

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Bury College

March 1995

**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.

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.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 28/95

BURY COLLEGE
NORTH WEST REGION
Inspected October - December 1994

Summary

Bury College is a well-governed and well-managed tertiary college. Courses cater for full-time and part-time students from a variety of backgrounds. There are extensive links with external bodies at local, regional, national and international levels. Communications at all levels are good as a result of the regular, widely-distributed newsletters and bulletins, and frequent meetings. Staff are well informed and support the college's strategic plan. The college management information system provides regular reports which meet staff requirements and inform planning and review. Students are represented on all cross-college committees and have access to a comprehensive range of support services. Well-qualified and experienced staff maintain a consistently high standard of teaching. Examination results are generally satisfactory and sometimes good. A recently-developed tutorial programme is not yet implemented across all courses and subjects. The college has comprehensive quality assurance systems and processes but they have yet to make an impact in some curriculum areas. Working across a number of sites adversely affects the efficiency and effectiveness of some programmes.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	1
Governance and management	1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	2
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Care, hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Engineering	2	Art and design	1
Business	2	English and communications	2
		Humanities	2
Catering, leisure and tourism	2	Adult education and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 Bury College was inspected in three stages during the academic year 1994-95. Arrangements for enrolment and induction were inspected at the beginning of term in September 1994. Specialist inspections of curriculum areas took place in the week beginning 17 October, and cross-college aspects were inspected principally during the week beginning 28 November. Twenty-one inspectors carried out the inspections using 89 inspector days. They visited 241 classes, studied a wide range of college documents, examined samples of students' work, observed a full meeting of the corporation board and held discussions with governors, college managers, teaching and support staff, students, local employers and the chief executive of the Bolton and Bury Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). They also met representatives from local schools, from a partner higher education institution and from the local community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Bury College was established as a tertiary college in 1987 by the amalgamation of two sixth form colleges, a further education college and the local authority youth training unit. It operates on four sites, Bury, Peel, Whitefield and Stand. The Bury and Peel buildings are close to each other, near Bury town centre. The Stand and Whitefield sites are approximately a mile apart and four miles to the south of Bury in the direction of Manchester.

3 Other post-16 providers in Bury include a voluntary-aided sixth form college, three independent grammar schools and a community education service of which the schedule 2 provision is sponsored by Bury College. None of the secondary schools maintained by the local authority have sixth forms. Two sixth form colleges, two further education colleges and another tertiary college are within seven miles of Bury town centre. A further five colleges lie within a 10-mile radius.

4 Enrolments at Bury college have increased by 70 per cent since 1987. In the 1993-94 academic year there were 8,073, giving a weighted full-time equivalent of 3,954; 4 per cent below the college's target. At the time of the inspection, there were 6,370 enrolments against a target of 7,145. Of these, 2,926 were full time, the remainder part time. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. The college has a full-time staff equivalent of 228 teachers and 166 support staff. The current staffing profile is shown in figure 4.

5 Responsibility for the quality and delivery of the curriculum rests with five faculties, organised according to the level and nature of courses. These are: adult and higher education; advanced diplomas; foundation studies; General Certificate of Education advanced levels (GCE A levels); and vocational education and training. Faculty heads allocate resources in response to bids from the 12 divisions in which teaching staff are organised. The divisions are: arts; business, leisure and tourism; English

and communications; health care and childcare; languages and humanities; learning support; management and business services; mathematics; psychology; health and social care; science; social studies and technology.

6 In 1994-95, 85 per cent of the college's income will be derived from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), 7 per cent from TEC contracts and 6 per cent from tuition fees and sales. Figures 5 and 6 show the patterns of income and expenditure over the 16 month period to July 1994. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £20.08 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17.

7 Most of the college's students live within the Bury Metropolitan Borough though 18 per cent come from other boroughs. At the time of the inspection, the unemployment rate for Bury was 6.1 per cent, compared with an average of 9.2 per cent for the north west as a whole. The 1991 census recorded 57 per cent of the workforce in non-manual occupations, of whom 16 per cent were employers or managers. In 1994, the percentage of 16 year old school pupils continuing into full-time education was 65 per cent. This is close to the national average figure but higher than the north west average of 59 per cent.

8 In its mission statement, the college stresses the importance it attaches to the flexible delivery of the curriculum focused on individual needs. It is in the process of achieving its aim of 'moving the focus of college work and activity from a teacher to a learner base'. Both the mission and the aims of the college emphasise the pursuit of quality and a congenial learning environment.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college offers an impressive range of courses with clear routes for student progression. It provides education and training opportunities for a wide variety of clients including school leavers, those in employment and adults returning to education. A range of foundation programmes encourages those people who would not normally have entered further education to come to the college. These programmes include provision for 27 school refusers, leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). The college offers 33 GCE A level subjects, seven GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 25 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. In addition, there is a wide range of NVQ programmes including some at levels 4 and 5. There is a positive commitment to GNVQs. Enrolments on these programmes have grown from 310 in the 1992-93 pilot phase to 1,360 in September 1994. Eight per cent of those currently on these programmes are part-time students. Twenty GNVQ courses are now offered, five at foundation, seven at intermediate and eight at advanced level. Students are attracted by the opportunity to individualise their programme of study by adding academic or vocational units to their GNVQ

programme. Many very able students have chosen to follow GNVQ advanced levels over the last two years and this is reflected in the excellent examination results.

10 The college has 17 partner schools but draws its students from a total of 85 schools in the catchment area. Good links between the college and partner schools are reinforced by a clear marketing strategy. School links start with 13 year old pupils, and all pupils in the final year of compulsory schooling in partner schools have a minimum entitlement which includes a personal interview, a copy of the prospectus and an invitation to open evenings. Fourteen year old pupils are able to broaden their curriculum by undertaking vocational studies in the college. This innovative programme involves 187 pupils from seven schools undertaking GNVQ/NVQ work. In addition to assisting students in their progression to the college, the programme is proving beneficial to the implementation and development of vocational education in the schools.

11 Effective links have been established with higher education institutions to support curriculum development, teaching and career progression for students. The college is a member of the Sheffield Partnership. Together with seven other colleges, it offers a full-time, three-year degree programme validated by Sheffield University. There are other productive links with higher education institutions, including Bolton Institute, Salford University and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. The college offers an access to higher education course, accredited by the Manchester Open College Federation, on which there are currently over 100 enrolments.

12 The college has been successful in strengthening and expanding its provision to meet adult needs. There is a marked increase in post-19 participation rates. For example, in 1991, 45 students were enrolled on access courses in three curriculum areas while, at the time of the inspection, 120 students were following courses in five curriculum areas. There are four adult fast-track GNVQ programmes to enable mature students to gain qualifications in a shorter than normal time. Progression routes are clear. The programmes offer general and vocational opportunities and there is flexibility for students in the method and timing of study. Some provision is offered on Saturday mornings when there are workshops for both children and adults, so that families can attend. A nursery, open every day from 08.30 until 17.00, is provided for the use of staff and students.

13 Extensive international links have led to the college's involvement in a number of collaborative activities. These include close arrangements with institutions in France, Holland, Germany and the United States of America, through which students on vocational programmes take up work placements in Lille, Tulle, Hamburg, Amsterdam and Minnesota. The college is also seeking to increase its commercial activities internationally and has recently obtained a contract with Holland and Belgium to produce

multi-lingual training materials for care programmes. The college has successfully bid for European Community funding over the last two years. The co-ordination of international links has now been formalised with the appointment of a director of international education who is supported by an international education quality group.

14 The college is strongly committed to the development of flexible learning, whereby students are offered a choice about methods of study and attendance. This is an increasingly important feature in course design and delivery. Substantial resources have been allocated for the period 1993-95 to support flexible learning projects and to invest in appropriate accommodation, equipment and staff training. Modularisation of the curriculum has had the effect of increasing access to courses and of encouraging different approaches to teaching and learning. An increasing number of NVQ programmes enrol students at whatever point in the year they wish to begin their studies and allow assessment to take place whenever they are ready to be accredited. In addition, 18-week semesters have been introduced to enable students to start programmes of study in January or September. The move towards flexible learning has been reinforced by the establishment of learning-resource centres on all college sites. These bring together traditional library resources and a wide range of information technology and multi-media resources. Students can work in the centres at times convenient to them and at their own pace. Tutorial support is available at all times. A learning-resources manager has been appointed to manage the centres and to ensure the continuing development of flexible learning in the college. In some curriculum areas, the pace of modularisation is proceeding faster than the development of appropriate flexible learning materials and of systems for tracking individual students' progress.

15 There are good working relationships with local industry and employers are represented on some college committees. However, a few vocational areas, such as hairdressing and beauty therapy, have no formal liaison or advisory group. The college recently commissioned a general needs analysis survey to inform the planning and development of the increasing range of training and consultancy services provided for local employers. A full-time commercial services manager is now in post and the service is run as a commercial and professional operation with a business strategy, clear performance indicators and targets which have already been exceeded. To date, most of the training delivered has been in the field of management but the college's portfolio of courses is increasing in response to the commercial opportunities in the area. In August 1994, Bury college took over the Bolton and Bury operation of a private training organisation. This has given the college greater opportunities in relation to youth credits and modern apprenticeships.

16 The partnership with the Bolton and Bury TEC is strong and productive at strategic and operational levels. There are many important

links including the provision of courses and consultancy by the college. The college benefits from using fully the TEC's labour market intelligence. Both the college and the TEC value the good working relationships.

17 The college is a partner with the TEC and the local authority in putting together the Bury single regeneration bid. The partnership has produced a vision statement aimed at raising levels of education and achievement in areas of the local community. This includes a plan to relocate the college buildings on a single site alongside a business plaza close to the centre of town.

18 A clear and coherent marketing strategy is supported by effective market research. A corporate image has been agreed and an appropriate range of high-quality marketing materials has been produced. Marketing activities are co-ordinated by a marketing officer supported by an action group representing all areas of the college's provision.

19 The college has an equal opportunities policy approved by the corporation and applied to all aspects of the college's work. Effective monitoring procedures are in place. The college has been successful in attracting students from minority ethnic groups. These form 8.2 per cent of the college population, well above the proportion of minority ethnic groups in the local population, which is 3.7 per cent. The college is addressing some of the gender imbalances which are traditional in some areas of the curriculum; for example in engineering, computing and care.

20 The college is strongly committed to provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learning support policy provides an appropriate framework for the development of this provision across the college. A wide range of opportunities is provided on both specialist and mainstream programmes. The move towards placing such students on mainstream courses has created a need for more classroom support and this is being provided. In 1993-94, there were 44 students on mainstream courses with additional support. At the time of the inspection there were 149. A number of innovative programmes meet students' differing needs for learning support. There are good working links with a number of relevant external agencies including the social services and the health service. The college works in collaboration with both of these on the 'A new life' project. This is sponsored by the Further Education Unit and is designed to deliver learning provision as part of care in the community.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 There are 19 governors, including the principal. They are drawn from a range of business and community interests. Two places have recently become vacant due to the incumbents' change of job and these are in the process of being filled with business governors. Eight of the governors are from manufacturing, new technology industries, small business, legal services, training organisations and an education business

link. There is a member from the local TEC, two co-opted members, a secondary head teacher and a member of the area health authority. One of the governors is a prominent member of the local Asian community. There are also two staff members and a student member. Meetings of the board take place about five times a year and are well attended. There are more frequent meetings of the seven subcommittees; finance, remuneration, employee relations, staff and student liaison, curriculum, land and premises, and audit. The governors have drawn up a position statement in which their responsibilities and powers are clearly stated as is the remit of the board and its subcommittees.

22 Governors use their experience and expertise in the interests of the college as a whole. They are clear about their responsibilities and carry out their duties effectively. The board has been involved since incorporation in strategic planning and development. Governors discuss, contribute to and monitor the implementation of strategic plans through full board and subcommittee meetings. They are well informed about the college's performance through regular reports, minutes of the academic board and monthly financial statements. They receive copies of the college newspaper and quality newsletter, take up invitations to open days and other college activities, and attend meetings of faculty boards and the academic board.

23 Senior managers have succeeded in communicating the college's mission and strategic plan, so that both are well understood by staff. Members of staff can talk of initiatives and developments which they have launched in terms of implementing aspects of the strategic plan. Managers operate within a consultative structure and seek to involve staff at all levels in their decision making.

24 Generally, the links between faculty and divisional plans and the college strategic plan are evident. Steps are taken by faculty boards to ensure that faculty plans contain relevant action plans and there is a good match between divisional operating priorities and the college strategy.

25 The senior management team has used the opportunities offered by incorporation to restructure the organisation, albeit within the constraints imposed by previously-agreed terms and conditions for staff. The management structure consists of an executive group of the principal, two vice-principals and the director of personnel who is also the clerk to the corporation. The senior management team comprises this group together with a senior assistant principal, an assistant principal, the head of learner/learning support and five faculty heads. Specific management of staffing and resources is the remit of the heads of the 12 divisions who service the needs of the faculties. The faculty structure focuses on students and their courses and was introduced early in 1993 to align management roles and tasks more closely with implementation of college aims and objectives. Its impact has resulted in a number of benefits. These include a high level of participation by staff in planning and monitoring the quality

of their own work and in contributing to the work of their division; high staff morale; enhanced communication and collaboration across the college; and increased opportunities for students to receive detailed and impartial information about a wide range of courses before enrolment and to transfer more easily between levels and programmes, if appropriate. The establishment of the foundation studies faculty has raised the status of foundation and intermediate programmes within the college.

26 Most staff have written job descriptions. Staff have their divisional head as line manager though they also report in some matters to the head of the faculty in which they work. Heads of divisions have a crucial role in curriculum management.

27 With few exceptions, staff are clear about lines of accountability and reporting, although these have become more complex within the new structure. Delegation of responsibilities for review and development through faculty heads to course team leaders has had a positive impact on staff involvement and morale in all but a few divisions.

28 Communications at all levels are very good. There are weekly timetabled slots for meetings at faculty, divisional and course team levels. Part-time teaching staff are encouraged to attend course team meetings and many do so. There is also a monthly college newspaper, a weekly bulletin and regular editions of the quality newsletter. Co-operation and teamwork among staff is effective. There are regular team meetings at course and division levels most of which are minuted. A few course teams meet less regularly, for example the hairdressing and beauty team where only some course meetings are minuted and there are no agendas or action plans.

29 The academic board is an important cross-college committee which discusses and advises the principal on major issues. It meets termly and is well attended by its members, which include senior managers, staff representing all faculties and student representatives. It has a major role in monitoring the implementation of cross-college policies and initiatives such as equal opportunities and learning support. It also receives course evaluation and review reports from its subcommittee, the standards committee, and ensures that these are discussed by the executive group to whom it makes recommendations for action.

30 The basis on which resources are allocated is clear and generally understood. Funding is allocated on the basis of weighted student numbers and can be vired between financial years. Budget control reports and variance analysis provide checks on unauthorised spending. Heads of faculty and divisional heads manage resources effectively. There is meticulous cost monitoring at course level, aided by monthly financial reports produced by the appropriate vice-principal. Training is being arranged for staff to help them understand the new funding model. There is some inefficiency generated by split-site working. For example, in art and design, expensive resources have to be duplicated on three sites.

31 The college is well advanced in developing an integrated computer-based management information system. It enables the college to produce a wide range of reports which are used by staff at all levels. The quality of information provided is good and is being used increasingly to support planning and decision making. Managers all have direct access to the system, though in practice they tend to receive information on a range of performance indicators as part of scheduled monthly bulletins or on request through the faculty administrators. In many divisions, course teams are using management information and the outcomes of audits and student surveys to inform decisions. For example, attendance, retention and destinations are appropriately monitored and effective action taken. Some teaching staff find that information on student tracking and course outcomes is not always well presented or easy to interpret, particularly for modular courses or courses where students are free to start and finish their studies at any time of the year. The college has recently appointed an administrative officer to maintain computerised records for those students taking NVQs and to assist academic staff by monitoring and retrieving relevant information.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 The provision of guidance and support to individual students is identified as a priority in the strategic plan. An extensive structure is being developed to guide and support students before entry, at entry and on programmes. Aspects of guidance and support which previously operated separately have been drawn together into a single structure operating under a head of learner/learning support.

33 Potential students have a range of well-publicised opportunities to receive impartial guidance prior to enrolment. Records are kept of pre-enrolment guidance interviews and their outcomes. Most students have more than one advice or guidance interview before enrolling.

34 Enrolment procedures and processes are efficient and effective. Links with the management information system at enrolment enable up-to-date information to be provided on the numbers recruited to courses. All students have access to a well-planned induction programme which strikes an appropriate balance between general induction to the college and subject-based induction. A common core of activities supported by relevant materials is supplemented by specific activities designed to meet the particular needs of the different student groups.

35 Enrolment and induction programmes include procedures to identify an individual student's learning support needs. Where appropriate, students' numeracy and literacy skills are tested. There is a cross-college system for meeting identified learning needs but this is not yet implemented consistently in all faculties. Although procedures for assessing students' prior learning are well developed in a few areas, the assessment of prior learning does not feature on most courses. Some curriculum areas make

effective use of records of achievement and there is an established programme of individual action planning. For example, in care courses, records of achievement are used and maintained by students who have brought them from school. Such records can also be started by mature students during their course.

36 Students have access to, and many make use of, a wide range of advice, guidance and counselling services which are co-ordinated by the head of learner/learning support. Guidance centres at all sites provide a focus for many of the services. The main centre is at the Bury site. It is well staffed and contains a good range of resources and facilities including areas for confidential counselling. The centre is open to existing and potential students throughout the day and into the evening, and staff also use the centre. A team of trained and experienced staff provide welfare advice, careers guidance and personal counselling at all sites. They have extensive links with outside agencies to which students are referred where appropriate. All centres and their services are publicised through the college induction programme, the student handbook, notice boards on each site, specific leaflets and the learning services bulletin. Careers guidance is provided by officers from the local careers service who are present for the equivalent of four-and-a-half days per week across the four sites, as part of a careers service agreement between the college and the local office. In addition to this, the college pays for one full-time equivalent careers officer who is based in the Bury guidance centre. Comprehensive records are kept by the centres and information from these is analysed and used to review and further improve the services. Four full-time student liaison officers have recently been appointed to provide additional support for students at each site.

37 Students are represented on most cross-college committees and on the faculty boards. Each site has a student council made up of representatives elected by tutorial groups and the site student liaison officer. Weekly council meetings are well attended. The councils elect representatives to the student executive group which meets twice a month. Issues and concerns identified by the group are discussed in monthly meetings with the head of learner/learning support and appropriate action is taken.

38 All students have a personal tutor and all full-time and many part-time courses include timetabled tutorial periods. The college is developing a framework for a minimum entitlement to tutorial support through a programme of tutorial activities for all students. Deputy heads of faculty, supported by pastoral leaders and tutors, are responsible for co-ordinating the development and implementation of the entitlement for students in their faculty. The tutorial programme is in place in some programme areas; for example, art and design. It has yet to be implemented fully across all subjects and courses. Some engineering and GCE A level students do not value their timetabled tutorials and spend much of this time in private study.

39 There is a college-wide review system, which includes performance targets, to enable students to review and evaluate their progress regularly. Review days are scheduled to ensure the production of reports on students' progress at times which coincide with parents' evenings. Both subject and personal tutors contribute to these reviews. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given specific support to enable them to participate fully in the review process. The college-wide system is not applied consistently across all divisions.

40 There is an efficient system for recording students' attendance. Personal tutors receive information on a weekly basis and this enables them to follow up absences. The action taken to deal with offending students is not always effective.

41 The college has recently appointed several staff to posts concerned with students' guidance and support. It has also established detailed policies and procedures on guidance and support, and tutors require appropriate assistance to enable them to implement these effectively.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

42 Seventy per cent of the 241 teaching sessions which were observed during the inspection had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. The following table summarises the grades given for the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Number of sessions
GCE AS/A level	14	34	16	2	0		66
GCSE	5	5	3	2	0		15
GNVQ	10	32	13	3	1		59
NVQ	4	24	5	1	0		34
Other	11	29	23	3	1		67
Total	44	124	60	11	2		241

43 Most programmes have clearly-stated aims and objectives. Course records and documents meet the requirements of the awarding bodies. With very few exceptions, comprehensive and detailed schemes of work are in use and most teachers use effective lesson plans. In some divisions, for example art and design, programme plans are given to all students at the start of their course. Some teachers also ensure that students are aware of the aims of the lesson before work starts. In business studies, there is insufficient joint planning of the GCE A level scheme of work by the teachers involved. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, the lack of explicit links sometimes causes confusion for students when they change from one module to another.

44 The standard of teaching is high and work is generally well matched to students' abilities and backgrounds. Teachers often use a variety of

teaching and learning styles, particularly during long sessions. In English, the range of activities helps to generate interest and encourage students to use their own ideas. In art and design, care, and management courses, appropriate teaching methods enable students to develop relevant skills to a high standard. In a few instances, for example in some business studies and English lessons, there is a failure to review and consolidate learning outcomes before the class ends. A few lessons, do not achieve their aim to involve students. For example, some discussion draws in only a handful of students and leads to other students losing interest, or questioning is not sufficiently exploratory and teachers supply the answer before the student can respond.

45 With very few exceptions, there are excellent working relationships between staff and students. Most students find their courses interesting and enjoyable and would recommend them to others. Students generally respond well in discussions and group work. Business students participate enthusiastically in work-related assignments. In English, the one-to-one teaching carried out in the learning support area is of high quality: friendly, positive and clearly matched to individuals' needs. The lessons involving adults, are conducted in a particularly cordial and productive working atmosphere which values adults' contributions and motivates them to achieve their potential. Sensible use is made of students' previous experience. Students are encouraged and given exercises to help them analyse their own learning needs.

46 Students are less well motivated in some GCSE classes, for example mathematics and languages, where the teaching fails to take adequate account of the wide range of students' ability and experience. The same is true of a few engineering lessons: some students are not challenged sufficiently while others are over stretched. In some cases, where students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated into mainstream courses, teachers fail to recognise their learning needs and are using inappropriate teaching strategies.

47 The college approach to assessment and marking is described in the college charter. In most divisions, work is set and marked regularly and there is adequate feedback in the form of written comments. In English, marking of work is thorough, and teachers helpfully identify targets for improvement. The best marking at GCE A level is of a particularly high standard. GNVQ tutors regularly inform students of their progress and keep appropriate records. In catering, tourism and leisure, there are frequent checks on learning, and continuity is ensured by reference to previous work. In business studies, teachers' verbal feedback to individual students is often detailed, although the level of written feedback varies.

48 Assignments are of an appropriate standard: the requirements are clearly stated and most students are familiar with the relevant assessment criteria. In adult education programmes, assignments are interesting and challenging and students are well prepared for written tasks which allow

them to respond according to their different levels of ability. Vocational course assessments are related well to work in industry. For example, art and design students carry out real design assignments at the request of local businesses. In most subjects, there are procedures for ensuring that standards of marking are consistent. In engineering, standards are maintained by the double marking of samples of work. In business studies, detailed procedures for internal verification are in place. In English, moderation and standardisation of coursework for all courses is systematic and a good source of course and staff development.

49 All full-time students on vocational courses have well-organised and relevant work placements which extend their learning opportunities and meet fully the requirements of the awarding bodies. Students on GCE A level and GCSE programmes have the opportunity for work experience through the student development programme, though not all of them take up this opportunity.

50 Most lessons are enhanced by the relevant use of learning aids including good-quality learning packages, study guides and a range of audio-visual resources. In English, written resources are of a good quality and the best are largely matched to students' needs and interests. The division organises a good range of theatre trips and visits which are well attended. In modern language and adult education courses, teachers often fail to make use of audio-visual aids in circumstances where they would have helped students' learning.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

51 Students aged 16-18 entered for GCE AS and A level examinations in 1993-94 scored, on average, 3.8 points per entry. 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 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. All students passed their GCE A levels in mathematics, further mathematics, German, Spanish, religious education and music. Results were above average in art and design, business studies, physics, computing, and English literature. In history and in government and politics, results were well below the national average and in human biology and sociology they were poor. GCSE results were much improved on those for the previous year as a result of college action to provide a wider range of accreditation opportunities at intermediate and foundation levels. Of 122 students entering GCSE English, 70 per cent obtained grades A-C. In geography, German and art, all entrants obtained grades A-C. Students did not achieve so well in mathematics where, of 284 entering, 40 per cent obtained grades A-C. On specialist programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 34 of the 36 students achieved externally-accredited qualifications.

52 Adult students' examination results were generally good. Results in GCE A level and GCSE examinations were above the examination board national average in most subjects. Of the 62 students entering for GCSE English language 87 per cent gained A-C passes; of 21 entering for mathematics 65 per cent obtained grade A-C passes. Ninety-two per cent of adults on the fast track GNVQ advanced level programmes gained the award. All students completing access courses achieved an award. Of these 80 per cent continued in higher education, 16 per cent progressed to further education and 4 per cent entered employment.

53 The Department for Education's 1994 performance tables record that 77 per cent of the 246 students, aged 16-18, in their final year of study on vocational courses were successful. Subsequently, the college has revised its return to the department to show that the accurate pass rate is 85 per cent. This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The results achieved by older students on many of the vocational courses were good. Adult students taking GNVQ advanced levels were particularly successful. All entrants for business and finance and for care and 97 per cent of art and design entrants gained the award. Students on courses in leisure and tourism and hospitality and catering achieved good results. Some also won prizes for outstanding achievement from awarding and other national bodies. On the intermediate GNVQ in business, only 47 per cent of entrants gained the award. Poor results were also achieved in some NVQ courses in engineering, hairdressing, beauty therapy and business administration.

54 Faculty deputy heads are responsible for the regular gathering and monitoring of information on student achievement and retention rates. The information is analysed by the quality manager and standards committee and published in faculty reports. The poor retention rates in some GCE A level subjects are partially the result of students failing to re-enrol for the second year. Ways of addressing this issue are under consideration. Retention rates on the two-year GNVQ advanced level programmes are good. At foundation and intermediate levels, rates are more varied, though on over half the courses more than 80 per cent of students completed the course. In GCSE information technology, only 21 per cent of students completed the course and in some other GCSE subjects, notably mathematics, retention rates were also poor. Seventy-four per cent of students on access courses completed their course.

55 Basic communication and study skills are developed as an integral part of students' main studies. Staff and students show awareness of the need to develop study skills. Students make effective use of the information technology, library and multi-media learning resources in the flexible learning centres to develop their skills. Core skills are effectively integrated into GNVQ programmes through strategies that enable students to develop interpersonal, numerical, information technology and communication skills. Care students demonstrate excellent presentation skills and regularly use information technology skills in assignments. In contrast,

engineering craft students have few opportunities to develop basic information technology skills. The recent new appointment of an information technology specialist, who is also a vocational specialist, is expected to extend the use of information technology.

56 In most classes, there is much group work and students use this effectively to develop knowledge and skills. Science students have a positive approach to problem solving and use the laboratory facilities in a co-operative way. Art and design students work well in groups, feeding back outcomes to the whole class. They are very articulate about their work. In English, most students work productively in lessons and take some responsibility for their learning when working in pairs and small groups.

57 Students generally develop knowledge and skills to an appropriate standard. In art and design, research skills are well developed. Students have achieved success in competition work and their designs are now used in brochures, leaflets and logos by a number of regional and national organisations. In English, most students' work is competent and shows sound understanding of texts and topics. The work of the highest achievers at GCE A level is good, and includes well-organised, coherently-written essays and coursework. In languages, standards are particularly high in listening, reading and writing, and students in some lessons show a good grasp of grammar. Adult basic education students learn to assess their own work and make effective progress. Many students with learning difficulties gain the confidence and skills they need to progress from specialist to semi-specialist or mainstream courses.

58 Some engineering students are not achieving their full potential because they are not being provided with sufficient challenge. In languages, though the work set is demanding and teachers have high expectations of students, there are too few opportunities for students to make extensive and creative use of the language which they are learning, and the standard of speaking skills varies. On GNVQ courses, notably in some leisure and tourism and care classes, work is insufficiently challenging for the level of student with too much emphasis on recall of knowledge. There is a lack of appropriate pace and rigour in some fast-track courses. First-year GCE A level and GNVQ students in some science courses are uncertain of mathematical techniques and skills.

59 Practical work is generally well organised and appropriate. Much of the practical work on care courses takes place in external work placements which are well managed and regularly assessed. Hairdressing students demonstrate a high level of practical skill development. Art and design students work independently and safely with a wide range of materials. There is a high level of safety awareness in practical work in science and engineering. On all engineering courses however, insufficient practical work is provided and several students complained about this.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 The college commitment to quality assurance is clearly stated in its mission, strategic plan and faculty plans. A comprehensive written policy establishes the overall framework and outlines the roles and responsibilities of individuals, teams and committees. An action plan for quality identifies priorities and milestones for the current year. Mechanisms exist to ensure that staff at all levels are familiar with the content of these documents and they are kept up to date with developments through 'Quality News', a bulletin published at regular intervals and widely distributed.

61 Responsibility for monitoring of quality is largely vested in committees. The academic board, its standards subcommittee, faculty boards, course teams and quality groups all contribute. In addition, the college has appointed a quality manager and invested in staff time for meetings and in-service training. The standards subcommittee has managed a number of internal audits, commissioned by the executive group, to assess the quality of aspects of college work. These have included audits of specific courses, support services, and cross-college initiatives. Outcomes have led to relevant actions. All programmes are subject to internal validation by the standards subcommittee whose responsibilities are increasing as it takes on additional tasks at the request of senior management. Its terms of reference have recently been updated.

62 Course teams take different approaches to course review and evaluation and the extent to which proceedings are formalised. Not all teams keep and publish minutes of their meetings or produce action plans and targets. At the request of college management, the standards committee has developed common quality and reporting criteria for use at course team level. A timetable has been drawn up for course teams to report against these criteria, beginning late in the autumn term, 1994.

63 The importance of the students' contribution to quality assurance is acknowledged by their inclusion on committees and working groups. Students' views are expressed through their membership of course teams, faculty boards, the academic board, the board of the corporation and student councils. Feedback from students on various aspects of provision is gathered annually through a college-wide student survey. This is analysed to inform planning at senior level and its impact can be seen, for example in improved arrangements for induction and open days. On some courses, students' perceptions are gathered through questionnaires administered three times a year. Course teams differ in the attention they pay to information from students and the action they take as a result.

64 Students, staff, the board of the corporation and a wide range of college customers were consulted about the development of the college charter. It is distributed in an attractive and readable summary form to all students and staff. Relevant aspects of the charter are included in learning

contracts which are discussed and signed by both the student and group tutor.

65 There has been considerable investment in staff development, which amounts to 1 per cent of the college budget. The college is working towards the Investors in People award and, with the support of the TEC, is funding an external consultant to work with staff at all levels on relevant staff-development and training activities. Staff development related to NVQ and GNVQ programmes is substantial and a high proportion of staff have been trained as assessors.

66 Both teaching and support staff are encouraged to identify their needs for training and development. Part-time and full-time teaching staff take up a range of in-service training opportunities to update their curricular, industrial and commercial experience. Some needs are effectively met by utilising resources and opportunities within the college itself rather than relying on external provision. Insufficient connection is made between the college's operational objectives and analysis of staff-development needs.

67 All new, full-time staff attend an induction programme which includes an introduction to the college and to the relevant faculty and division. The programme is evaluated and revised to take account of participants' feedback. Staff involved last year judged it to be extremely useful. The full-time staff handbook is a valuable source of information for new staff. Induction for part-time staff is less well developed and the part-time staff handbook has not been updated.

68 Appraisal was introduced in 1993 to link staffing and staff training to the strategic plan. Extensive appraisal training is being given to all staff, beginning with senior and middle managers who are currently completing their training. The appraisal scheme is designed to help staff identify their own training and development needs.

69 The college's internal-assessment report provides a brief summary of its history followed by statements, identifying between two and six strengths, under each of the headings from Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The only major area of weakness it identifies is accommodation, and this is in line with the findings of the inspection. The production of the report was not linked to the college's quality procedures. Its contribution to the inspection process was limited.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70 Almost all teaching and support staff are suitably qualified and have the relevant industrial experience to match course needs. Teaching staff display a high level of knowledge and expertise in their subject area. Most are well informed about trends and issues in the further education sector. Those staff directly involved with NVQ and GNVQ provision have a good understanding of the implications for curriculum development and they are supported by effective staff training.

71 Part-time teachers are well qualified and most have relevant recent industrial experience. They are encouraged to become fully involved in the work of the division and many attend course team meetings. In some areas, for example business studies, the ratio of part-time to full-time teaching staff is high. The part-time teachers' needs for support in terms of staff development and access to appropriate learning resources are not always met.

72 Overall, the college has a sufficient number of support staff, but their deployment does not match current needs. In computing and adult basic education, technician support is inadequate. This is being addressed by a rolling programme of retraining and redeployment.

73 Teachers are effectively and efficiently deployed. The average class size is 18. In the continuing drive towards a more flexible approach to teaching and learning, efficiencies in formal teaching hours have been introduced. Part of the saving made is used to finance flexible-learning programmes, in particular the relevant retraining of technical and support staff to act as instructors or demonstrators in the flexible-learning centres and specialist workshops.

Equipment/learning resources

74 Most programme areas have good levels of appropriate specialist equipment. There is a well-equipped multi-skills office, a wide range of specialist equipment in art and design, and the experimental equipment in science laboratories is of a high standard. The 389 computer workstations give a good student to work station ratio of 8.7:1. However, only a relatively small proportion of these can run the latest versions of software and the quality and level of information technology resources at the Bury and Stand sites are poor. In mathematics, several sessions for computing students were adversely affected by lack of access to appropriate and reliable computers.

75 The resources and materials used to support teaching and learning are good in most subject areas though in some, for example health and social care, there is a shortage of suitable textbooks. Teachers in all programme areas make use of a wide range of written and audio-visual materials. The management suite at the Whitefield site has excellent compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities and flexible-learning packages. The Stand site holds a large stock of video and audio cassettes.

76 All sites have flexible-learning centres in various stages of development which bring together library, computer and multi-media learning resources. A large range of good-quality materials has been developed or purchased to support learning in these centres including study packs for independent learning and simplified guides to computer programmes. Students use the facilities in the centres in a responsible manner and there is a high level of usage at most times of the day. The

centres at the Bury and Peel sites are popular and consequently very busy at peak times. The resources and facilities at the Peel Centre are excellent and this is the model for centres currently under development at the other three sites.

77 The college has a cost-effective system in place for purchasing software and its membership of the Greater Manchester purchasing consortium ensures efficiency in purchasing a wide range of equipment, goods and services. The library budget has been increased this year by £8,000 giving an expenditure of £10.92 per full-time student. Bookstocks are not yet computer-indexed and links between the four site libraries are by telephone and a daily courier van.

Accommodation

78 Accommodation at Bury College is split into four sites. The standard of student facilities at all sites is generally good with the exception of the refectories which have limited services, mainly from vending machines. Hot food is available only at lunch times. Students at the Stand site have no common room. There is a general lack of quiet private study areas.

79 The college environment is generally pleasant. Corridors and classrooms are clean and tidy. There are impressive wall displays to support learning in a number of areas, notably in art and design, and care. Some of the specialist accommodation is of high quality. The Whitefield site has a modern training restaurant which is open to the public three days a week and a popular bistro is run wholly by catering students. A purpose-built nursery has recently been opened at the Peel site, serving the needs of students and staff. It is also used as a work experience location for students on nursery nursing courses. Almost all areas of the college are accessible to students and staff who use wheelchairs. The accommodation at Whitefield for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is isolated and there is no suitable location for teaching independent living skills.

80 In some programme areas, the size of teaching rooms does not match class sizes. Some of the buildings date from the early part of the twentieth century and refurbishment and maintenance costs are high. The property is efficiently managed. As a way of alleviating the high costs of repair and maintenance, several buildings and other assets are let out to the public when not in use; for example the theatres and football pitches.

81 Working across four sites necessarily causes a number of problems which affect the quality of learning. For example, some students have to move between sites to use facilities, especially information technology equipment, and there is no college bus service. In some cases where curriculum provision is delivered on more than one site, expensive resources have to be duplicated. In addition security and insurance costs are high. Efforts are continually being made to alleviate the problems caused by split sites with some degree of success. In the short term, subject

areas such as performing arts and media studies have been grouped at the Peel site and the GCE A level provision is almost all based at Stand. In the longer term, the college's comprehensive accommodation strategy, approved by the board, contains detailed plans to move accommodation and facilities for all provision on to two sites and eventually on to a single site close to the town centre.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

82 The college has made significant progress towards achieving its mission. Its strengths are:

- the wide range of courses with clear progression routes for students
- strong, productive links with a wide range of local, regional, national and international agencies
- successful strategies to increase the flexibility of provision
- the high quality of the learning centres
- open management and effective communication
- efficient and effective enrolment and induction procedures
- a wide range of relevant and accessible guidance, counselling and advice services
- a consistently high standard of teaching
- well-qualified and experienced teaching and support staff who maintain good working relationships with students.

83 If the college is to maintain its responsiveness, achieve planned growth and improve the quality of its provision, it should address the following issues:

- the variable implementation of student entitlement to tutorial support
- poor retention rates on some GCE A level courses
- the varying effectiveness of course review and evaluation procedures
- the reductions in efficiency and the quality of learning caused by split-site working.

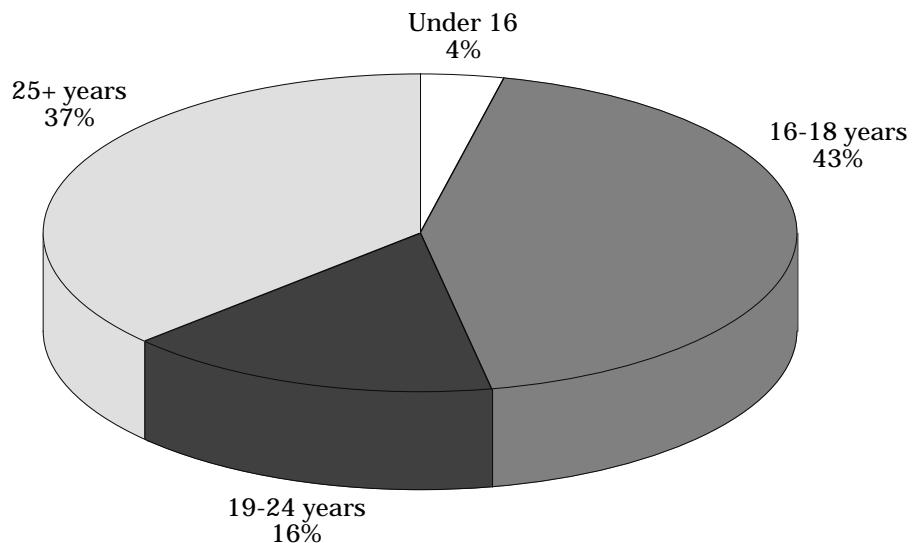
FIGURES

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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 16 months to July 1994)
 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)
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Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

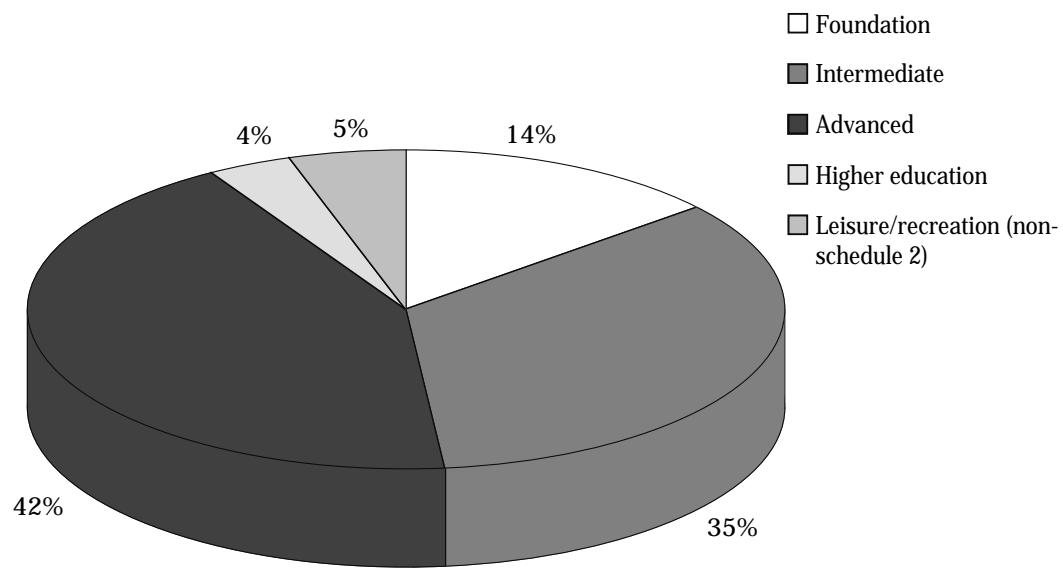
Bury College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 6,370

Figure 2

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



Enrolments: 6,370

Figure 3

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

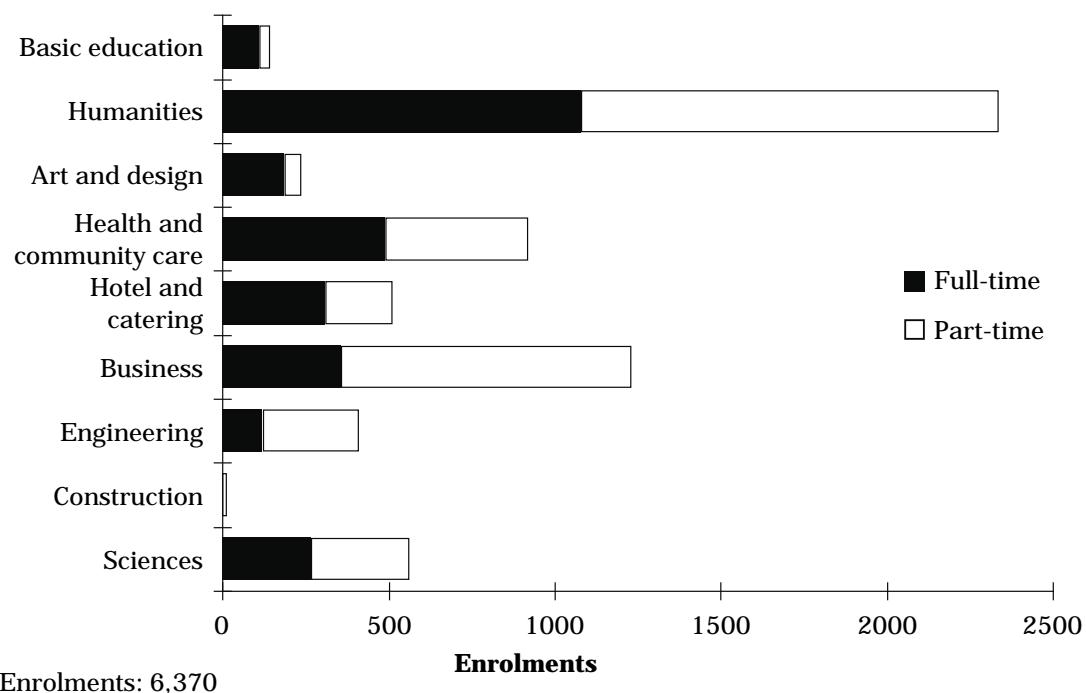


Figure 4

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

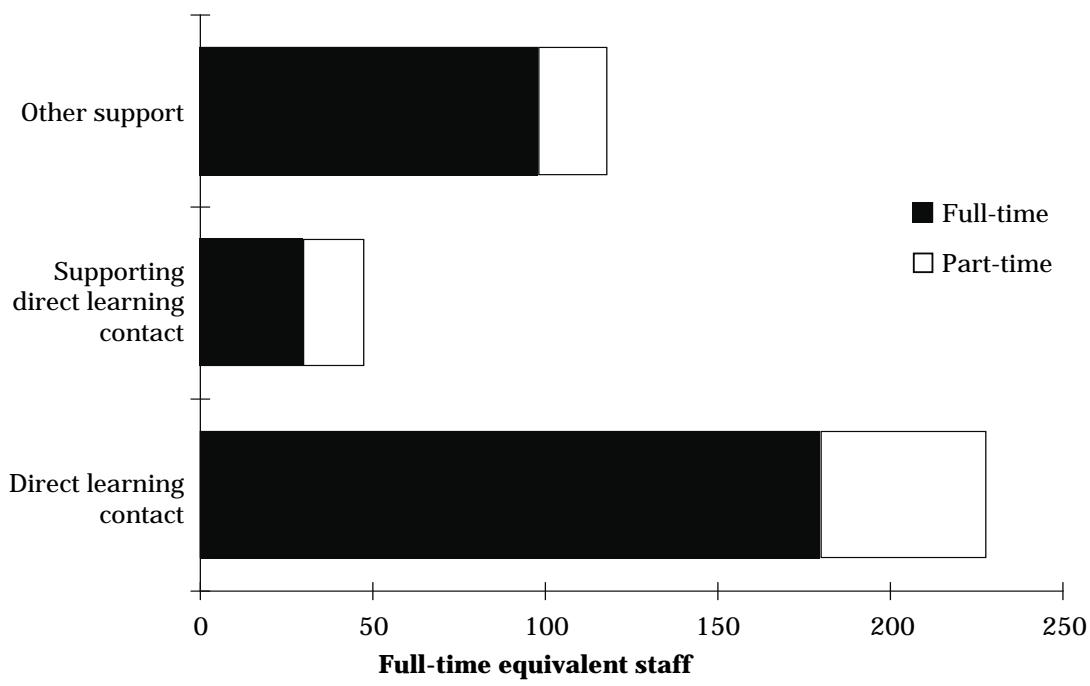
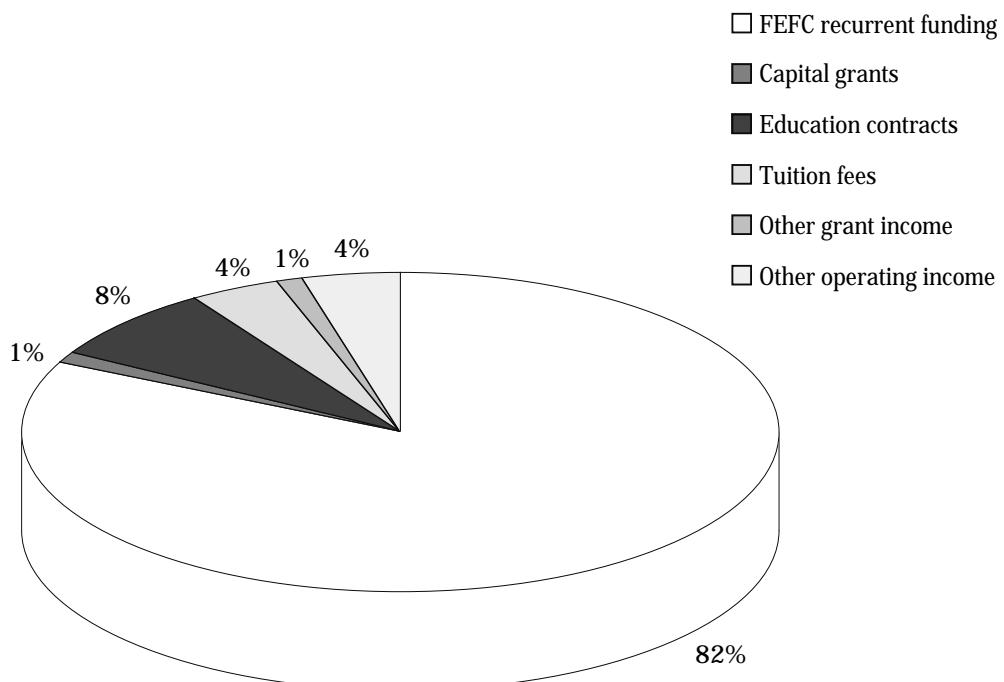


Figure 5

Bury College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)

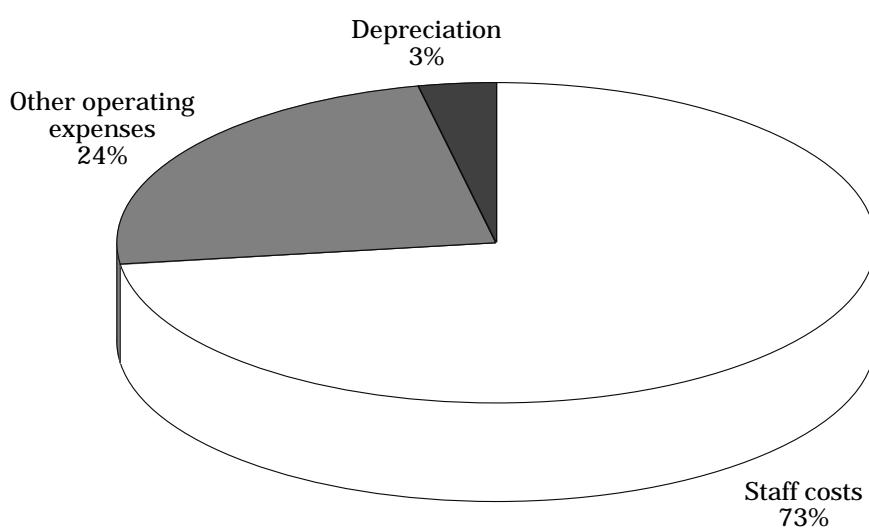


Income: £15,042,000

An additional £449,000 relates to the release of the revaluation reserve

Figure 6

Bury College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £14,776,000

Note: this chart excludes £5,000 interest payable

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