

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Epping Forest College

February 1996

**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 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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CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	9
Governance and management	22
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	32
Teaching and the promotion of learning	44
Students' achievements	55
Quality assurance	66
Resources	77
Conclusions and issues	90
Figures	

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 09/96

EPPING FOREST COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected March-November 1995

Summary

Epping Forest College offers a wide choice of general education courses. Full-time students are well supported by personal tutors and given comprehensive guidance during their transition from school to college. Senior management provides strong and purposeful leadership, and governors take a keen interest in students' achievements. Staff are committed to improving quality and standards of teaching are high in many curriculum areas. The college campus occupies an attractive site with good access to road and rail networks. Staff are well qualified and there are good opportunities for their professional development. Guidance systems for part-time students need further development. The range of NVQ programmes available is narrow. Although work placements are arranged for students on full-time courses, strategies for liaison with industry are lacking. Arrangements for marketing are not well developed. The role of the academic board needs further development. The management information system does not meet curriculum managers' needs for data on students. An internal verification system for ensuring consistent standards of assessment on vocational courses is not yet in place. Students have insufficient access to information technology resources to support independent study.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Health and community care	2
Engineering	3	Art and design (including performing arts)	2
Business and management	2	English and communications	2
Leisure and tourism	3	Humanities and modern languages	2
		Basic education	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Epping Forest College was inspected between March and November 1995. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September, curriculum area inspections were carried out between March and October, and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected from 30 October to 3 November 1995. Ninety-eight days were used for the inspection. A total of 264 teaching sessions were observed. Inspectors examined samples of students' coursework and held discussions with staff, students, members of the corporation and representatives of local schools, industry, the Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and community groups.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Epping Forest College is a tertiary college which was established in 1989 when post-16 education in south-west Essex was reorganised. It was formed from the Loughton College of Further Education and the sixth forms of seven local secondary schools. The college occupies a single site in Loughton with good access to road and rail networks, including the M11 and M25 motorways and the London Underground.

3 Students are drawn from a wide catchment area which includes the district of Epping Forest and the outer London boroughs of Redbridge and Waltham Forest. Sixty per cent of the present full-time students, and 34 per cent of the part-time students, travel to the college from outside Essex. There are nine other further education colleges within a 10-mile radius of the college: Barking College, Enfield College, Harlow College, Havering College, Hertford Regional College, Leyton Sixth Form College, Redbridge College, Sir George Monoux College and Waltham Forest College.

4 Epping Forest College is in the West Essex education area where there are 11 grant-maintained secondary schools, three of which have sixth forms. Three of the local 11-16 schools are partner schools of the college, and in 1995 almost 80 per cent of their school leavers enrolled as full-time students at the college. There are also three 11-18 independent schools within five miles of the college. The proportion of young people in Essex over the age of 16 who continue in full-time education has increased from 54 per cent in 1990 to 71 per cent in 1994, though there are wide variations within the county. In the district of Epping Forest, this participation rate increased from 57 per cent in 1990 to 81 per cent in 1993 but fell back to 72 per cent in 1994.

5 In the 1991 census, the population of the Epping Forest district was recorded as just over 116,000; that of the whole county of Essex was just over 1.5 million. In 1991 the resident minority ethnic population in Epping Forest was 2.5 per cent, the largest group being of Asian origin. However, students also travel to the college from adjoining London boroughs which have much larger minority ethnic populations. In the 1991 census the resident minority ethnic population was recorded as over 21 per cent in Redbridge and over 25 per cent in Waltham Forest. Of the college's current

enrolments, 16 per cent of full-time students and 4 per cent of part-time students are from minority ethnic groups.

6 Most employers in the Epping Forest district are enterprises of small to medium size. The main sources of local employment are construction, distribution, hotels and service industries. Major local employers include the Bank of England printing works, Epping Forest District Council, St Margaret's Hospital, and the college itself. Over half of the local residents commute to work, mainly to Greater London. According to figures from Essex County Council, the unemployment rate in the Epping Forest district in July 1995 was 6.7 per cent, as compared with an average unemployment rate for the county of 7.2 per cent.

7 In the academic year 1994-95 there were 11,706 enrolments: 2,346 by full-time students and 9,360 by part-time students. Enrolments by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. The curriculum of the college covers eight of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas and is managed through seven divisions: art and design; business and secretarial; humanities and modern languages; English and communications; engineering technologies; leisure, performing arts and community; and mathematics, science and computing. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

8 The college's stated mission is to provide opportunities in education and training to the local community. The college's major objectives for the immediate future, according to its 1995-96 strategic plan, are: to identify and respond to clients' needs and where appropriate to be innovative; to improve the quality of college services and enhance the reputation of the college; and to provide a range of opportunities for the whole community. These objectives are encapsulated in the phrase, 'open for opportunity' which appears on the cover of the full-time and part-time college prospectuses.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 There is a wide choice of general education courses in the humanities, arts, languages, sciences and social sciences. This includes 36 General Certificate of Education advanced levels (GCE A levels), 13 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and 22 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. Students are able to combine related GCE A level and GCSE subjects into integrated courses. For example, there is a social science package which enables GCE A level students to combine sociology and psychology, and a communications package which allows full-time GCSE students to combine English language with media studies. Modular GCE A levels are offered in mathematics, the sciences, and business studies. All GCE A level students can also take GCSE English and mathematics.

10 A good range of full-time vocational courses for school leavers includes programmes in art and design, business and secretarial studies, engineering, computing, media studies, leisure and tourism, and health

and social care. Full-time students can choose from 12 vocational courses at either Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma level or General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) advanced level. There are eight intermediate courses, including five GNVQ intermediate programmes, and several foundation level courses, including three GNVQ foundation programmes. On some courses students can take relevant supplementary qualifications; for example, students on the GNVQ advanced level course in leisure and tourism can take the community sports leader award and life saving and first-aid certificates. The college timetable has not, however, been designed to encourage students to combine GNVQs with individual GCE A level or GCSE subjects.

11 Many GCE A levels and GCSE subjects, and a few vocational courses, are available through open learning or home study. Open learning students purchase a resource pack from the college and attend for individual sessions with a subject tutor. In 1994-95, 271 students enrolled for open learning courses. Home study is a new venture, in which the college works in partnership with the National Extension College. The latter provides private study materials, a marking service and telephone support by its own tutors. Home study students have access to the college library and computing facilities. The further expansion of independent learning during the next year, through the creation of three centres to provide learning and computing resources, is a target in the college's 1995-96 strategic plan, but at the time of the inspection little progress had been made towards its achievement.

12 The range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) offered to full-time and part-time students is limited to the occupational areas of accounting, administration, management, and engineering. In two of these, administration and management, NVQ awards for part-time students are regarded as a supplement to other qualifications; few students achieve a full NVQ award. Students do not have the opportunity to gain NVQs in leisure and tourism, design, or health and social care, and at the time of the inspection there was no NVQ provision at NVQ level 1 for students on the work preparation courses. In its 1995-96 strategic plan the college recognises the need to extend the range of NVQ programmes that it offers.

13 Some courses have been designed specifically for adults. There is an access to higher education course, a one-year GCE A level programme with a choice from nine subjects, and a GCSE course with a choice from six subjects. The access course is limited to a range of humanities options; it does not provide for the needs of students who wish to specialise in other areas such as science or business studies. There is little provision of higher education courses, for example for part-time students who wish to progress to an advanced professional qualification or a BTEC higher national certificate. Recently the college introduced the foundation year of a degree programme in engineering through a franchise agreement with the University of Hertfordshire.

14 The college provides classes on its premises and at several local centres for over 3,000 adults under a contract with the Essex local education authority. The college also sponsors adult education courses funded by the FEFC at Epping and Waltham Abbey Community College.

15 Activities involving different sections of the community have contributed to the college's high local standing. Members of the public attend the annual summer art exhibition of students' work and various drama productions. One play, 'Frogspell', was written for children; the production went on tour for one month, with performances in primary schools throughout West Essex. There are also activities for senior citizens. For example, in 1990 the college helped to set up the local branch of the University of the Third Age, a national network of retired people who wish to spend their leisure time in study. The local branch is one of many local groups that use college premises.

16 In addition to formal courses of study, full-time students are offered a range of optional activities during the day, evening and weekends. These include competitive sports such as netball and squash as well as other social and recreational activities. Last year there was a choice of 25 activities which were attended by 10 per cent of students on a regular basis. In some activities, students were able to gain supplementary qualifications, such as the St John Ambulance 'first aid at work' certificate and the Duke of Edinburgh awards. Students pursuing courses in modern languages in 1994-95 took part in study visits to Austria, France and Germany to improve their language skills. For example, a group of seven GCE A level students taking French visited the Lycée St Genevieve in Paris where they worked as classroom assistants in primary schools, helping French pupils with reading and writing in English.

17 Strong links are maintained with special schools, the local adult training centre and Essex TEC to develop provision for adults and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are two full-time courses for school leavers, including a work preparation course which receives funding from the TEC. Both of these include work placements and have clear employment goals. There are several part-time courses for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Progression onto other vocational courses is, however, limited by the lack of NVQ accreditation for these programmes.

18 The college is highly regarded by its three partner schools. College staff, including the principal, take part in promotional events designed to give pupils the opportunity to find out about college life and the courses on offer. The events include open days, presentations by college staff, and parents' evenings in local schools. The full-time prospectus contains comprehensive details of the courses and services available to students. A publication which provides an 'overview of the college' is produced specifically for parents.

19 Specific objectives have not been set for the divisions with respect to liaison with industry and there is no overall co-ordination of employer links across the college. Liaison with industry comes about through the supervision of students on work experience. A few divisions benefit from having advisory panels including employers. For example, in engineering technology the advisory panel has enabled the college to match teaching and course design more closely to industrial needs. In other divisions, such as mathematics, science and computing, links are less developed. The provision of full-cost courses has expanded recently through the work of the college industrial training unit, which has secured contracts to provide multi-skill engineering training for about 800 employees. Most of this training will be undertaken off-site for large employers such as London Transport and Thames Water. The college also has some contracts with Essex TEC for youth training and work preparation.

20 Although the college has met its growth targets in recent years it has not yet developed a clear marketing strategy or operational plan that specifies how it will achieve its future aims of increasing enrolments by adult and part-time students. There is no separate marketing function or full-time marketing officer, and there has been little market research to inform curriculum developments and evaluate the effectiveness of current marketing activities. The college does, however, secure good press coverage, and has published a schedule of promotional events, aimed primarily at school leavers. The need to develop a more systematic approach to marketing is recognised by the college in its 1995-96 strategic plan.

21 There have been a number of initiatives to promote equal opportunities in the college. Two studies have recently been completed. One analysed the relationship between student retention and ethnicity, gender and residence. The other compared the pass rates of male and female students on the general education programme. The equal opportunities policy is described in a brief document, supported by statements in the staff and students' handbooks. Although staff are committed to equality of opportunity, there is no regular forum in which they can discuss policy and develop more detailed standards to guide practice.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 There are 14 members of the corporation including the principal. Eight hold senior positions in local business or industry. There is also a representative from the local community, one elected staff member, and one member nominated by the Essex TEC. Together they bring to the corporation a wide range of expertise and experience of significant benefit to the college. Some sections of the community are under represented on the board. There is no member from a minority ethnic group and no representative from higher education. The corporation took the decision not to include a student member on the board. It has, however, established

a liaison committee to keep it in touch with the views of full-time and part-time students. Students on this committee believe this arrangement allows them to contribute effectively, and are seeking to increase student representation at divisional and course level. At the time of the inspection there were two vacancies on the corporation.

23 There is an effective partnership between governors and senior management. Members of the corporation have a clear view of their role in providing a strategic oversight of the college. They leave the day-to-day management to the principal and his senior staff but receive regular progress reports on the implementation of board decisions. They have attended seminars relevant to their role and induction programmes are arranged for new members. The corporation has yet to consider evaluating its own effectiveness.

24 The board has established an appropriate range of committees: audit; finance and general purposes; remuneration; staffing and personnel; strategic planning; and building, health and safety. All have clear terms of reference and there is a well-planned calendar of meetings. Members are keenly interested in all aspects of the work of the college; in particular, they take a close interest in the achievements of students and seek explanations for poor examination results. To guide forward planning the board has recently commissioned consultants to conduct a risk analysis, involving an assessment of the college's ability to cope with internal and external changes that may affect its performance.

25 Senior management provides strong and purposeful leadership. The principal is supported by three deputy principals who are responsible for client services and physical resources, corporate services, and curriculum and human resources, respectively. These form the executive team which meets weekly to discuss major strategic issues. The executive team and the four directors of study responsible for curriculum delivery comprise the senior management team which meets twice a month. All meetings are recorded, though the quality and detail of the minutes is variable. There are clear channels of communication between management and staff. They include fortnightly briefing meetings for heads of division and managers of the support units who then disseminate information to other staff. The staff newsletter is also seen as a valuable source of information. Staff feel that they are fully consulted and informed, and appreciate the ethos of teamwork which is encouraged by management.

26 Courses and subjects are generally well managed. Teaching and some support staff are grouped together in seven divisions and four units. Each division is responsible for managing a group of related courses and subjects. Two of the units, for management education and industrial training, are concerned with full-cost activities. The other two units, for learning support and staff development, have an internal role in supporting students and staff. The structure is well understood and there are clear lines of responsibility. The co-ordination of cross-college aspects of the

curriculum is at an early stage of development. On a number of curriculum matters, for example internal verification of assessment and the accreditation of students prior learning, policies have been developed but not yet fully implemented. The college has recognised the need to strengthen curriculum planning across the divisions and has appointed senior curriculum managers in the divisions and units to concentrate on this role.

27 The academic board meets quarterly. There is a lack of clarity about its role that makes it difficult for it to fulfil its responsibility for advising the principal on academic matters. For example, it has played little part in such matters as approving new course proposals or monitoring standards of assessment. The senior management team is aware of this and is considering how to expand and clarify the board's role.

28 The strategic plan is developed by the senior management team and procedures have been developed for linking planning at college and divisional levels. Each division is required to produce its own operating statement with reference to the framework of the college's strategic plan. However, there is considerable variation in the style and quality of divisional statements and their consistency with the overall college plan. Board members have established a strategic planning committee to allow governors to contribute to the development of the plan before formal approval by the corporation. All full-time members of staff receive a copy of the plan. The current plan includes enrolment targets but none for retention or successful course completion. A new development in the current planning cycle has been the establishment of a target review group to monitor progress made towards meeting the college's objectives.

29 In 1995-96, the college's average level of funding is £17.00 per unit. This compares with the national median for general further education and tertiary colleges of £17.84 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

30 The college budget is determined on a basis of assessment of need, taking into account changing patterns of enrolment. Leaders of divisions have delegated budgets for consumables and part-time staffing. The allocation process is clearly understood. Corporation members receive regular reports on cashflow, income and expenditure in relation to the planned budget. Last year a number of procedures were introduced to improve budgetary control and the reliability and accuracy of information reported to the board. A budget review group was established which meets monthly and monitors the financial progress of the college against the predicted budget.

31 Computer systems are used to support student administration, personnel management and financial management. Curriculum managers and teachers are not well served by the system, which is not able to provide reliable data on attendance, retention, destinations and examination results. Some information, for example on student destinations, is still

gathered manually. The college is aware of the need to improve the system and has invested recently in an electronic student attendance system linked by radio to central computers. At the time of the inspection the system was still under development but it is intended that it should be fully operational during 1996.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 The range of student services for full-time students is comprehensive. There are good relationships and mutual respect between staff and students. Students speak warmly of the support they receive and of the secure, informal and friendly atmosphere in the college. Student services are well managed and kept under critical review. The most recent review has resulted in a new senior post to manage admissions and guidance, and the use of senior curriculum managers to monitor and evaluate the quality of tutorial work.

33 There is an effective process of transition for students from local 11-16 partner schools to the college. Schools are encouraged to draw on the expertise of college staff to increase their students' knowledge of the courses the college offers. Staff from the college organise visits and participate in careers sessions; for example, they take part in mock interviews with year 11 pupils. All students from the partner schools are guaranteed a place at the college. Liaison with other schools and with neighbouring careers services is also strong. The college holds an open day for students to find out more about the college and its courses.

34 The next stage of recruitment is for individual students' programmes of study to be discussed and determined through interviews. The director of student services issues detailed guidelines for conducting student interviews. Surveys of full-time students show that the interviews are highly valued. Some divisions have arranged taster days to enable students to sample courses in the summer term, but they were not well attended and the college is reviewing its arrangements to keep in touch with students between interview and enrolment. Enrolment procedures are efficient. Arrangements for the guidance of part-time students are more variable. Tutors are available to advise them on college advice days, but access to specialist guidance is more limited at other times.

35 A policy for accrediting the prior learning of students has been developed but has yet to be implemented. Some assessment of prior learning is offered in NVQ administration and management programmes, but few students have had their prior knowledge and experience accredited.

36 Induction for full-time students is generally well planned, follows clear and comprehensive college guidelines and provides a good introduction to the college and its courses. During induction, full-time students attend sessions on the choice of optional activities and on the specialist student services. They receive a useful and attractively presented

set of documents including the college charter, a student union handbook and a college student handbook. Students' comments after their first days at the college showed that most enjoyed their induction and appreciated the support they received. Tutors are available to advise students and the procedures for transferring students between courses and subjects are effective. Guidelines have recently been developed to ensure a more consistent approach to the induction of part-time students.

37 Students speak highly of the quality of support they receive from their tutors. Each full-time student has a designated tutor, usually their course or subject teacher. Tutors have a handbook explaining their role and setting out procedures. They carefully monitor the progress of students through their courses. Attendance is also closely monitored, and non-attendance is followed up appropriately. Central to the tutorial programme is the use of action planning, which requires students to set targets and review their progress towards them at regular periods throughout their course. In this way students take responsibility for monitoring the standard of their work. The college has not yet linked action planning to the national records of achievement which some students bring from their previous schools. There is considerable variation in the way tutorials are planned by course leaders. Careers and health education are not always given sufficient emphasis.

38 Parents receive an attractive information folder before students begin their courses. The regular information they are given afterwards includes the student's timetable and written attendance and progress reports. Students and their parents are invited to consultation meetings to review results and progress and to an evening meeting on higher education opportunities. The college sets a good balance between keeping parents informed and recognising student independence. Parents appreciate the efforts made to involve them and keep them informed.

39 Students have access to a wide range of specialist services. A confidential counselling service is well advertised and valued by students. Appointments can be made with either a male or female counsellor. There is also a special adviser to help students on financial issues, and a college nurse. Many student services are not accessible to part-time students in the evening.

40 There are well-structured arrangements to advise students individually on careers and the application to higher education. Specialist careers advice is offered through the Essex Careers and Business Partnership, and the specialist careers adviser offers appointments to students during the day and on one evening per week. The careers library is adequately stocked, though access to computer-based information on careers is limited. Records of student destinations to further and higher education and employment are collected by tutors and a detailed summary, analysed by division, is prepared centrally. In 1995 about 90 per cent of full-time leavers responded to the college's requests for information about destinations.

41 Systems for diagnosing and responding to student needs for additional support with literacy and numeracy are good. Diagnostic assessment of all full-time students uses the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit instrument and other screening or diagnostic tests more closely related to vocational areas. Staff from the college learning support unit monitor the results and advise tutors about appropriate support. Teachers from the unit offer support in various ways. Some students are offered separate help; others are helped by learning support specialists who assist subject teachers. Tutors are encouraged to refer students to the unit or to ask for guidance on how they and their course teams can help students. All full-time students receive a leaflet describing the help available. Procedures for tutors to obtain learning support for students on part-time and evening courses are less developed.

42 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive strong support. The college has access to specialist support, and volunteers make a valuable contribution. There is close liaison with local schools to aid transition to college. Links with employers are also good and have led to valuable work placements.

43 The work of the student union is supported by the college. The presidency is a full-time paid post. The president meets with the management team and governors to discuss student issues and is supported on a day-to-day basis by the director of student services, who provides advice, for example, on welfare questions. A separate association represents the views of adult students. The association is active in promoting social activities, such as visits to the theatre and opera. The college assists adults with study during the day by providing a 24-place nursery for children between the ages of two and five.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

44 Inspectors observed a total of 264 teaching sessions. In 62 per cent of the sessions the strengths outweighed the weaknesses. In less than 7 per cent of the classes the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. Consistently good practice was found on the courses in modern foreign languages, performing arts and theatre studies. 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	Totals
GCE AS/A level		16	39	19	3	0	77
GCSE		2	9	10	2	0	23
GNVQ		4	15	15	4	0	38
NVQ		0	6	2	1	0	9
Vocational diploma and certificate		9	17	23	4	0	53
Other		19	27	14	3	1	64
Total		50	113	83	17	1	264

45 The average level of attendance at the 264 sessions observed was 83 per cent. Average attendance at the 91 GNVQ, vocational diploma and certificate sessions inspected was 84 per cent; at the 100 GCE AS/A level and GCSE classes inspected it was 80 per cent.

46 Teachers of science showed a sound knowledge of their subject, and their teaching provided a good and well-ordered coverage of the GCE A level and GCSE syllabuses. They placed a strong reliance upon formal exposition and there were few examples of students working independently on projects and investigations without close supervision. Students were rarely given opportunities to work in groups. Most students worked purposefully through practical tasks and were able to apply theoretical concepts to the findings of experiments. In mathematics, techniques were presented clearly and supported by appropriate assessment exercises. Teachers of first-year GCE A level students paid particular attention to strengthening their ability to cope with algebra and trigonometry at the start of the course. In teaching sessions on computing there were good examples of skilful questioning by teachers during discussions of students' project work.

47 On engineering courses, practical tasks in the workshop were used to promote understanding and develop craft skills. Demonstrations of technical equipment by teachers were common on motor vehicle programmes. For example, during a lecture on vehicle ignition systems learning was effectively reinforced by a demonstration using a rig mounted engine. There were examples of well-designed individual assignments on the engineering courses but coursework, as a whole, was not planned to ensure an even workload for students. There was insufficient review by staff of the standards required of students in assignment work, either through sharing good practice or by monitoring the consistency of marking.

48 On the GNVQ programmes in business, teaching and assessment were generally well matched to students' needs. Students were encouraged to work independently, with the aid of well-designed self-study packs. For example, on the GNVQ intermediate course, students worked through an attractive colour-coded manual which contained problem-solving

activities. This was supported by useful reference material. Teaching was well structured on the secretarial programmes but learning resources, such as self-study packs, have not been sufficiently developed to allow students to work independently. The systems employed by teachers for assessing students' competencies on the NVQ programmes in administration were complex and time consuming. Few students understood clearly how to present evidence in order to meet assessment standards. The teaching methods used on the part-time management and practice administrator courses were skilfully designed to draw on the work experience of adult students. For example, students on a 10-week programme designed for managers of small businesses were individually assessed on their preparation of a business plan and the presentation of it to a panel which included external specialists.

49 Students on leisure and tourism courses developed skills in sports coaching in badminton, netball and basketball and enjoyed training in the college gymnasium. A good feature of the GNVQ programmes was the self-assessment of students' coursework. On the full-time courses, there was a strong emphasis on students working through assignments in groups. Some of the assignment tasks did not stretch the more able students who quickly lost their interest. Teachers made little use of visual aids in the more formal classroom sessions.

50 On the health and community care courses teaching and assessment were well planned. Schemes of work on most GNVQ programmes were designed to enable students to integrate material from the mandatory and optional units. Group activities were well managed and the objectives to be achieved were clearly identified. Students were given the opportunity to develop their communication skills through assignments involving group presentations to the rest of the class. Adult students participated confidently and teachers drew effectively upon their professional experience. For example, in a session on first-aid a student explained the difficulties encountered when applying resuscitation techniques in real situations in contrast to practising with dummies in the controlled environment of the classroom.

51 A variety of teaching methods was used in art and design, including studio practice, visits to museums and art galleries, and one-to-one teaching. Students were given clear guidance on projects. Detailed feedback was given by tutors on the quality of completed work and teaching sessions were often used to explore different techniques for tackling students' projects. The teaching of graphic design was enlivened by the use of part-time teachers who had current experience of the industry. Independent learning was strongly encouraged on the performing arts and drama courses, with students taking direction from each other. In one session, a first-year student was seen confidently choreographing dance routines practised by second-year students. The development of students' skills and instrumental technique in music was constrained by the shortage of suitable practice facilities.

52 The teaching of individual GCE A level and GCSE subjects in the humanities and social sciences was usually well planned and often based upon good use of challenging learning materials. For example, during a GCE A level history class on Soviet foreign policy, an official Soviet government document outlining the strategy followed during the Second World War was contrasted with the interpretation offered by western historians. In a GCSE media studies class, individual students designed front pages of tabloid newspapers which were then evaluated by other students in the group. Teachers of modern foreign languages conducted sessions in the target language, using the language laboratory and video tapes and adapting their approach to the needs of the strongest and weakest students. The approach to the teaching of English was less successful in supporting students experiencing difficulty with grammar and expression, particularly at GCSE level. Throughout the humanities and social sciences, although there were examples of detailed and helpful marking of students' work, there was no systematic monitoring of students' progress over the complete duration of the course. For the full-time GCE A level and GCSE programmes as a whole, there was no consistent approach to developing study skills such as note taking, or core skills such as information technology.

53 On the access to higher education programme for adult returners, the development of skills in numeracy, literacy, information technology, research and private study was an integral part of the course. Students were able to measure their own progress against agreed targets. Adult students demonstrated high levels of motivation on courses of English as a foreign language. Teachers made good use of different linguistic registers and involved students in speaking and listening through well-designed role-play exercises. For example, in one class students were given picture cards illustrating active leisure pursuits such as hang-gliding and fencing. Each student then had to persuade others in the group of the case for taking up a particular sport or hobby. Supporting audio tapes and texts were available to help the students develop appropriate vocabulary.

54 There were many examples of good support for individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on mainstream courses. In many cases, college teachers co-operated closely with staff from external agencies. For example, some students took part in a practical cookery class with assistance from an accompanying officer from the day-care centre. There were well-established separate courses for students with moderate learning difficulties, such as 'new ventures' and the Royal Society of Arts basic skills programme. Many of these were designed to prepare students for employment and included a period of work experience. Teachers provided students with challenging tasks and gave them constructive feedback, often in individual tutorials.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

55 Students were generally well motivated. They enjoyed their courses and spoke highly of them. There was a sense of real partnership in learning on many of the programmes attended by adult students. On many courses students were able to apply specialist knowledge which was directly applicable to their work. For example, part-time students on a course for medical receptionists developed expertise in the Latin and Greek derivations of medical terms by analysing the literal meanings conveyed by the prefixes, suffixes and stems of words. This enabled them to interpret medical vocabulary with which they were unfamiliar and enhanced their skills in serving patients and medical practitioners.

56 Most students who entered for the awards in vocational courses offered by the college in 1994 achieved the qualification they were seeking. Of the 271 students aged between 16 and 18 in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's (now the Department for Education and Employment) 1994 performance tables, 87 per cent were successful. In 1995, of the 299 students aged between 16 and 18 in their final year of study on vocational courses, 72 per cent were successful. This is a decrease in the achievement of vocational qualifications of 15 per cent and places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The degree of student success varied between programmes. For two-year GNVQ and BTEC national diploma courses in performing arts, media, social care, science (health studies), nursery nursing, travel and tourism, art and design and graphic design, final pass rates in 1995 were above 90 per cent. When measured against first-year enrolments (in November 1993), just over 80 per cent of students who commenced the course achieved the full award. For BTEC national diplomas in computing and engineering, the BTEC first diploma in engineering, and the GNVQ intermediate course in art and design, the final pass rates were under 80 per cent.

57 In 1994, 446 students between the ages of 16 and 18 were entered for GCE A level examinations in 31 subjects and for GCE AS examinations in 10 subjects. These students scored an average of 4.2 points per subject entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the former Department for Education. There were a total of 42 GCE A level subject entries for full-time students aged 19 or over; 83 per cent of these students achieved a pass at grades A-E, as compared with the national pass rate of 62 per cent for all students aged over 19 in further education colleges. In 1995, 401 students aged between 16 and 18 were entered for GCE A level examinations in 33 subjects and for GCE AS examinations in 13 subjects. In the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment, these students scored an

average of 3.6 points per subject entry, a decrease of 0.6 compared with 1994. The pass rate achieved by the full-time students at GCE A level grades A-E was 72.4 per cent. This compares with the corresponding figures of 71 per cent in 1993 and 77 per cent in 1994. Results were well above the national average in mathematics, English literature, environmental science, photography, government and politics, film and media studies, sports studies, theatre studies and business studies. Results were well below the national average in chemistry, physics, computing, human biology, geography, Spanish, English language, music, accounting and economics. There were a total of 221 GCE A level subject entries for full-time students aged 19 or over; 71 per cent achieved a pass at grades A-E.

58 Results for full-time students taking GCSE mathematics and English in 1995 were better than the national averages. Fifty per cent of the 230 students entering for GCSE mathematics were awarded grades A-C: slightly above the national average of 44.7 per cent. Seventy-nine per cent of the 283 students entering for English language achieved a grade A-C pass. This was well above the national average and represented a significant improvement on the previous year's GCSE English language results. In other subjects, where the number of examination entries per subject was far smaller, the picture is a mixed one. More than 60 per cent were awarded A-C grades in business studies, English literature, film studies, French, German, Italian, Spanish, media studies, human biology and psychology. However, in art and design, business studies, chemistry, history and physics, less than 30 per cent of students entering for examinations in 1995 were awarded A-C grades; a performance significantly below national average standards in these subjects.

59 Sixty-eight of the students who sat these examinations in 1995 were following a full-time GCSE programme of four or more subjects. Most of them had previously taken a GCSE programme at school. Eighteen per cent were awarded grades A-C in four subjects, and a further 30 per cent in three subjects. Over 50 per cent of students on the full-time GCSE programme progressed to more advanced courses at the college.

60 Part-time students achieved good results in many GCE A level and GCSE subjects. For example, 26 of the 42 students entered for GCSE mathematics obtained A-C grades, a pass rate of 62 per cent. On the evening programmes for GCE A level economics, French, German, government and politics and law, pass rates of over 60 per cent at grades A-E were achieved. Many of the students entering these examinations had had tuition in the subject only for three hours per week over a single academic year. Good results at GCSE and GCE A level were also achieved by students entering these examinations after following home-study and open-learning courses. Fifty-two students were entered for a GCE A level or GCSE examination and 42 achieved either grades A-E at GCE A level or grades A-C at GCSE level.

61 In 1994-95, the overall retention rate for full-time courses was 83 per cent. A study was undertaken into the relationship between the withdrawal rates of full-time students and the factors of gender, ethnicity and place of residence. Its most significant finding was that students who lived in Essex were less likely to withdraw than those with a longer distance to travel. The withdrawal rates of students are given in the following table.

Withdrawal rates of full-time students, 1994 -95

Place of residence	Withdrawal rate (%)
Essex	14
Redbridge	17
Waltham Forest	18
Newham	25

A working party of the academic board also investigated the reasons why full-time students left their courses in 1994-95 through an analysis of tutor records. It found that according to students' own statements, just over one-quarter left because they could not cope with the demands of their course, and just under a quarter because they had obtained employment.

62 The involvement of students in self-assessment was a good feature of many GNVQ programmes and part-time management courses. Students on GNVQ programmes were required to produce substantial portfolios of their own work as part of their final assessment. Many of these portfolios were well organised and presented. In art and design, student folders demonstrated imagination, flair and the application of good technique. On many of the GNVQ programmes students were able to make use of assignments undertaken during work placements to generate evidence of achievements. In 1994-95, over 700 full-time students had periods of work experience with local employers.

63 Effective communication skills were developed on many GNVQ and BTEC national diploma programmes, and some programmes for adult students, through assignments requiring the writing of reports and the making of presentations to the class. Adult students on the access course worked in small groups to produce a television magazine programme, using cameras and editing facilities in the college studio. The exercise was a real test of skills in listening, debating and resolving disagreements. Information technology skills were not developed effectively on many courses. In the teaching of sciences and engineering, for example, little use was made of information technology facilities to analyse and present experimental data and projects. Study skills of general application, for example, note taking and essay writing, were emphasised on the grouped GCE A level and GCSE courses such as the 'media package' combining GCE A level communication and media studies where students follow two or more related subjects. There was little emphasis on the development of

such skills by other students whose programmes consisted of a selection of individual GCE A level subjects.

64 A strong emphasis on the development of numeracy and literacy skills was a feature of the special courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. On some of these, students' achievements were recorded and accredited through the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) wordpower and numberpower awards. However, the extent of accreditation towards NVQ and other nationally recognised qualifications was limited, even for students whose courses contained a substantial element of work experience.

65 There are good rates of progression to further education, higher education and employment in many curriculum areas. In 1995, a total of 695 students completed GCE A level and advanced vocational courses such as BTEC national diplomas. Forty-eight per cent of those whose destinations are known progressed to higher education, 13 per cent to further education and 26 per cent to employment. The other 13 per cent are unknown. Over 50 per cent of the 473 students completing GCSE courses and vocational programmes at foundation and intermediate levels in 1995 progressed onto more advanced further education courses at the college. There was also a high rate of progression to higher education by adult students on the access to higher education programme; 17 of the 21 students completing the course in 1995 went on to degree or higher national diploma courses.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

66 There is a strong commitment from the corporation and senior management to improving the quality of provision. All members of the senior management team are members of the quality steering group responsible for developing and implementing policy in this area. There is a director of quality assurance who has the power to initiate reviews of the curriculum and student services with the support of an internal quality audit team. A range of methods is used to assess quality at course, divisional and college levels.

67 Each course and subject team is required to produce an annual monitoring report which is reviewed at divisional level. The college quality manual provides a format for monitoring structure which places a strong emphasis on the evaluation of data on student enrolments, retention, destinations and examination results. Action planning is used to identify issues needing attention and set a timescale for their resolution. The standard of critical self-evaluation in monitoring these reports varies. Some are mainly descriptive in tone and do not demonstrate how the course team's action plan has led to improvements in teaching and learning. The better reports make full use of the structure provided by the quality manual and include evidence of curriculum change in response to action plans.

68 The process of annual review incorporates the production of a divisional overview using the evidence from the annual monitoring reports, supplemented by analysis of responses to questionnaires from students and reports from moderators and external verifiers. Progress in addressing actions identified through divisional reviews is monitored by the director for quality assurance and the vice-principal for curriculum and human resources.

69 In addition to the routine cycle of course and divisional reviews, the system of quality assurance includes internal quality audit. A team of 12 audit staff, drawn predominantly from the divisions, supports the director of quality assurance in conducting special surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of provision. During 1995-96 this team is assessing each division's response to the findings of the FEFC's curriculum area inspections. In 1994-95, an evaluation by the team of initial student guidance and induction procedures led to significant changes and improvements.

70 Examination results are analysed carefully by senior management and reported to the corporation. The director of quality assurance makes a detailed investigation of the reasons for poor examination results and reports to the principal. For example, a review in 1993 of the examination results of full-time students taking four or more GCSE subjects found that student success in examinations was closely related to entry qualifications and the combination of subjects taken. Following this review the college raised its entry requirements for the full-time GCSE course and offered subjects in cognate groups, such as English and communications. Results have improved significantly in 1994 and 1995, following the implementation of these changes.

71 Value-added measures, relating students' qualifications at entry to their achievements at college, are used to inform the evaluation of GCE A level results. There is a college value-added group which has considered different techniques for these measurements and undertaken pilot studies in several divisions.

72 Common procedures to check the consistency of internal assessment on NVQ and GNVQ programmes are not yet in place. A common set of verification procedures is being developed and the functions of internal verifiers have been agreed by all the divisions. Routine procedures to check standards, for example by sampling students' assessed work across related courses, are not being implemented.

73 There is a strong commitment to staff development and a high level of staff-development activity. The staff-development policy and procedures are included in the staff handbook. Most staff development takes place through activities organised by the divisions and support units. A central staff-development unit provides training which cuts across specialist areas, such as teacher education, information technology skills updating, and preparation for assessor and verifier awards. There is a staff-development

officer, who plans and monitors activities in accordance with the objectives in the college strategic plan. The college has committed itself to work towards the achievement of the Investors in People standard and appointed a project officer to co-ordinate work on this initiative.

74 The college is currently modifying the staff-appraisal system which was introduced in 1993 for all managers and full-time teaching staff. At the time of the inspection, 60 per cent of the full-time teaching staff had participated in an appraisal interview. The documentation for recording appraisal interviews is complex and only half of the appraisals that have taken place have been recorded. The system has not been successful in achieving its original aims of clarifying individual roles and identifying personal development needs. It has only recently been extended to support staff. There is a well-organised programme for the initial briefing of new staff by senior managers, but this is not followed up systematically to ensure that staff are well inducted into their new roles.

75 As required by the national charter for further education, statements of the college charter are given to all students. The statements are not linked to clear statements of service standards and students were not fully aware of the significance of the charter in defining their rights and obligations.

76 Two sets of self-assessment reports were produced by the college under the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Each division produced a critical self-review in advance of the curriculum area inspections. These were subsequently updated to take account of the findings of inspection. Before the inspection of aspects of cross-college provision, the senior management team produced a brief summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses, with a supporting context document. Although it was difficult to cross-reference this substantial volume of documentation, many of the judgements arrived at internally concurred with the findings of the inspection.

RESOURCES

Staffing

77 There is a full-time equivalent staff of 213 teachers and 105 support staff. Teachers are generally well qualified for the courses on which they teach. Most full-time and many part-time teachers have a teaching qualification. Seventy-three per cent have a first degree and a further 12 per cent have a higher national diploma or its equivalent. Some teachers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not have appropriate professional qualifications. Many teaching staff have industrial, commercial and vocational experience relevant to their current work, although this is now dated in some areas. Full-time teachers in engineering, computing and leisure and tourism, in particular, are lacking in recent industrial experience.

78 Part-time teachers make an important contribution to course teams. Their industrial experience and awareness of modern practices is of real benefit in vocational areas. In art and design there are part-time staff who also work as freelance artists and designers. The proportion of course hours taught by part-time staff varies across the college. There are few part-time staff in health and social care. In mathematics, a high proportion of course hours are taught by part-time teachers. The college does not set targets on the usage of part-time teaching staff across the college or within divisions.

79 A high proportion of teachers in vocational areas have achieved, or are working towards, the assessor/verifier qualifications required to support NVQ and GNVQ programmes. However, in some areas, for example health and social care, progress is slow. Currently, 70 staff in vocational areas have achieved assessor awards. There are qualified assessors and verifiers in most curriculum areas.

80 Learning is well supported by technical and support staff working closely with teaching staff. For example, in mechanical engineering there is a workshop development committee composed of teachers and technicians who jointly planned changes to the mechanical engineering workshop.

81 A comprehensive staff handbook is issued to all members of the full-time staff. It sets out policies and procedures for equal opportunities, grievance, discipline, recruitment and selection, staff development, and sickness and absence. Arrangements for the recruitment and selection of full-time staff are good. Candidates called for interview are set a task which requires them to demonstrate that they have the required knowledge and skills. For example, candidates for teaching posts are asked to prepare lesson plans and to present them to the interviewing panel. Arrangements for the recruitment of part-time staff are less systematic. Although staffing trends are analysed by age, ethnicity and gender there is no monitoring of applications for college posts for these areas. Thirty-eight per cent of the full-time and 64 per cent of the part-time teaching staff are female. Three per cent of the full-time and part-time teaching staff are recorded as being from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Equipment/learning resources

82 In most areas the levels of equipment are broadly adequate for current needs. There is a good range of equipment and materials in art and design, science and in most of the performing arts. The television studio is well equipped and the college has recently purchased an up-to-date vision mixer. There is a planned replacement programme for other studio equipment which is coming to the end of its useful life. There are insufficient resources, for example, costumes and masks, for theatre work. In media studies there is little radio technology. In motor vehicle engineering the equipment is out of date.

83 In most classrooms the furniture and general purpose teaching aids are adequate. Overhead projectors, whiteboards and other audio-visual aids are available. Appropriate screens and blinds were not always available where teachers were using overhead projection.

84 The library is a modern semi-circular building of one storey in the middle of the college campus. The accommodation is attractive but has proved difficult to use effectively. It has been adapted to house a number of seminar rooms and bays around its perimeter. Its central area contains the bookstock of about 34,400 volumes, together with periodicals, audio and video tapes, and slide sets. There are 132 study spaces including 20 in an area reserved for quiet study, a provision which is not always adequate to meet student demand. Some of the furniture is shabby. The library staff liaise closely with the teaching divisions on the choice of bookstock and other resources. In many curriculum areas the provision of books is suitable for students' needs, but it is too limited in business studies, engineering, management and media.

85 The college has a campus-wide computer network with 274 workstations. The quality and quantity of computers and software to support specialist computing courses is good, but for other students it is variable. There is limited open access to machines for independent study. The one open-access computer room is in the upper building; it is difficult to find, inconvenient for students who study in the lower building, and frequently used for class teaching.

Accommodation

86 The campus is situated on a pleasant 14.8 hectare site with grassed areas and adequate space for car parking. It includes a copse which is part of the original Epping Forest. There is a playing field of 4.9 hectares on a site close to the college which the college took over from Essex County Council in January 1995. There are two main teaching buildings. The lower building was formerly the main building of Loughton College of Further Education, and the upper building was formerly the main building of Epping Forest High School. Both have been remodelled and refurbished. A third, new building, known as the 'middle building', was completed in 1989 and houses the library and central administration. Access to buildings for students and staff using wheelchairs is generally good. The college has undertaken many building adaptations to improve facilities for those with restricted mobility, including substantial changes to the refectory in the lower building.

87 Teaching accommodation is generally clean, tidy and well maintained, and in most curriculum areas specialist rooms are grouped together to display relevant subject materials and promote a curriculum identity. The science laboratories do not provide sufficient teaching space. There have been some recent improvements in the mechanical engineering workshop and the facilities for fabrication and welding. There is a full range of specialist accommodation in art and design. In media and

performing arts there are good-sized television and performance studios and a 150-seat theatre. Facilities for music are less good; the music studio is inadequately soundproofed, and there are no individual practice rooms for students. The college has its own maintenance team to carry out small repairs and grounds maintenance. There is a planned maintenance programme.

88 The location of the main college reception and information centre in the middle building is confusing for visitors to the college. Directions and signs are inadequate for those unfamiliar with the site. The college has recognised that the present reception points in the lower and upper buildings are uninviting and is seeking to improve the quality of information provided to visitors.

89 There is a large and adequately furnished students' common room in the middle building which is used mostly by 16-19 year old students. There is no specific social space for adult students. Refectories in both main teaching buildings provide a good service for students throughout the day. Facilities for student services are centrally located and adequate.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

90 The particular strengths of the college are:

- effective support for students transferring from school to college
- a wide range of GCE A level, GCE AS and GCSE courses
- purposeful leadership from senior management
- active governors who take a close interest in students' achievements
- good support from tutors for full-time students
- a full range of student services
- the commitment of staff to improving quality
- high standards of teaching in many curriculum areas
- good opportunities for work experience for full-time students
- a high level of staff-development activity
- well-qualified and motivated teaching and support staff
- the attractive site and well-maintained accommodation.

91 If it is to build upon its existing strengths the college should address the following:

- the narrow range of NVQ accredited qualifications
- the underdeveloped strategies for marketing and industrial liaison
- the limited role and contribution of the academic board
- the present failure of management information systems to inform curriculum planning and monitoring
- the underdeveloped guidance process for part-time students

-
- the absence of an effective system for monitoring standards of assessment on vocational courses
 - poor access to information technology resources for independent study.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

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

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

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

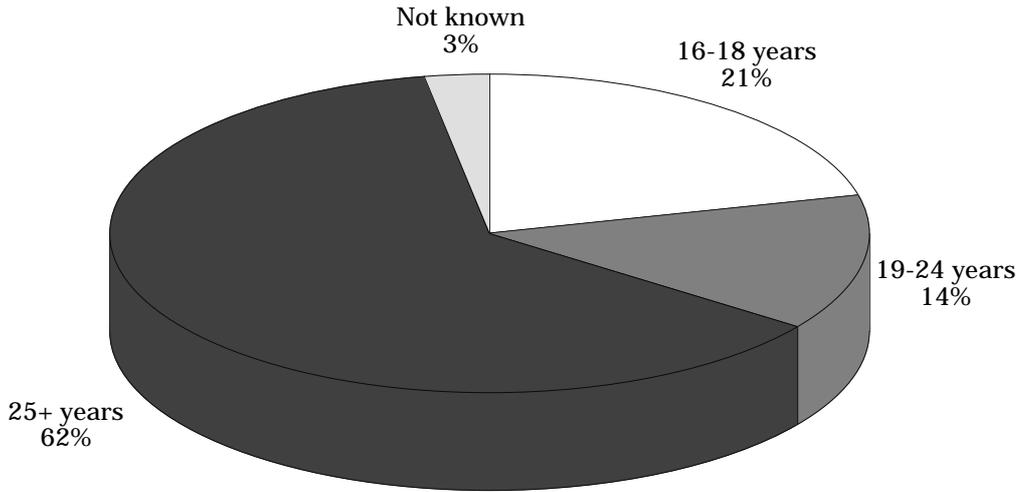
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

Epping Forest College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

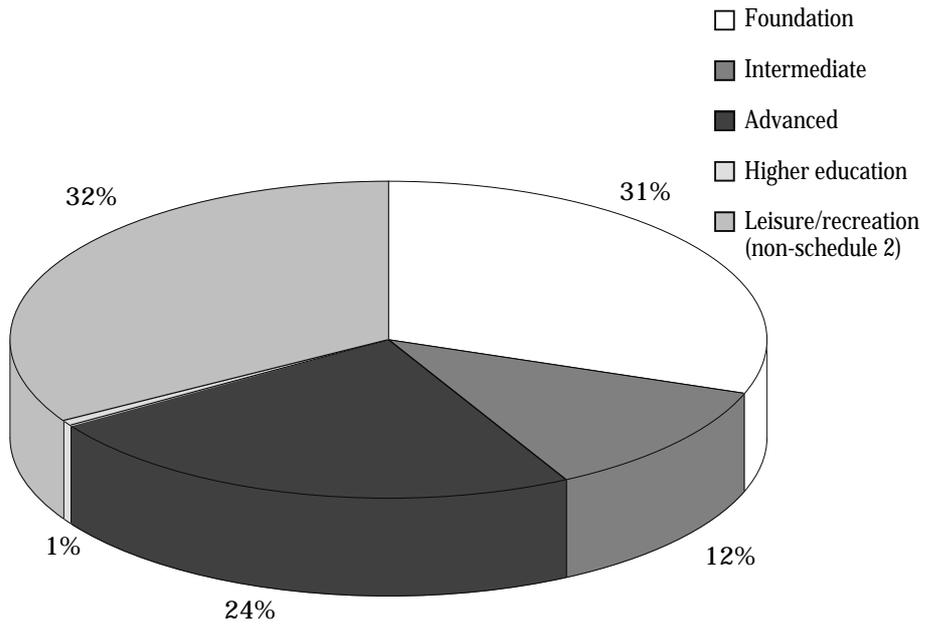


Enrolments: 11,706

Note: 27 enrolments are aged under 16 years.

Figure 2

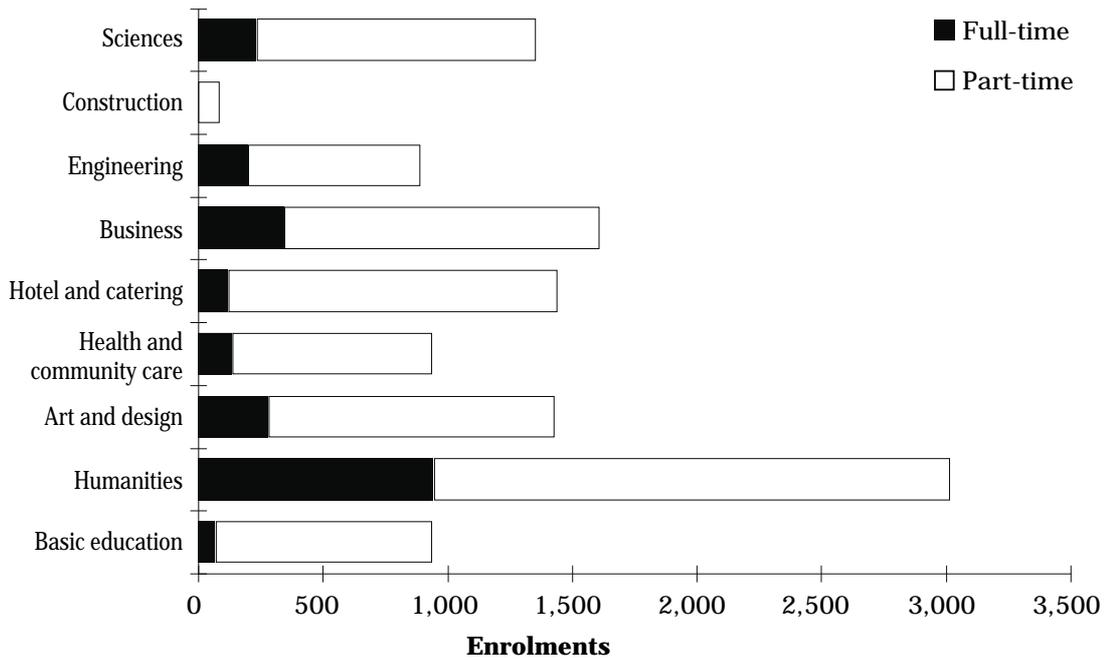
Epping Forest College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 11,706

Figure 3

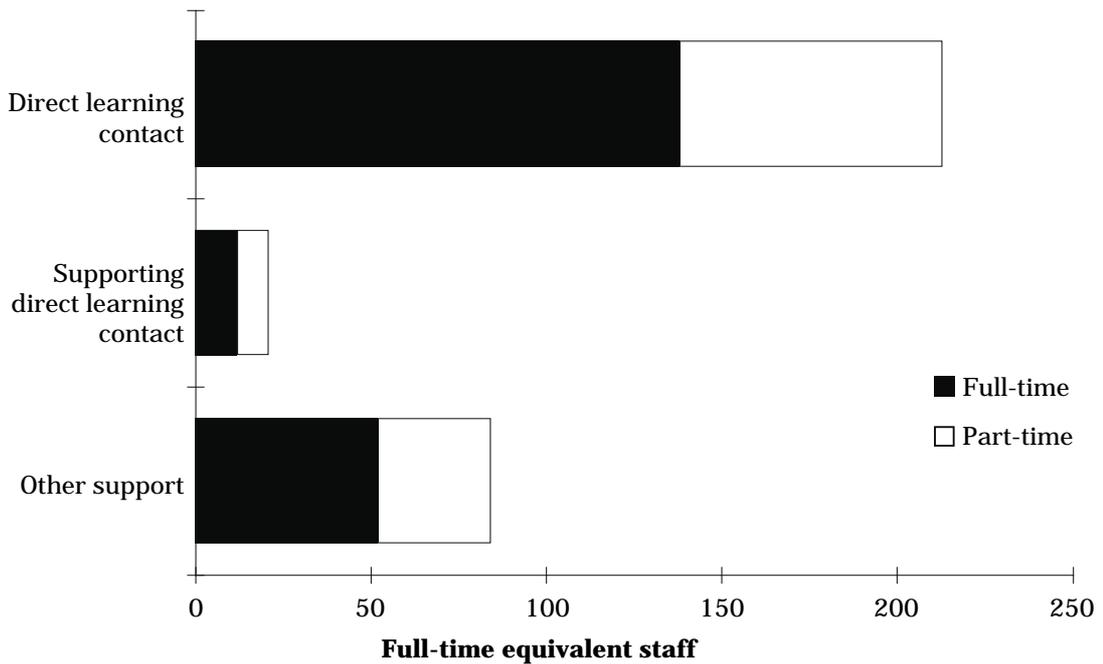
Epping Forest College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 11,706

Figure 4

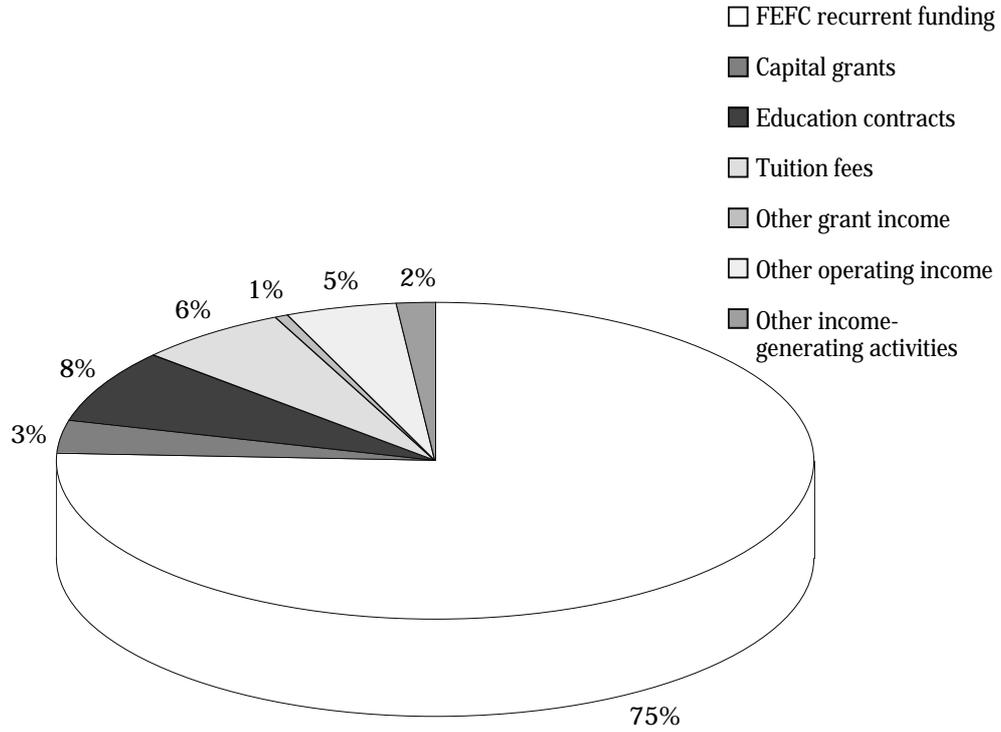
Epping Forest College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 318

Figure 5

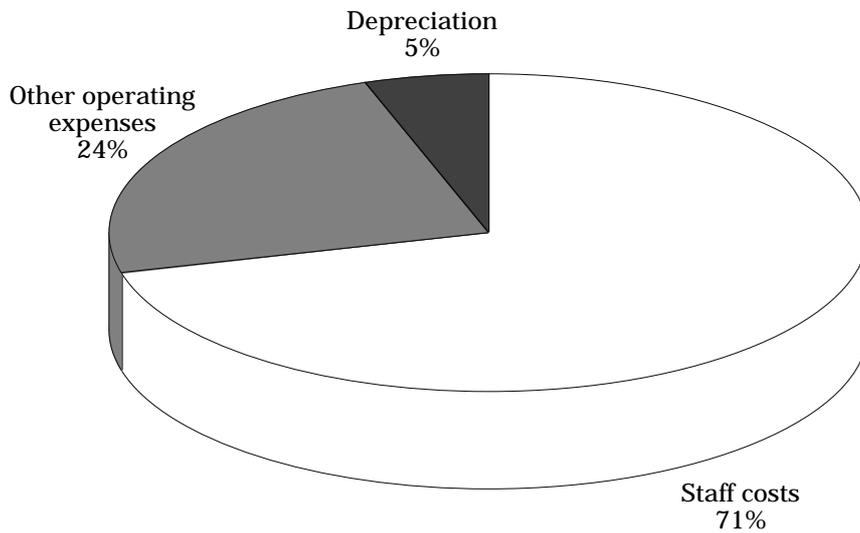
Epping Forest College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £8,830,290

Figure 6

Epping Forest College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £9,119,530

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