cent in business studies to slightly over 20 per cent in communications, languages, humanities, social care and

health. There have been some difficulties over the attendance of part-time teachers at meetings and their consequent lack of familiarity with current developments.

95 Administrative and technician staff provide teachers with good levels of support in most areas. Administrative staff work effectively to support the work of the college. For example, the college admissions officer organises full-time admissions in close consultation with divisional tutors, and library staff are actively involved in ensuring that students receive and complete Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application forms on time. Technician staff work flexibly across teaching divisions. There is insufficient technician support in art and design.

96 Personnel policies and practices have developed rapidly to meet the needs of an incorporated college. Staff recruitment procedures are comprehensive and the discussion of appointment panels are minuted by the personnel section. There is a comprehensive staff handbook with major sections covering college procedures, college management and organisation, the college's strategic plan and college policies. The introductory section covers the mission statement, strategic aims and objectives, college targets for education and training, a calendar of events and the student charter.

Equipment/learning resources

97 Levels of equipment to support the curriculum are generally good. In science, there is a good range of equipment although some of it is dated. There are no up-to-date computers for laboratory use. The new photographic darkroom for art and design is well equipped. In the modern language laboratory many of the stations are unreliable. There is an up-to-date computer-aided design facility in engineering. The college attracts donations of equipment from industry and has recently acquired a modern motor vehicle for training purposes.

98 The college has a campus-wide computer network of over 200 modern machines and a good range of software. Joint work with a major computer manufacturer on network development has led to donations of some equipment. The overall ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is good. There are limited open access facilities for independent study. However, students are able to use computers within timetabled classes when they are available. A college information technology strategy has been produced by the information technology working party. This will be used to guide future developments.

99 The library occupies attractive accommodation. The stock of over 23,500 items includes books, cassettes, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, slide sets, subject folders and videos. In most areas, book provision is suitable for students' needs. There is a manual system for book issues and cataloguing although plans exist to introduce a computerised system. The library issues free course text books to all full-time students. There is also access to the Essex County Council library

catalogue and bookstock. Library staff consult with staff and students through the library liaison committee. The library is represented at college management level by the manager of college services but there is little formal representation on course teams.

Accommodation

100 The college occupies a pleasant site with grassed areas, shrub borders and trees. The original purpose-built structure was erected more than 20 years ago and there has been a recent additional building in keeping with the original design. Within the campus there are 10 temporary huts and the caretaker's bungalow. Most of the temporary huts provide poor teaching accommodation. They comprise over 10 per cent of teaching accommodation. The college is working on a capital scheme for a new building to replace the huts and for improving refectory provision.

101 Accommodation is well maintained and decorated. Students and staff using wheelchairs have good access to teaching accommodation in the main blocks. In recent years, several parts of the college have been remodelled and refurbished to improve teaching facilities. Improvements include: computer suites, a special facility for office technology, an area for art and design which incorporates a three-dimensional workshop, a screen printing room, a ceramics room, a well-equipped photographic processing room and a dedicated area for the teaching of health and social care. The college hall is used for teaching performing arts. It lacks appropriate equipment; for example, wall bars, mirrors and a sprung floor. Science laboratories, though adequate for much current teaching, are inflexible and less suitable for integrated practical investigations. The laboratories are also used for theory classes although the furniture is not suitable for long periods of class-based work. The accommodation for engineering, although in need of some redecoration, is adequate for current provision.

102 The college owns a large sports hall, which is managed by Basildon District Council. This arrangement gives the college use of the facility during the daytime. In addition to recreational use, the sports hall provides a good realistic working environment for leisure and tourism students.

103 Facilities for students are generally good. The student common room is well decorated and contains the students' union offices. The student services area has a central location and is accessible to students. A careers room and an advice and guidance centre is part of the student services area. The college refectory area was refurbished in 1991 and provides a good service for both daytime and evening students.

104 A cross-college rooming committee ensures that rooms are well used and that, where possible, groups are in rooms of an appropriate size. Some large classes have to be placed in rooms which are too small.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

105 The particular strengths of the college are:

- the wide range of general education and vocational provision
- a corporation with broad representation and a commitment to high standards of governance
- strong co-operation with the local adult education service
- the development of special courses for some major local employers
- the availability of skilled counselling and welfare support for students
- good support for students with disabilities and sensory impairments
- the clearly-defined role of the academic board in monitoring courses and student services
- effective co-operation between teaching and support staff
- a suitable range of equipment including a well-stocked library
- appropriate and well-maintained accommodation.

106 If it is to build upon its existing strengths the college should improve:

- the effectiveness of the management response to key issues facing the college
- liaison between marketing staff, teachers and support staff
- opportunities for accreditation and progression for students with learning difficulties
- support for students with identified weaknesses in basic skills
- the poor levels of attendance, retention and completion on many courses
- the variable quality of guidance and support for students during induction and tutorials
- the quality of its response to issues identified through monitoring and review
- the management of cover for absent teaching staff.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

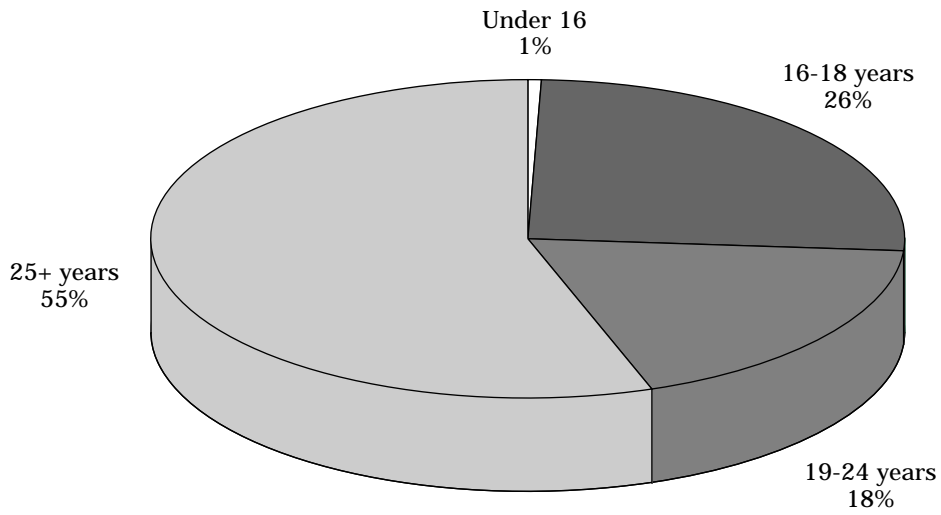
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)
-

Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

Basildon College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

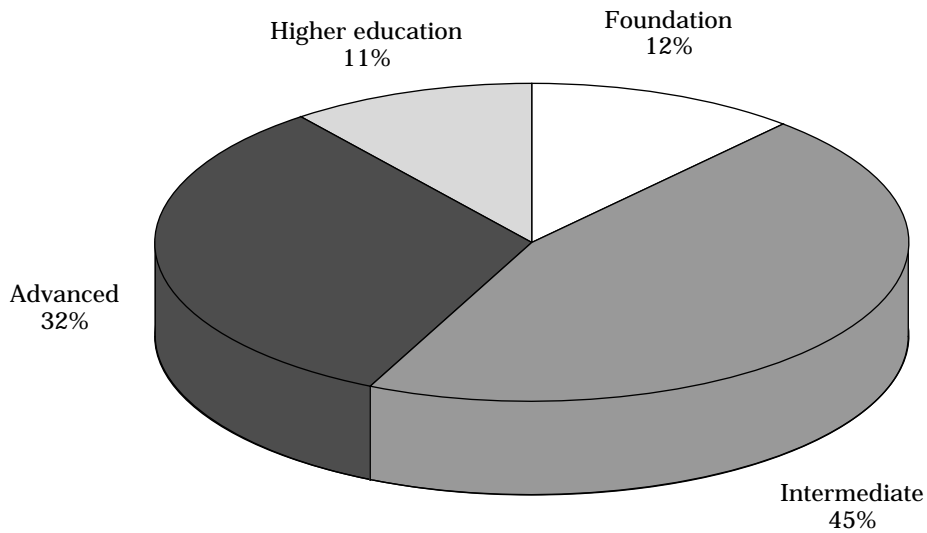


Enrolments: 5,570

Note: this chart excludes six enrolments where the age is not known.

Figure 2

Basildon College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 5,570

Figure 3

Basildon College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

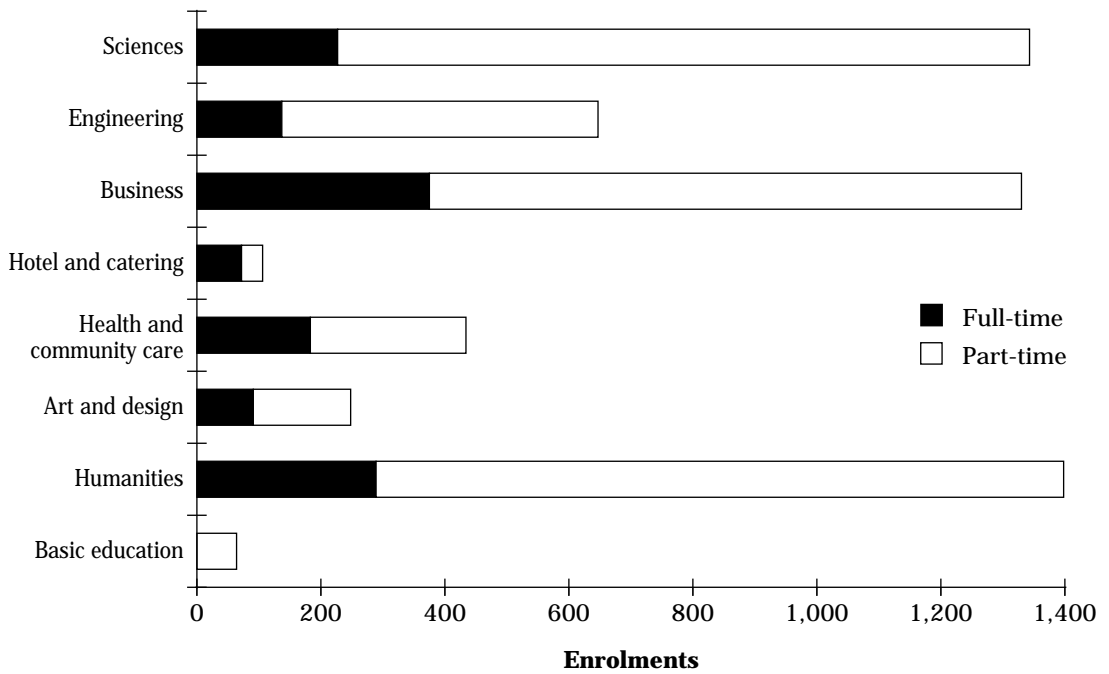


Figure 4

Basildon College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

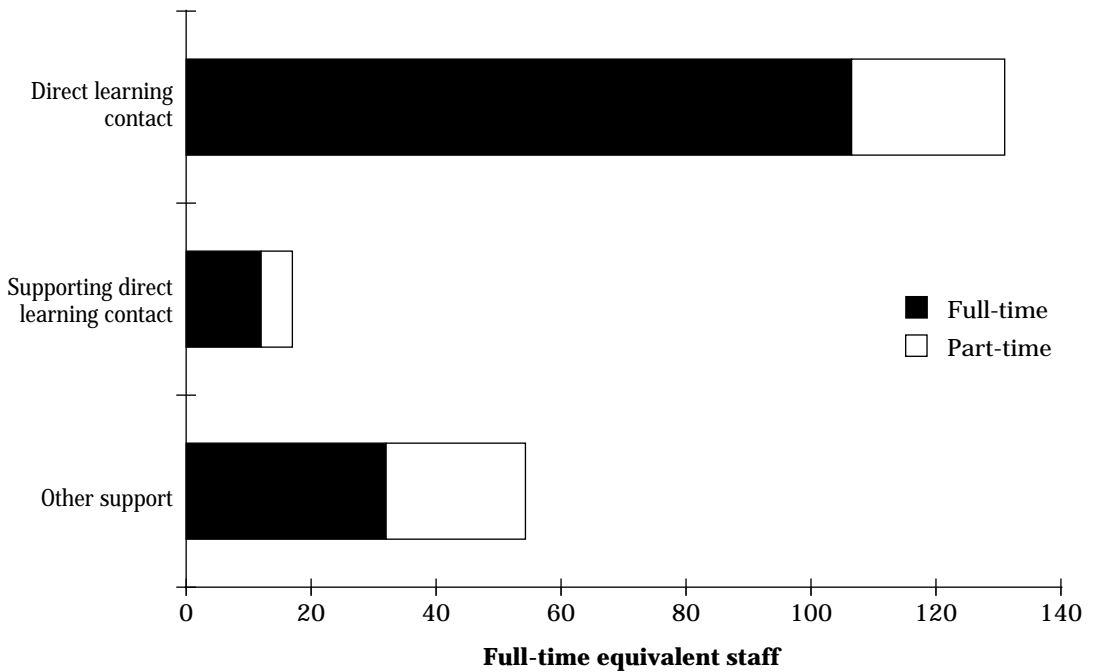
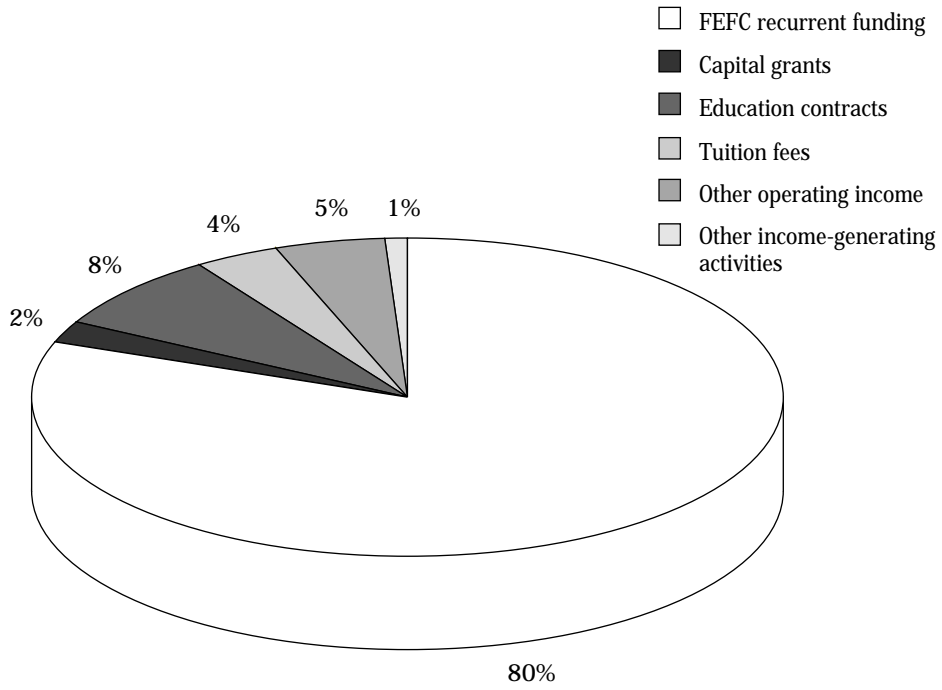


Figure 5

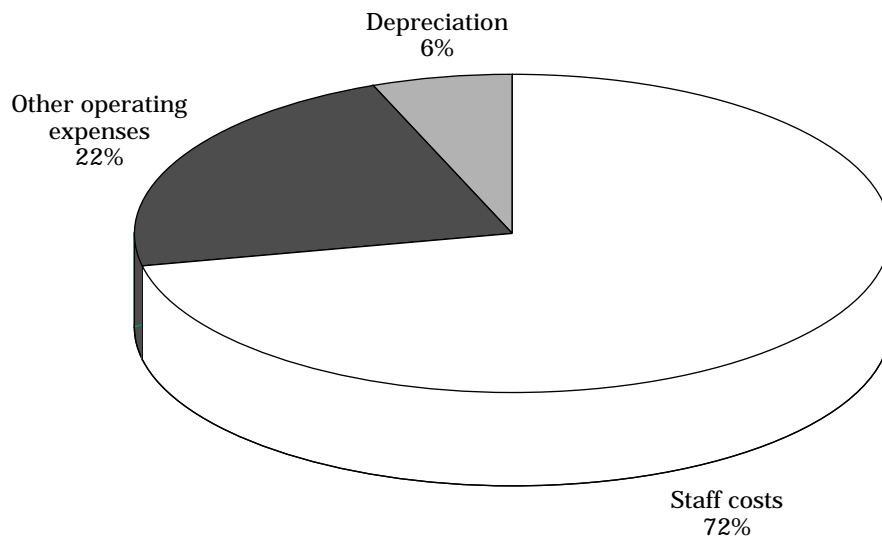
Basildon College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £5,590,000

Figure 6

Basildon College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £6,006,000

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