

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Chelmsford College

August 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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 the 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 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 90/97

CHELMSFORD COLLEGE
EASTERN REGION
Inspected August 1996-April 1997

Summary

Chelmsford College offers a broad range of courses for school-leavers and adults. The college is responsive to the needs of the business community. It has extensive and productive links with other European countries. The corporation and senior managers have set clearly identified objectives and priorities for the development of the college. There are appropriate procedures for the recruitment, admission and registration of students. Most teachers are suitably qualified and experienced and they prepare their lessons well. There is a good range of equipment and resources. Students' performance in examinations varies considerably. Retention rates are improving. The quality assurance system is comprehensive but the college should ensure that it leads to improvements in teaching and learning and in students' achievements. The college should: extend its range of courses at entry and foundation level; ensure that, where necessary, students are given help with basic skills; and improve tutorial support for some students.

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	2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	3
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics, sciences and computing	2	Health and community care	3
Construction	3	Art and design	3
Engineering	3	Humanities	3
Business and professional studies	2	Basic education/provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3
Business administration	2		
Hotel, catering, leisure and tourism	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 Chelmsford College, in Essex, was inspected in three phases. Enrolment and induction were inspected in August and September 1996. Curriculum areas were inspected between November 1996 and March 1997 and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in April 1997. Twenty-two inspectors spent 76 days in the college. They observed 199 classes and examined students' work. They met students, parents, staff, members of the corporation, employers and representatives from local schools, higher education, Essex Careers and Business Partnership Limited and the Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors also examined college policy statements, minutes of committee meetings and other college documents.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Chelmsford College was established as a further education college in 1962 on a single site in Moulsham Street, close to the town centre. At that time, the college made a major contribution to the training of apprentices locally, many of whom were employed by the major engineering companies located in the town. In 1988, the local education authority (LEA) financed the cost of a new building on a second site, at Princes Road, about one kilometre away. This was built to enable catering and construction courses to be transferred from the then Essex Institute of Higher Education, now Anglia Polytechnic University, and to allow the college to expand its numbers. The college is one of 11 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded colleges in Essex; of these, the two nearest colleges, both 16 kilometres away, are Braintree College to the north and Basildon College to the south.

3 There are two selective grammar schools serving the immediate area and beyond. All eight maintained secondary schools in Chelmsford, and those in the surrounding villages, have sixth forms. The LEA is responsible for adult education provision. The percentage of 16 year olds in the Chelmsford and mid-Essex area who continue in full-time education has been between 78 and 83 per cent in recent years.

4 Chelmsford has a population of approximately 152,000. A large number of those in employment commute daily to London. Local employment has traditionally been heavily dependent on engineering and on financial and local government services. In recent years, the engineering and manufacturing sector has declined significantly, and the numbers employed by the county council have fallen. There has been an increase in employment in retailing and distribution. The recession has had a more significant impact on employment in Essex than it has in the rest of the southern counties. The county's unemployment rate has, however, fallen substantially since its peak at the beginning of 1993. In March 1996 it was 7 per cent in Essex as a whole and 5 per cent in Chelmsford.

5 In 1995-96, there were 2,390 full-time students and 3,903 part-time students at the college. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. The college employs 154 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 117 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

6 The college's mission is to 'provide high-quality learning opportunities for individuals, employers and groups in Essex'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college offers an extensive range of education and training programmes. Courses are available in all the programme areas of the FEFC except agriculture. The range of courses is regularly reviewed, and extended or revised to meet the needs of the local community. A programme of 26 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects and 12 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects is offered during the day and in the evening. Subjects in the programme may also be studied through open learning, whereby students work on their own, at times of their choosing, using learning materials suited to their individual needs. Courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) are offered in 11 areas. These complement the wide range of courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs), mainly at levels 2 and 3, and other vocational and professional courses. Students can strengthen their achievements by taking extra qualifications, or accredited units from other courses, in addition to their main qualification. For example, GNVQ advanced students may also take a GCE A level subject. GCE A level and GCSE students may broaden their programme by developing a range of skills through study for the diploma of achievement awarded by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.

8 A successful open learning programme has been developed for students who prefer this method of learning or who are unable to attend classes regularly. They are provided with study materials which they can use at home and they receive tutorial support regularly. Over 450 students have chosen to study through open learning this year. They are enrolled on a variety of courses including GCE A levels, GCSEs, languages, and vocational courses such as those leading to qualifications of the Association of Accounting Technicians. A further 175 students are enrolled for an open workshop in information technology skills at the college. A small number of higher education courses is available. These courses are either franchised from Anglia Polytechnic University or validated directly by the awarding body. The Anglia Polytechnic University courses include the first two years of a bachelor of science (BSc) degree course and a higher national certificate course in health and care (childhood studies). Students who are registered under the 'Anglia Compact' scheme, which the college operates with Anglia Polytechnic University, may be given

preference when applying for courses at the university. Currently, the college is developing similar arrangements with two other universities.

9 A successful professional development services unit works directly with employers to design training programmes to meet their specific needs. The unit responds quickly to enquiries. Much of the training is carried out on clients' premises. The unit has expanded rapidly and exceeded its 1995-96 income target by a considerable amount. It has recently been awarded substantial contracts from companies in Chelmsford and throughout the mid-Essex area.

10 Productive relationships have been developed with Essex TEC and other business organisations in the county. College staff maintain close links with Essex TEC, and play an active part in its working groups. The college has recently entered into a contract with Essex TEC to provide modern apprenticeship training for 22 trainees in a range of disciplines. The college also works closely with Mid-Essex Business Link, Chelmsford Borough Council and with both the Chelmsford and the North and Mid Essex Chambers of Commerce.

11 The 'Essex Returners' Unit' is based at the Moulsham Street campus. Funded jointly by the Essex TEC and the college, the unit provides a successful research and information facility and it has a high profile in the area. It researches and advises on the needs of those with childcare requirements, older workers, ethnic minorities, ex-offenders and those with disabilities to find routes into training and employment. It also advises employers who are looking to recruit mature workers. The unit has organised national seminars and conferences on topics such as arrangements for flexible working and training, and the barriers to employment and progression which older people face. Its work is recognised nationally and it is supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission. The college seeks to promote equality of opportunity through its comprehensive equal opportunities policy, a statement on equal opportunities in its charter, and its disability statement. However, the college has not monitored the implementation of its equal opportunities policy regularly. The policy has recently been revised and managers have clarified who has responsibility for ensuring that it is properly implemented.

12 A few courses are timetabled flexibly to suit the specific needs of adults or under-represented groups. For example, some classes in art and design and office technology are arranged at times to suit those who have to take their children to and from school. Recently, the college launched a small programme of four courses on Saturdays. These courses form what is known as the 'Saturday college' and they have attracted plenty of enrolments, particularly the computing skills workshops. An access to higher education programme is offered in three subject areas but enrolments for this have declined. The college is reviewing its access to higher education programme with a view to offering other subjects and expanding the provision. The college works co-operatively with the

Chelmsford Adult Community College. The principal meets regularly with the principal of the community college to plan provision. The Chelmsford Adult Community College uses the college's premises and there is some joint publicity by the two institutions. Provision which is exclusively for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is limited. There is, however, a work preparation course, funded under the TEC youth training programme, to assist these students in the transition from school to working life. The college also offers a course to help them to progress to mainstream craft training. In general, GNVQ foundation courses have failed to recruit sufficient students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who join mainstream courses are given help and support to enable them to study effectively.

13 The college has maintained co-operative links with some local schools despite the fact that it is in competition with them for post-16 students. College staff attend careers evenings in most schools and, in a few cases, they are invited to give presentations about the college. Pupils from one school attend the college one day a week to undertake foundation training in engineering skills. A partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board enables school pupils to sample 'taster' sessions in the construction curriculum centre. Co-operative links have also been established with some special schools. At curriculum level, links with employers and the community are of variable quality. Work experience placements are arranged for most full-time students. A few employers are involved in curriculum developments and the assessment of students. Local business people act as advisers in the Young Enterprise Scheme. The college's governors have recently reviewed the extent to which employers or community representatives give advice on the curriculum and help to plan it. New arrangements for involving employers or community representatives in curriculum development are being implemented.

14 The college has developed extensive links with other European countries. As a result of these links, the college takes part in projects with institutions in other countries, students have work experience placements on the continent, and there are teacher exchanges and student exchanges. In a number of cases, these activities involve the college in multiple partnerships with institutions in other countries, and they have been funded by the European Union. For example, there is an innovative project for the development of a multimedia, multilingual dictionary of construction terminology with partners in Spain, Portugal, Italy and France. The college, together with seven European partners, is involved in a project funded under the 'Leonardo' scheme to assist rural and coastal tourism through the development of marketing and foreign language skills. Several curriculum areas also arrange a variety of cultural and educational visits to Europe. For example, a recent group of NVQ catering students went on a gastronomic tour of France.

15 Marketing is effectively co-ordinated and planned. Recently, the college used a variety of advertising media in order to raise its profile in the local community. Promotional materials are attractive and informative. Marketing events are held throughout the year and the college is regularly open to the public. The college advertises itself to the local community by providing information about its provision at stands in local supermarkets. Staff also visit community organisations. The college's market research has been limited but staff have carried out some useful work by providing an analysis of labour market information. This analysis will be taken into account in the planning of full-cost courses.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 Corporation members provide effective governance. Governors understand their role and how it complements that of managers. They have provided the college executive with clear direction. For example, they have defined the college's role in the community. They have helped the college to devise key policies and they have encouraged the introduction of the new learning centres. The corporation has established five committees to carry out the more detailed aspects of its work; these cover personnel; finance and general purposes; audit; search; and remuneration, respectively. In addition, the corporation has established a working party to consider matters of governance. Corporation and committee meetings are well attended, and they are properly recorded and minuted. The corporation has established procedures for its self-assessment and it has identified standards for the work of its committees. In the corporation meeting attended by inspectors, senior managers made clear presentations to members who then asked searching questions to probe the issues under debate.

17 The corporation has 14 members including the principal and a member of staff. Nine are independent members, one is nominated by the TEC, one is from the community and another is from higher education. Three business members and the staff member are women. Governors are well qualified and experienced. Collectively, they offer a wide range of professional expertise that benefits the college. Governors have recently been involved in the examination of the college's procedures in academic and financial areas. They have also undertaken an assessment of 'client services'. Members of the corporation have a good appreciation of the college's work and the key issues affecting its development.

18 Corporation members are provided with regular reports from the principal that include key statistical data which relate to enrolments and to the number of tariff units achieved against targets. They also receive an annual report on students' achievements which includes a commentary, placing the results in the context of national statistics. There is limited information relating to year-on-year trends in examination results or the comparison of students' performance against appropriate benchmarks. There is limited reporting on the college's overall performance against performance indicators.

19 The college's present management structure was introduced in September 1995. The college is organised in 10 teaching sectors and there are three teams which provide support to all students across the college. The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal and three directors. Each of the directors has individual responsibility for finance, client services and quality and development, respectively. The development of cross-college courses and functions, such as open learning, GNVQ, and liaison with schools and higher education is the responsibility of nine managers. The senior management team has clearly defined terms of reference. The organisational structure and the arrangements for management of both teaching and support functions are appropriate and clear. The roles and responsibilities of managers are well understood by staff.

20 Senior managers provide effective leadership. They have clearly identified priorities for the strategic development of the college. College policies are well documented and clearly stated. Members of the senior management team and the sector heads all have clear job descriptions identifying their respective areas of responsibility. Staff are encouraged to take responsibility and to use their professional skills for the achievement of the college's agreed objectives. Specific managers have responsibility for monitoring the implementation of policies.

21 Working relationships between managers and non-managerial staff are good. Staff are informed about managerial decisions in a variety of ways, including a comprehensive range of meetings, the principal's bulletin which is issued three or four times a year, and a college newspaper that is produced about twice each term. In addition, each member of staff is given a summary of the strategic plan. At the time of the inspection, lines of communication between sectors and cross-curriculum providers were being reviewed as part of the college's commitment to securing the Investor in People award.

22 Staff have the opportunity to contribute to the development of college policies and procedures through membership of working groups and committees. The academic board and its committees advise the principal on the development of policies, working practices and planning. The board was reformed following the reorganisation of the college in 1995. It has three committees which cover learning resources, academic standards and matters relating to the quality of provision; the latter committee has its own subcommittee for staff development. Committees have clear terms of reference and they function effectively. The GNVQ working group has been particularly effective in introducing common arrangements for the administration of GNVQ programmes.

23 Sectors and courses are well organised and administered. The use of resources is monitored. The timetabling of staff is appropriate and efficient. Most courses are effectively managed. Course documentation is well organised. The systematic use of course files ensures that there is a consistent approach to course administration. Comprehensive records

are kept of course team meetings. Course teams monitor students' attendance carefully. Students' retention is monitored regularly. The monitoring of students' performance on courses is inadequate; there is insufficient analysis of students' achievements. Arrangements for the management of some programmes which are taught by staff from several sectors, have not always been effective. The management of the GCE A level and the GCSE programme is being reviewed in order to ensure that the teachers on it are more accountable and that the quality of the teaching and learning of GCE and GCSE subjects is monitored more closely.

24 The college is developing a more analytical approach to the preparation and the review of its strategic plan. Currently, the plan is drawn up by corporation members and senior and middle managers, in the light of clear corporate objectives against which the college's performance can be measured. Each sector has completed an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and has produced a development plan. The plans produced by the sectors, however, and those drawn up by teams which have business support functions, do not have precise objectives and they do not specify timescales within which specific tasks must be completed. The college intends to strengthen the planning process. It is intended that all sectors and the business support teams shall have, by September 1997, operating statements together with objectives which must be fulfilled over one year and over three years, respectively. The lack of detailed operational plans limits the extent to which managers can monitor how the college achieves its objectives. The senior management team and the sector heads closely monitor progress towards the achievement of the college's targets for enrolments, retention rates and funding levels. The college has maintained modest steady growth in enrolments in the last three years. It slightly exceeded its target for funded units in 1994-95 but experienced a shortfall of 2.5 per cent in 1995-96. It anticipates achieving its target in 1996-97.

25 Management information is readily available. The college management information systems are effectively administered and they are an authoritative source of accurate information. Reports on course applications, enrolments, retention rates and the number of tariff units earned are produced regularly. The record system on students holds six years of data about students and courses. These data have helped managers to carry out a comprehensive analysis of year-on-year trends in students' retention rates, by mode of attendance. Sector and senior managers can obtain information directly through computer terminals on the college networks. Direct access to this information is, however, not available for all staff. Plans for the development of the computer management information system are not formally recorded. The college does not have a comprehensive strategy for improving the collation and accessibility of information.

26 Resources are managed effectively and efficiently. Through its effective control and monitoring of expenditure the college has been able

to accumulate and maintain financial reserves. The needs of budget holders are carefully assessed in the light of previous enrolments for, and the total of tariff units earned by, the areas of work for which they are responsible. Monthly budget reports are made to cost centre budget holders. Management accounts are prepared monthly for the senior management team and for the finance and general purposes committee. Some improvements in value for money in service areas such as catering and energy consumption, have been achieved. In order that they may plan expenditure on resources more effectively, college managers have undertaken exploratory work on comparing the college's unit costs with those of other colleges, and they have entered into informal discussion with other college managers about funding arrangements. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 was £17.71 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1995-96 was £18.13 per unit.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 In 1995, policies on students' support were revised and new procedures were established for the recruitment of students, students' induction, tutorials and for helping students to acquire key skills. These procedures are implemented with variable effectiveness across the college. The support systems for full-time students are more firmly established than those for part-time students. The director of client services is assisted by a team of four cross-college managers who have responsibility for adult services, tutoring and developing the recording of achievement, schools and higher education liaison, and learning support, respectively.

28 The college provides school-leavers with comprehensive advice on the range of courses it offers. Enquiries about college courses are dealt with systematically and positively. The college's prospectus and other promotional material is of high quality; it is readily available and informative. Staff participate enthusiastically in events designed to promote liaison between the college and local schools. Most schools co-operate to make these successful. Some schools which have sixth forms, however, do not permit college staff to talk directly to pupils who wish to stay on in full-time education and recruitment from these schools is restricted. All prospective full-time students are interviewed by a teacher from the course for which they have applied. Students who are uncertain about their future career can obtain guidance from the college's careers adviser. In most sectors, interviews are thorough and they are valued by students. Interviewers are provided with guidelines and training but there has been no assessment of the effectiveness of the interview process. The college has set targets for the amount of time which should elapse between a prospective student's application and his or her interview. The college is aware that these targets are not always met.

29 Teachers provide effective guidance throughout the enrolment process. They take particular care to ensure that the students are given a learning programme which is appropriate for them. Many of the lessons seen during the induction process were lively and of interest to the students. Some induction lessons, however, were dull and some were taken up with giving the students documents. Some students did not receive information about the library and learning centres or the careers and course information centre. Students are given a useful, well-written students' handbook and diary. This handbook contains information about college facilities and events, the complaints procedure and a summary of the college's charter. Students are aware of the existence of the college's charter, but they know little about its contents. On many courses, students are provided with course handbooks. The GNVQ handbook is very effective. It contains simple and direct explanation of GNVQ terminology and its question and answer format is readily understood by most students.

30 Procedures for accrediting students' prior learning have been developed and staff from different areas of the college's work have been trained to carry out the accreditation. A handbook describing the accreditation system is available for students. Although little formal accreditation of students' prior learning has taken place, the accreditation procedures have been effective as a means of testing adults, in order to assign them to courses of an appropriate level.

31 Arrangements to help students who need to develop their basic skills are being strengthened. Learning support workshops are open for two hours in the middle of the day for four days each week. These take place in ordinary classrooms which have few specialist resources and no dedicated information technology equipment. Students are referred to workshops by their tutors. There is no formal monitoring of students' attendance and progress at workshops. Diagnostic testing of students' key skills is not carried out on entry to every course. The engineering sector tests all students in key skills. As a result of their showing in these tests, some students include, as part of their action plans, individual programmes of study to help them improve their performance in key skills.

32 Students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good help and support. The learning services manager organises a team of 10 support staff which includes a teacher of the deaf and two trained communicators with the deaf who support individual students on their courses. There is no specialist support for students with dyslexia. They are directed to the lunchtime workshops provided for all students and the monitoring of their progress is limited.

33 All full-time students have a designated tutor and a one-hour tutorial period within their weekly timetable. Tutorials for students on full-time vocational courses are an integral part of their programme of study. Tutorial support is effective and it is valued by students. In their tutorials, students on GCE A level and GCSE courses receive advice on how to apply

for higher education courses or for employment, and they are given information about health education. The quality of tutorial provision for GCE A level and GCSE students is variable and is largely dependent upon the individual efforts of their tutors. A number of initiatives have been taken to improve the quality of tutorials for these students and a working group has been established to develop a tutorial programme for them. Students are encouraged to take personal responsibility for maintaining their national records of achievement. On a number of general vocational courses, students record their acquisition of key skills as part of their tutorial activity. The quality and extent of tutorial provision for part-time students are variable. Tutorial arrangements for part-time students on access, NVQ and open learning courses are more effective than those on other part-time courses. The parents of full-time students aged 16 to 19 are informed of their children's progress. Students' attendance is regularly monitored. Procedures for following up unexplained absences are effective and they are valued by students.

34 Students have access to a comprehensive range of professional advice and guidance. A careers and course information centre is located centrally near the reception area. The college employs a qualified and experienced careers adviser who can be seen by appointment or on a 'drop-in' basis. Essex Careers and Business Partnership provides students with additional support throughout the year. Prospective students are offered advice and guidance at the time of the publication of their results. Students who wish to change courses are advised on alternative courses available to them in the college, and at other institutions. Advice is available to students on how to apply for a job or for a higher education course. Students are also given information on employment opportunities and on further courses which they can follow. Students can attend workshops on the preparation of curricula vitae and take part in practice interviews. Confidential counselling is available to students with personal problems. The admissions section readily and sympathetically provides students with information on grants and other financial matters.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

35 Inspectors observed 199 lessons. In 53 per cent of these, strengths outweighed the weaknesses. Weaknesses outweighed the strengths in 10 per cent of lessons. These percentages compare with an average, for all colleges inspected during the 1995-96 programme of inspections, of 63 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, as published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The following table summarises the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE A level	4	16	10	0	0	30
GCSE	2	6	3	1	0	12
GNVQ	9	19	19	7	0	54
NVQ	7	12	14	2	0	35
Other vocational	6	14	15	4	1	40
Higher education	2	1	5	1	0	9
Other	3	5	7	3	1	19
Total	33	73	73	18	2	199

36 The attendance rate for the lessons inspected was 79 per cent. The highest attendance rate was in engineering at 86 per cent, and the lowest in mathematics at 61 per cent. The average number of students in the lessons observed was 11. These attendance rates and class sizes are slightly higher than the averages for the sector as published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*.

37 Teachers had produced schemes of work for all courses. The schemes varied considerably in the amount of detail they contained and in the quality of their presentation. On the better organised and managed courses, schemes of work were an integral part of a comprehensive course file that also included details of assessments, tutorials, and students' progress in developing key skills. Many schemes of work failed to specify the teaching method to be used for particular topics; some schemes were poorly presented, or did not have enough detail to be effective. There were no common schemes of work for mathematics. All full-time and part-time teachers had devised their own teaching plans.

38 Most lessons were well prepared. In almost all lessons the good rapport between teachers and students helped to make teaching and learning effective. In the better lessons, teachers shared the aims and objectives of the session with students at the start of the lesson. In science and catering, teachers planned lessons carefully to ensure that practical work and appropriate theoretical work were properly integrated. The better engineering lessons had clear aims and objectives. They were well structured and had a sense of momentum; the students engaged in a variety of appropriate activities which held their interest. Teachers on the basic education programme had devised detailed lesson plans and, in some instances, these included a clear specification of how the individual needs of students would be met.

39 In the good lessons, time was well planned. Teachers used a range of appropriate teaching methods which held the students' interest; they ensured that learning proceeded at an appropriate pace; and they set the students tasks which challenged them to think and perform well. Business

studies teachers questioned their students effectively and engaged them in a variety of appropriate activities including discussion and role-play exercises. In some successful lessons, teachers illustrated their lectures with useful references to current projects in the world of work with which they were familiar through their contacts with commerce and industry. For example, in an art and design lesson, a part-time lecturer drew on his experience of working on a current commission in order to demonstrate ways in which designers respond to briefs from clients. He was able to give students an understanding of aspects of business practice such as costing and the preparation of rough sketches; in addition, he emphasised the importance of finishing work by agreed deadlines. The students were fascinated by the lesson and the spontaneity of their questioning demonstrated their high degree of interest and enthusiasm.

40 In less satisfactory lessons, teachers usually failed to check that learning was taking place; they managed small groups poorly and their skills in questioning the students were inadequate. In some lessons, teachers used overhead transparencies of poor quality. Where lesson plans lacked detail the work often lacked momentum; teachers made insufficient demands on students and, as a result, the students learned little. In a few instances, teachers had no lesson plans at all. Some lessons got off to a poor start because students arrived late. In several lessons teachers talked for too long, or students spent too much time laboriously copying notes from a board or overhead transparency. In one lesson for example, a teacher used an overhead transparency that showed topic headings. He developed each topic orally and made no use of an adjacent markerboard. Students were inattentive and failed to write down all the information they needed to know.

41 Most practical classes were well planned and well managed. In a biology lesson, the lecturer provided a clear explanation of cell division and demonstrated, with the aid of a camera attached to a microscope, what students should look for in the practical investigation which followed. Students prepared their own material for observation and individual students received very effective support from the lecturer. Specimens were available for those students who had been unsuccessful in producing suitable specimens of their own for observation and drawing. On an NVQ level 3 catering lesson, students who were working in the production kitchen were allowed freedom to plan their work schedule and were given responsibility for preparing food for the restaurant. Those students who failed to prepare food to the required standard, or who did not produce the food on time, were encouraged to analyse the reasons for their poor performance and to suggest ways of improving their work in the future. Students were able to learn from their mistakes and they received help and support in doing so.

42 Students on several programmes were able to develop their technical and communication skills by undertaking a period of work experience. Leisure and tourism students, in conjunction with the sports centre staff,

arranged an activities week for local children during the half-term holidays. During this week, the students were able to gain valuable experience in coaching and in organising activities. Business administration students used the training office to improve their skills and the speed of their working in preparation for their period of work experience.

43 The extent to which students developed key skills was variable. Catering students on GNVQ advanced level programmes successfully developed key skills through assignments which they found interesting and vocationally relevant, and which were set in a local context. Students in the second year of their GNVQ business course worked creatively in teams on their projects for the Young Enterprise Scheme, and they were highly motivated and enthusiastic. In science, key skills were developed on vocational programmes but these did not form an explicit part of GCE A level programmes. On programmes for student with learning difficulties and/or disabilities neither schemes of work nor lesson plans showed how students might acquire or develop key skills.

44 Teachers set students appropriate homework and assignments. They marked these carefully in order to monitor students' progress. In computing and mathematics good assessment was a strength of the teaching and learning. In computing, for example, coursework assignments were marked comprehensively and students were given detailed feedback on the quality of their work. The health and social care sector has a policy of 'double marking' whereby an assignment is marked by one teacher and his or her marking is verified by another teacher. Engineering students on electrical installation courses were required to assess the quality of their own work and progress; in order to do this, they drew on teachers' comments, assessment record sheets, feedback on their written assignments and evaluation from other students in the class. In some instances, however, students' work was not assessed thoroughly and students were not given detailed comments on the quality of their performance. On business administration courses, the quality of feedback to the students varied from detailed and helpful comments to only one or two words. In a few cases, there were no comments at all. In catering, there were a few instances when errors in students' work remained uncorrected. In foreign languages, students' work on higher level courses was marked thoroughly. Teachers also provided the students with helpful comments in order that the students might improve their performance and achieve their full potential.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

45 Most students were well motivated and interested in their work. They spoke well of their courses and the college. Students on vocational programmes particularly enjoyed practical work. They produced work of an appropriate standard and carried out practical tasks competently and with a high regard to safety regulations. In addition to their academic achievements, some students are also successful in sporting activities,

either as individuals or as members of a college team. For example, in the 1995-96 session, the college football team won the Mid-Essex Schools Sports Association under-19 cup, and in the current session there have been a number of individual successes in cross-country events.

46 The majority of students at the college are studying for a vocational qualification. It is the college's policy to submit details of students' examination results to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) once confirmation of these has been received from the appropriate awarding bodies. In 1996, such confirmation arrived too late for the results of 10 per cent of students, aged 16 to 18, on their final year of advanced vocational courses, to be included in the information submitted to the DfEE. As a consequence of this, the students' average success rate is shown as 63 per cent in the performance tables for 1996 published by the DfEE; this percentage is 10 per cent lower than the actual figure for the college and it places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector, based on this measure. If the correct figure of 73 per cent been submitted to the DfEE, the college would have been placed in the middle third of colleges in the performance tables, as it had been in 1995. The achievements of students aged 19 and over are not included in these tables. In 1996, 76 per cent of the 164 students aged 19 or over, on advanced level courses, were successful; a similar proportion of students aged 19 or over was successful on these courses in the previous year. Fifty-one per cent of the 188 students, aged 16 to 18, on intermediate level courses were successful, and their results place the college in the bottom third of the relevant DfEE performance table. In 1995, the performance tables published by the DfEE did not include the results of students on intermediate level courses but the college's records show that 45 per cent of its students on intermediate level courses were successful in that year.

47 In 1996, 184 students aged 16 to 18 were entered for GCE A level examinations. Their average points score per subject entry was 2.9 (where grade A=10 points, E=2), based on the data published by the DfEE. This places the college in the bottom third of the sector colleges on this performance measure. The points score per entry has declined over the past three years; in 1994 it was 3.5 points, and in 1995 it was 3.2 points. In 1996, 31 per cent of students aged over 19 years on GCE A level programmes obtained a pass at grade C or above which is lower than the national average of 36 per cent for colleges in the sector.

48 In 1996, 32 per cent of students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCSE examinations obtained grade C or above; this is 7 per cent lower than the national average for the sector. The proportion of students over 19 years who obtained grade C or above was 62 per cent which was the same as the national average. Success rates varied significantly between subjects.

49 Students' retention rates on many courses improved during 1995-96. Retention rates are, however, low on a number of two-year courses, including GCE A level courses. The college is working in partnership with the Institute of Education to investigate reasons for low

retention rates and to enquire into matters related to students' achievements.

50 In 1995-96, there were good retention rates on most science programmes. Eighty-one per cent of students aged 16 to 18 who enrolled for GCE A level chemistry completed the course; of these students, 83 per cent gained a pass at grade C or above, a percentage which is almost double the average for the sector. Results in GCE A level biology were also above the national average for sector colleges. GCSE results in chemistry and human biology were well above national averages. Students' achievements on the advanced GNVQ science course, however, were poor; only 14 per cent of students who enrolled on the course completed it successfully and retention rates on this course were low, at 62 per cent. Science students were generally responsive and well motivated, especially during practical lessons. They were able to explain clearly what they were doing and to demonstrate the relationship between practical and theoretical work. Students' achievements in GCE A level computer studies, on the national diploma computer studies course and in GCSE mathematics, were generally satisfactory. The GCE A level mathematics pass rate of 58 per cent for 16 to 18 year olds was significantly lower than the national average for further education colleges of 75 per cent; the retention rate was also low at 61 per cent. Standards of work on the recently introduced GNVQ intermediate course in information technology were excellent. Students responded well in class but written work indicated that some students had difficulties with spelling.

51 Construction students have achieved notable success in some practical trades. For example, decorating students have won the awarding bodies national silver medal for the last two years. The quality of some mature students' work was particularly high. The construction sector has been successful in teaching basic construction craft skills to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Retention rates are generally good. However, students' success on NVQ programmes has varied significantly between different trades. There was a 100 per cent success rate on the two-year bricklaying course whilst the success rate on the two-year painting and decorating programme was only 33 per cent.

52 Engineering students were well motivated and most displayed a keen interest in their studies. They were proud of the work in their portfolios. The success rate in 1996 on the GNVQ intermediate course was 29 per cent, slightly above the national average of 27 per cent. Other pass and retention rates for students completing their courses in 1996 were often below national averages for two-year and one-year full-time vocational programmes. For example, the success rate on the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma course was 34 per cent compared with the national average of 48 per cent; the retention rate on this course was also low at 41 per cent. Nevertheless, data provided at the time of the inspection indicated a significant improvement in retention

across all engineering programmes, and that the average retention rate on these had risen to 94 per cent.

53 Pass rates on most business studies courses in 1996 were equal to national averages and on many of the part-time professional courses, they were above national averages. The pass rate on the one-year RSA Examinations Board (RSA) higher diploma in administrative and secretarial procedures programme was 100 per cent. There were also good pass rates on a number of other courses including the NVQ level 3 administration programme, the evening course for the Association of Accounting Technicians foundation level award and on the course for medical secretaries and general practice administrators. Sixty-seven per cent of GCE A level accounting students obtained a pass at grade C or above, significantly above the national average for sector colleges but, in business studies, few students gained passes at grade C or above. The success rate on the GNVQ advanced business course was similar to the national average; the retention rate on this course was, however, higher than the national average. Overall, the retention rates on business courses have been high. A strength of students' achievements in this sector of the college is the large number of additional qualifications which they gain in addition to the main qualification for which they are aiming. In 1995-96, for example, students obtained 428 RSA awards as additional qualifications. The written work of business studies students seen during the inspection was of a good standard. Students' portfolios were generally tidy and well organised.

54 In catering lessons, students displayed a good understanding of the subject matter and responded positively to questions. GNVQ portfolios were well organised and they contained some examples of good work. Students worked confidently in groups and they displayed a high level of energy and enthusiasm in practical activities. Pass rates were good for those students who completed their course. For example in 1996, 100 per cent of the students on NVQ level 2 food preparation and cooking who completed the course, gained the award. Similarly on the NVQ level 2 food and drink service course, 95 per cent of students gained the award. On the advanced GNVQ hospitality and catering course, 57 per cent of the students who enrolled on the course gained the award, a percentage which is well above the national average of 46 per cent; retention, however, was low at 62 per cent. NVQ portfolios were well organised and well presented and most work was of a high standard. In practical kitchen and restaurant sessions, there were examples of good teamwork and evidence that students were developing communication and social skills. Leisure and tourism provision is a relatively new curriculum area in the college. The college's first cohort of students taking GNVQ leisure and tourism at advanced level completed their course in 1996. The percentage of students who completed this course in the two-year period was 44 per cent, some 15 per cent below the national average; the retention rate on this course was also low at 61 per cent. The success rate on the GNVQ intermediate

course in leisure and tourism was 41 per cent; this is significantly lower than the success rate of 59 per cent in the previous year; it is also below the national average. In 1996, the retention rate on this course was 84 per cent, and it was similar to the retention rate for the previous year.

55 In health and social care, much of the provision is relatively new. Students were well motivated, well behaved and proud of their work. They worked enthusiastically and collaboratively in groups. The standard of their written assignments was appropriate for the stage and level of the course. In 1996, results on the GNVQ foundation course were significantly above the national average with 70 per cent of the students who were enrolled gaining the award; the retention rate was high at 90 per cent. On both the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses, however, results were below national averages; retention rates on these courses and on the diploma in pre-school practice course, were lower than in the previous year.

56 Art and design is another new curriculum area. There were good standards of work in a number of specialist art and design areas, including fashion and textiles, three-dimensional design, photography and interior decoration. The students' drawing skills, however, were generally weak. Some portfolios were poorly presented. Media studies students displayed good analytical skills but their written work was weak. Students' achievements varied significantly between courses. In 1996, the pass rate (grades A to E) on the GCE A level programme in media was high, at 92 per cent, but the percentage of passes at grade C or above was lower than the national average. On the GNVQ media course at intermediate level, the success rate was just 13 per cent. In 1995-96, retention rates were low on GNVQ courses but early monitoring in 1996-97 indicates that retention rates on these courses have improved.

57 Humanities students achieved high pass rates in 1996 on several courses including: the further and adult education teachers' certificate, the access to higher education and the uniformed services course. For example, 86 per cent of students who completed the further and adult education teachers' certificate gained the award. Many students on the uniformed services course progressed either to the national diploma course in public services or directly into employment in the services. In 1996, the pass rates for students on the two-year GCE A level programme in sociology and in government and politics were higher than those of the previous year and they were above the national average for sector colleges. In 1995 and in 1996, pass rates in GCE A level psychology were poor. There was a 100 per cent pass rate for GCE A level communication studies and 81 per cent of the students taking this subject gained a pass at grade C or above. In English, the percentage of students gaining a pass at grade A to E was similar to the national average but the proportion of students who gained a pass at grade C or above was lower than the national average. English coursework folders were well organised and well presented. Many examples of students' work showed evidence that students had carried

out effective research. The oral skills of many students were, however, poor. In GCSE examinations, results in sociology for the last two years have been above the national average. For the past three years, the students' success rates in GCSE examinations in some foreign languages have also been above the national averages for colleges in the further education sector, but the number of entries for these subjects has been low. In 1995, adults on part-time courses achieved good results in French and Spanish. Students learning a European modern language demonstrated a reasonable standard in basic speaking skills, but their levels of ability in comprehension skills were variable. The examination results of students on courses in English as a foreign language (EFL) were mostly poor.

58 Most students on the full-time programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve external accreditation in literacy, numeracy and spoken English. However, there are no procedures for systematically recording their achievement and progress in other subjects. Retention rates on the specialist full-time and part-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are virtually 100 per cent, as they are on these courses in most colleges in the sector. Students on programmes of basic education were working towards a range of qualifications including City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) wordpower at entry level, level 1 and level 2; RSA stage 1 English; and GCSE English. In 1995-96, 27 students were awarded college certificates in recognition of work produced toward C&G wordpower levels 1 and 2. Students' written work demonstrated that they had a clear understanding of the tasks they had been set.

59 The college has significantly increased the amount of information it collects on students' destinations. It has done so by contacting former students within months of their leaving college to ask them for details of their destinations. Students who left at the end of the 1993-94 session and those who left at the end of the 1994-95 session, were contacted by post, and 38 per cent and 34 per cent responded, respectively. Students who left at the end of the 1995-96 session, were initially contacted by post. Those who did not reply were also contacted by telephone with the result that the college was able to obtain information on the destinations of 81 per cent of students who left the college last year. This information showed that 18 per cent of students progressed to higher education, 28 per cent continued in further education, 20 per cent gained employment, and 15 per cent took up other activities. There is little analysis and use of these data within curriculum areas.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 The college is committed to ensuring the continuous improvement of the quality of its provision. Its quality assurance system is comprehensive and appropriate. Lines of responsibility for the implementation of the quality assurance system are clear. The director of quality and

development has prime responsibility for the quality assurance systems for both the teaching and business support units. The academic board, through its academic standards committee, has responsibility for the quality of programmes of study across the college. The college has established a committee which has responsibility for the quality of cross-college and business support units. This committee reports directly to the senior management team, and through the senior management team, to the corporation. There is an established course monitoring, review and evaluation system that has recently been revised and refined. The system requires course and programme leaders to gather information as part of an annual review which is prepared by the heads of sector and presented by them to the quality standards committee. The academic board identifies key issues for the college's annual self-assessment report. The report is presented to the corporation and it is taken into account during the development of the college's strategic plan.

61 Course and programme leaders have implemented the quality assurance system to varying degrees and some elements of the system need further development. Implementation of the system has not led to any significant improvement in teaching and learning or in students' achievements. Quality assurance arrangements are less comprehensive on some courses, for example GCSE and GCE A level courses, than they are on others. Monitoring, review and evaluation reports from the sectors and the cross-college areas have been mostly descriptive. Many of these reports contain insufficient detailed analysis of evidence and they are not rigorous enough in their evaluation of the quality of provision. Managers have made progress in setting targets for enrolment and retention but they have carried out little investigation into factors which affect students' achievements. Managers have, however, identified the need for courses to be planned more effectively and for more priority to be given to ways of increasing enrolments, and to ways of improving students' retention and achievement rates. On some courses, such as GNVQ media studies, retention and achievement rates have improved substantially. At the time of inspection, the revised monitoring, review and evaluation process was in mid-cycle and it was too early to carry out a full evaluation of its effectiveness. There is a well-developed, well-documented and effective system of internal verification and assessment.

62 Procedures for obtaining the views of students and employers about the quality of the college's provision are well established. Questionnaires are distributed twice a year to representative groups of full-time students, part-time students and employers. Some positive use is made of the responses to these questionnaires. The way the responses are analysed, however, does not lead to the easy and effective identification of aspects of provision which give students and employers satisfaction, or which cause them concern.

63 Good progress has been made in establishing standards for the business support units and the cross-college units. In consultation with staff, specified standards have been developed for client services, learning centres, the college management information system/information technology, finance, personnel, accommodation and support services and professional development services. At the time of the inspection, teams were working on the implementation, monitoring and review of the standards. College quality assurance procedures include external activities provided by the business development unit. Arrangements for the quality assurance of collaborative provision funded by the FEFC, which takes place on sites away from the college, were satisfactory. The quality of the college's external work has been recognised by Essex TEC through the award of the TEC Supplier Quality Standards (levels 1 and 2).

64 The college's charter meets national requirements. It is intended for both students and staff and it is a concise, well-produced and well-publicised document. The charter contains few specific standards. Students, however, find it useful to refer to the document when they wish to voice their concerns, as they are able to do, for example, through their membership of course committees. The college responds effectively to formal complaints. There are, however, no arrangements for collating complaints on an annual basis, or for monitoring the effectiveness of the action taken to address them.

65 Self-assessment reports have been produced annually since 1994. They have followed the headings used in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Earlier reports tended to be mostly descriptive but the most recent, an interim report for 1996-97, is more self-critical and contains a realistic assessment of the college's strengths and weaknesses. Although the report has some omissions and it lacks detail in a few areas, the overall judgements are broadly in line with the findings of the inspection team.

66 There are formal procedures for the appraisal of staff. The appraisal process helps staff to identify their own needs for professional development and training. If they so wish, staff may have their performance in the classroom observed and taken into account as part of the evidence which contributes towards their appraisal. There are satisfactory induction arrangements for all newly appointed teaching staff. They are allocated additional help through a mentoring system.

67 The college has been working towards the achievement of the Investor in People standard. It has a strong commitment to staff development for which it allocates funding equivalent to 1.5 per cent of pay costs. In 1995-96, 81 per cent of staff undertook some form of staff-development activity. In addition, a significant amount of informal staff development was undertaken in sector areas and business units. The programme of staff-development activities reflects priorities in the college's strategic plan, issues arising from quality assurance reports, course requirements, and the needs of individual staff which have been identified during the

appraisal process. Recent staff development relating to assessment for GNVQ courses has enabled staff to meet the requirements of examining and validating bodies for consistency in course documentation and in assessment procedures. The college has participated in a Further Education Development Agency project on personal development for staff. A further example of staff-development activity, in this instance prompted by the findings of the quality assurance process, is a working party which has been set up to explore ways of improving personal tutorials for students on the GCSE and GCE A level programmes. Priority has been given to helping untrained teachers to obtain a teaching qualification. The college recognises that it should give greater priority to staff development which leads to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and in the standards of students' achievements.

RESOURCES

Staffing

68 Teachers are suitably qualified for the work they undertake. They are deployed effectively across the college. Many have relevant industrial or commercial experience which they draw upon in their lessons. In a few instances such experience is in need of updating. Between 1993 and 1996, the number of staff has been reduced as a result of changes in the college's curriculum. Sixty-eight per cent of teachers have a first degree or equivalent professional qualification, and 14 per cent have higher degrees. Over 90 per cent of full-time teachers, and 74 per cent of all teachers have a teaching qualification. All full-time and part-time staff who do not have a teaching qualification are encouraged to obtain one. In most sectors, there are sufficient teachers with assessor/verifier awards.

69 Learning is well supported by appropriately qualified, and effectively deployed support staff. A minority of support assistants working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not fully utilised. There are sufficient technicians in most sectors. They work flexibly and carry out a variety of tasks. However, in art and design they have difficulty in adequately supporting the wide range of crafts offered. Audio-visual aids technicians provide a valuable range of services to teachers, including the production of audio and video recordings, and the purchase and maintenance of teaching aids and reprographic equipment. A team of information technology technicians maintains computer hardware and software throughout the college and provides staff-development training on new systems. Professionally qualified business support staff provide a valuable range of services. These services include counselling, careers guidance, support for open learning and childcare. Suitably qualified staff manage cross-college aspects of provision and administration, such as finance, client services, accommodation, and management information systems.

70 Professionally qualified personnel staff advise managers on employment issues, including the recruitment and selection of staff, and employment legislation. All senior managers, business support staff, and newly appointed teachers have clear job descriptions, and these are being developed for all staff. The personnel unit monitors the staffing needs of the college effectively through a process in which curriculum sectors and business support managers bid for staff on the basis of their development plans. The principal and the senior management team review and prioritise these bids against the strategic plan. The college has an equal opportunities policy and this is implemented effectively. Sixty-four per cent of the staff are female. Two per cent identify themselves as being from a minority ethnic background and this proportion is approximately the same as the proportion of people from a minority ethnic background in the local population.

Equipment/learning resources

71 General classroom equipment is of a good standard and it is well maintained. Teachers benefit from a well-equipped audio-visual aids facility. There is appropriate and sufficient specialist equipment in most curriculum areas. In catering and leisure, the industrial and domestic kitchens and the associated training restaurant are equipped to a high standard. The sports hall equipment is extensive and of good quality. There is a very good range of specialist equipment in science laboratories. In engineering, students benefit from a newly equipped computer-aided design facility providing 20 workstations; this contrasts with some old engineering equipment in other workshops. Art and design students use a well-equipped fashion and textiles area. Computers used by students in classrooms vary in their specification. There is a need to replace the computers used by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and to upgrade some of those used in business studies. Plans for the systematic replacement of out-dated equipment are not fully developed.

72 New learning resource centres have been established at both sites. They provide library, computing and study area facilities which students may use at any time. A total of over 37,000 books and nearly 140 periodicals meets the needs of students and staff in most curriculum areas. The bookstock for engineering, computing and some aspects of business is small and old. Students have access to 151 compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, covering a wide range of subjects through eight workstations at Moulsham Street and four workstations at Princes Road. Nearly 900 video recorders and 80 audio recorders are available for students to use at 10 of the 170 study places provided across the two centres. A workstation at each centre provides students with supervised access to the Internet. Students have access to computers at 18 workstations at Moulsham Street and nine workstations at Princes Road. These computers are heavily used, and at Princes Road, in particular, students sometimes have to wait to use a machine. There is central

timetabling of the seven air-conditioned computer rooms; students have access to any unused machine, even when lessons are taking place in these rooms. In total, the college has approximately 270 computers for students' use, giving a ratio of one computer to every 10 full-time equivalent students.

Accommodation

73 The college has two sites. The larger site, at Moulsham Street, is in a pleasant residential area of Chelmsford but it offers no room for the further expansion of the college. On this site there are approximately 10,000 square metres of accommodation, which is used for both teaching and administrative purposes. The main block was purpose built in the 1960s, and provides well-decorated and pleasant accommodation. A well-designed learning resources centre and eight classrooms, separated by folding partitioning, have replaced the old library. The Dovedale Sports Centre is joined to the main block by a link corridor. The centre is jointly operated by the college and Chelmsford Borough Council. It comprises a very large, good-quality, multipurpose sports hall, squash courts and viewing gallery and a large, air-conditioned performing arts facility with sprung flooring. There are two older, adjacent blocks; they house engineering, some art and design provision, and the Essex Returners' Unit. Much of this accommodation has been refurbished; it consists of adequate specialist areas and general classrooms, although part of the engineering accommodation is in need of repair. A large Victorian building, Dovedale House, provides classrooms and studios, used mainly by art and design students, and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The accommodation at Dovedale House is adequate, although some rooms are in poor decorative order and there is some rising damp in the building. The centre at Princes Road was built in the 1980s. It is about half the size of the Moulsham Street site, and offers good, attractive specialist and general teaching accommodation in its main block; a large adjacent building is used for bricklaying courses. There are also seven temporary buildings on this site, which provide classroom accommodation of poor quality.

74 The college nursery is on the Moulsham Street site in a small prefabricated unit. It has spaces for 20 children aged three to five. Places are allocated to children of college students and of college staff, and to members of the local community. It also provides work placements for college students on childcare courses.

75 Security at the college is unobtrusive. The recent installation of security cameras at both centres enables 24 hour surveillance of areas to which the public have relatively easy access. At Moulsham Street, there is an attractive reception area, close to which are situated the information centre, college bookshop, and other services. At both centres, there are communal areas with seating for students. Through an agreement with a major coffee supplier, the college has been able to provide attractive cafe facilities at both sites, which together with student refectories, are well

used. The college employs its own catering staff. Cleaning services are contracted out. The college has made it a priority to ensure that it is accessible to wheelchair users; through the provision of ramps and lifts, wheelchair users have access to almost all its areas.

76 The college has a clear accommodation strategy. There is a planned programme of refurbishment and maintenance. Sector heads bid annually for their general teaching accommodation on the basis of their strategic plan and the number and types of course they intend to provide. The use of accommodation is monitored by the estates manager. There is significant variation in the way rooms are used; at Moulsham Street, some classrooms and specialist areas are used inappropriately. There is no detailed monitoring of the effectiveness of the learning centres other than the monitoring of the number of books borrowed from them, and of the extent to which the CD-ROMs are used. In the absence of such monitoring it is difficult for the college to assess the extent to which the learning centres are meeting students' needs.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

77 The main strengths of the college are:

- its links with Essex TEC and with business
- its productive and extensive links with other European countries
- its effective course administration
- the clear direction provided by governors and senior management
- the well-organised admissions procedures
- the careers and welfare guidance for students
- its well-established self-assessment process
- the technician support for information and learning technology
- the specialist equipment in science, catering and sports
- the well-maintained accommodation which is accessible to all students.

78 In order to improve its provision further the college should:

- extend the range of provision at foundation and entry level
- carry out more analysis of students' achievements
- ensure that the quality assurance process leads to identifiable improvements in teaching and learning and in students' achievements
- provide more support for students who need help with basic skills
- improve the tutorial support for part-time students, and for all students on GCE A level and GCSE courses
- ensure that course monitoring and review are carried out consistently, and to a high standard
- improve the retention and pass rates on many courses.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1996-97)

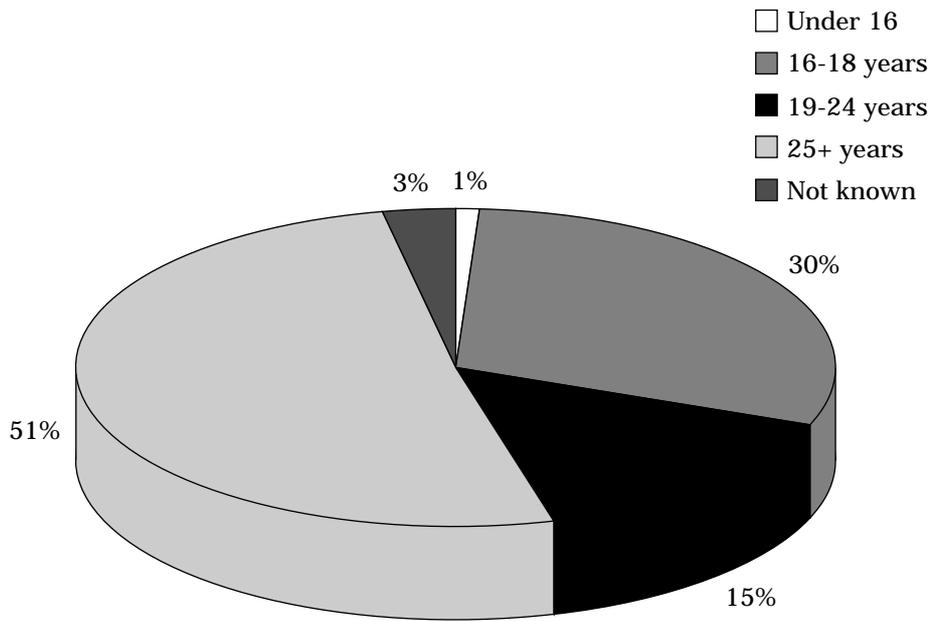
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

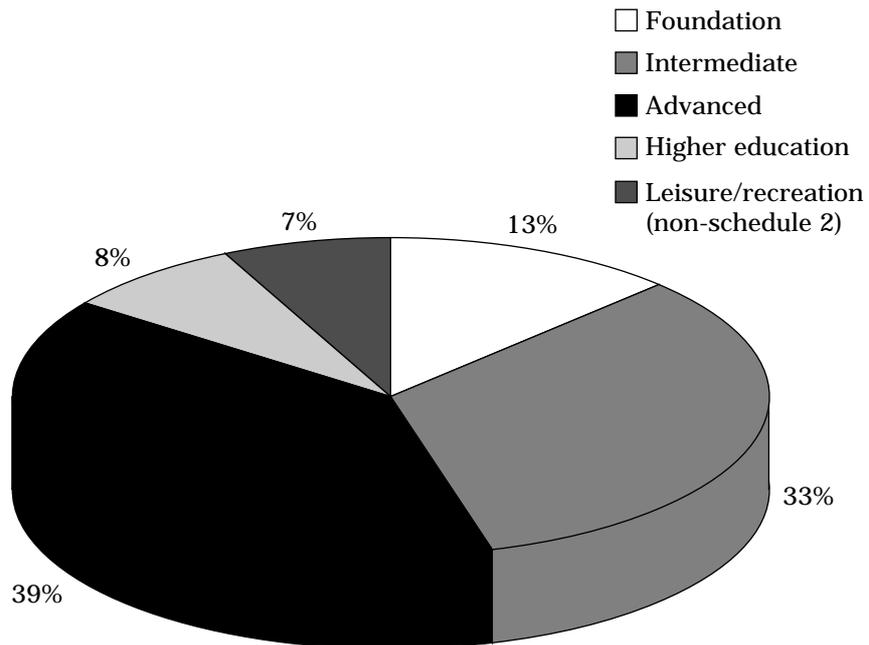
Chelmsford College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 6,293

Figure 2

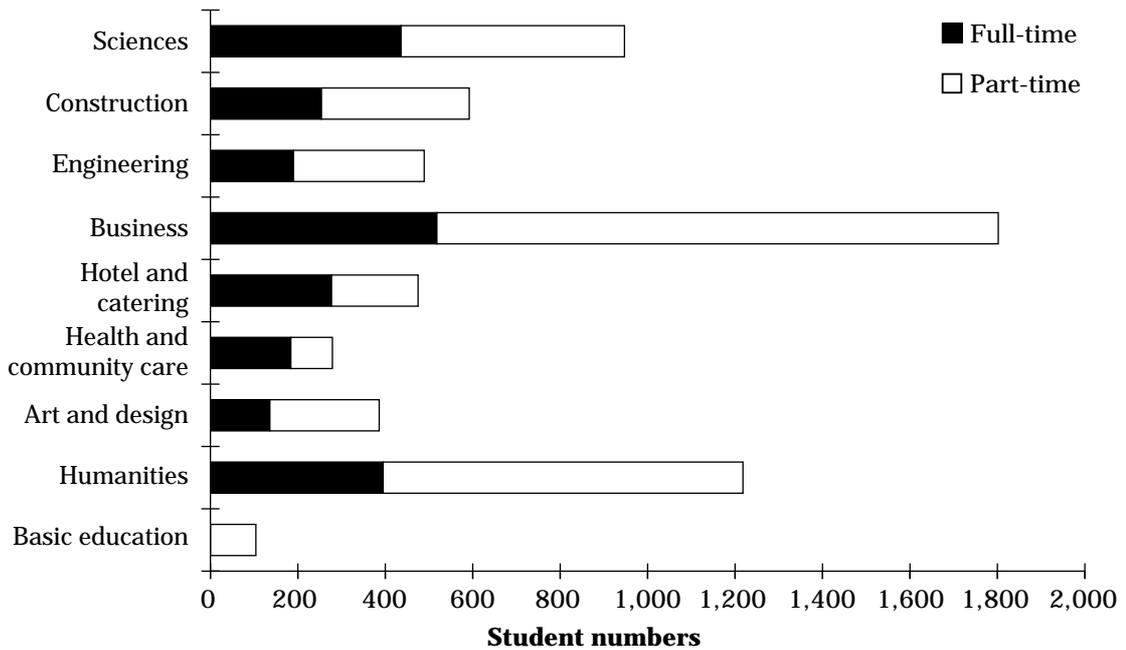
Chelmsford College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 6,293

Figure 3

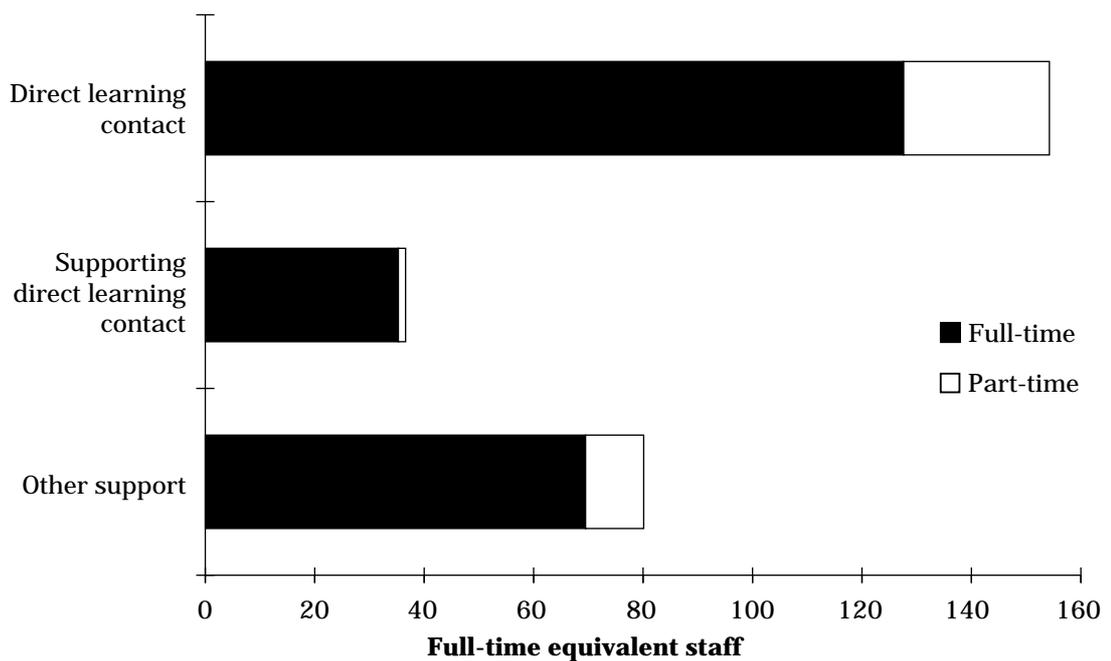
Chelmsford College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 6,293

Figure 4

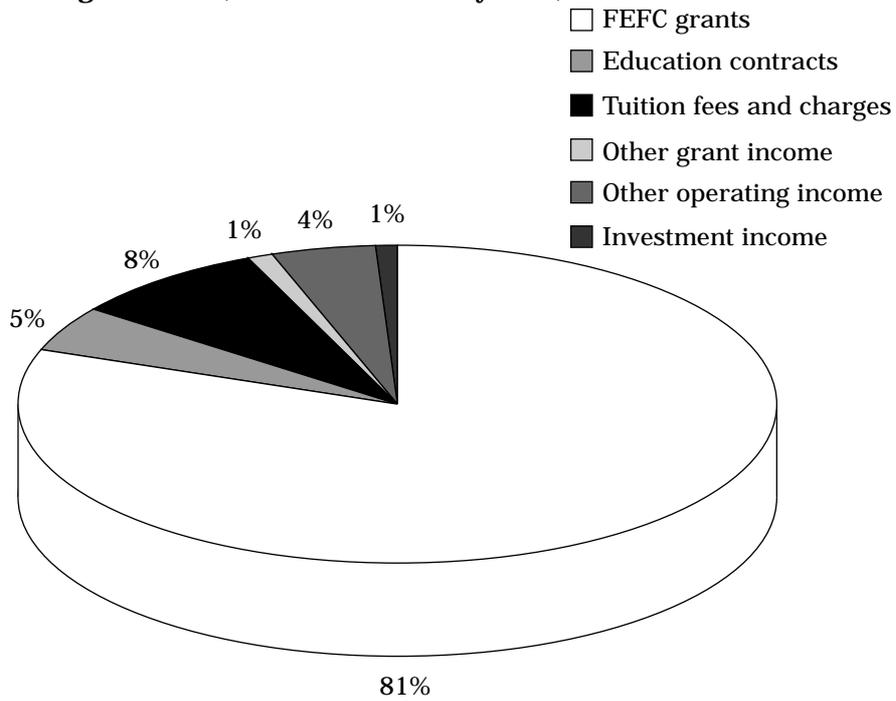
Chelmsford College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1996-97)



Full-time equivalent staff: 271

Figure 5

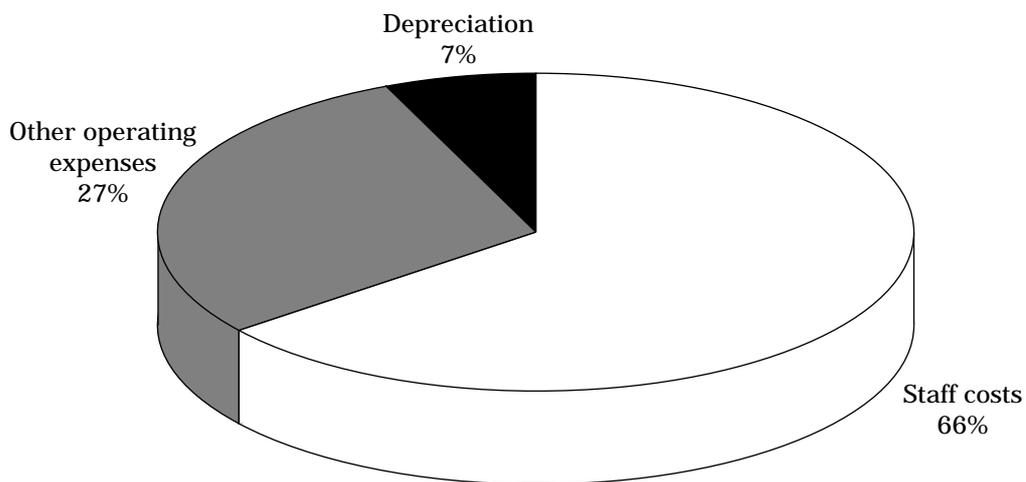
Chelmsford College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £7,575,000

Figure 6

Chelmsford College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £7,540,000

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