

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Huntingdonshire Regional College

October 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	7
Governance and management	18
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	27
Teaching and the promotion of learning	34
Students' achievements	44
Quality assurance	55
Resources	64
Conclusions and issues	74
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 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 116/97

HUNTINGDONSHIRE REGIONAL COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected May 1996-May 1997

Summary

Huntingdonshire Regional College offers a wide range of courses at intermediate and advanced levels for full-time and part-time students, and an extensive community education programme. The range of programmes at foundation level is limited and progression opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are restricted. Governors are actively involved in the work of the college and have appropriate knowledge and experience. Arrangements for students' recruitment and guidance are efficient but tutorial support is of variable quality. There is extensive provision for childcare but the support for students on mainstream programmes who need help with basic skills is inadequate. Teachers are well qualified and courses are well organised. Examination results on GCSE, GCE A level and some vocational courses are, with some exceptions, poor for 16 to 19 year olds; results are better for students over the age of 19. Retention, attendance and progression rates are low on some courses. The college should: develop a more effective marketing strategy; address weaknesses in the management structure; further develop its quality assurance systems; monitor and review more effectively students' achievements and teaching and learning; improve strategic planning and the setting of clear targets; improve the use and quality of its accommodation.

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		3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		3
Quality assurance		4
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	3
	accommodation	4

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health and community care	2
Engineering	3	Art and design	3
Business studies	3	Humanities	3
Leisure and tourism	3	Basic education	3

INTRODUCTION

1 Huntingdonshire Regional College was inspected between May 1996 and May 1997. The college's induction and enrolment procedures were inspected in September 1996. Curriculum areas and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected between September 1996 and May 1997. Eighteen inspectors spent 68.5 days in the college. Inspectors visited 189 classes. They examined students' practical and written work and read documentation about the college and its courses. Inspectors met the college's governors, managers, teachers, students, and staff responsible for support services. Meetings were also held with employers, parents, local secondary and special school teachers, and representatives of the local community, the careers service, Anglia Polytechnic University, the College of Animal Welfare, the Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority (LEA), and a representative of the Cambridgeshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors also observed meetings of the corporation and the programme development committee.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Huntingdonshire Regional College is a general further education college based in the town of Huntingdon with an annex at St Neots. It was established in 1964 at its present site. The college serves a dispersed rural population in a catchment area of over 350 square miles. The majority of its students live within a 12 mile radius of Huntingdon.

3 Huntingdonshire has a population of approximately 150,000. The unemployment rate is lower than the national average. The projected population growth rate is higher than the national average. The main areas of employment are education, scientific research, health and local government. Other significant sources of employment are retailing and distribution; business and professional services; and engineering. Small businesses, employing less than 25 people, account for 87 per cent of all businesses in the county.

4 There are six other colleges funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) within a 20 mile radius of Huntingdon. Five are within Cambridgeshire: Cambridge Regional College, Hills Road and Long Road sixth form colleges, Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture and Peterborough Regional College. The sixth college is Bedford College, situated to the south west of Huntingdon. There are seven secondary schools with sixth forms in the immediate catchment area, and one independent school with a sixth form. Two schools cater for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, one offering post-16 provision. Higher education is provided by Cambridge University, Anglia Polytechnic University and De Montfort University. In 1996, 81 per cent of 16 year olds in the Huntingdon area continued in full-time education or training.

5 There were 8,971 students enrolled at the college at November 1996. The number of adult students is increasing. Thirty-five per cent of the

full-time and 79 per cent of the part-time students are over the age of 19. Courses are provided at intermediate and advanced levels in all FEFC programme areas. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. There are 61 full-time teachers, including fractional appointments. In addition, there are 215 teachers working part time and 72 staff who support the work of the college in administrative, technical and clerical positions. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

6 The college's mission is to sustain an independent, locally governed and locally managed establishment, which is accessible and responsive to local people. The college seeks to respond to diverse local needs through: programmes which prepare individuals for employment or higher education; training for employers; and programmes designed to enrich people's lives through the acquisition of new skills or interests.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college offers a broad range of vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels. At foundation level, the range of provision is more limited. For example, there are no courses for general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation level. Few courses are available at level 1. There are eight part-time national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes at level 2 and 11 at level 3; the range on offer to full-time students is more limited. Six GNVQs courses are available at intermediate level and five at advanced level. The college offers eight BTEC national diploma and certificate courses. Professional courses are available in business studies and management qualifications. The college has developed outward collaborative agreements with organisations offering training in hair, beauty, animal care and motor vehicle body repair. Counselling courses and a range of specialist courses in animal care attract students from a wide geographical area. The college has established links with the community through the provision of assessor and verifier training for teachers from local schools and teacher training for staff from the Wood Green Animal Shelter. Training for playgroup workers and leaders has been developed through local partnerships with the Pre School Learning Alliance, the TEC and the Kids Club network.

8 In 1996-97, 20 full-time and 22 part-time courses were offered for general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects and 22 full-time and 17 part-time courses were offered for general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects. However, only two-thirds of these courses recruited sufficient students to run. The college provided a small additional programme of academic, sports and social activities. Most students on leisure and tourism courses take a range of additional qualifications mainly related to sports. The college enters teams in a variety of sports in the Eastern Region Colleges Association leagues.

9 For adults who wish to gain entry to higher education but do not have GCE A levels there is a modular access programme which offers students some choice in their studies. An access to nursing programme is run in conjunction with Addenbrooke's Hospital. There is no pre-access course available which would help to prepare adult students for a return to study. There is an effective relationship with Anglia Polytechnic University. The college has a franchise agreement with the university which enables it to offer first-year history and English degree modules. The college has found it difficult to sustain this provision because of low enrolments and it has not met its current recruitment targets. The college offers a BTEC higher national diploma in business studies and in engineering and, in response to demand from local employers, the college has developed a higher national diploma in photography which is franchised from the university.

10 There is a wide range of full-time and part-time provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although there is no provision for those with severe or profound learning difficulties. Students can progress from the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) national skills profile onto a vocational access certificate programme which allows them to sample vocational programmes and to undertake work experience. Further opportunities for progression from separate specialist provision are limited by the restricted number of vocational programmes within the college at foundation level. Of the 49 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enrolled in 1995-96 only one progressed to a mainstream vocational course. Some college courses take place in 'outreach' centres in partnership with community organisations. Young people under 16 with emotional and behavioral difficulties, who have been excluded from school, are able to join college courses. Through an outward collaborative agreement with the Richmond Fellowship, training is offered in woodwork and horticulture for those with mental health difficulties. The college has strong links with special schools and social services, and has developed several other outward collaborative agreements with organisations which offer sheltered workshop provision.

11 Most courses are based on traditional patterns of attendance and rely on teaching students as a whole group. There has been little development of alternative forms of learning. Few courses, except for management NVQs, are offered in a modular form or can be studied at home with regular tutorial support. Some courses are designed to encourage women to return to study and are timetabled to fit in with childcare arrangements. Students who find difficulty in attending regularly can maintain contact by post, telephone and fax.

12 The college's extensive community education programme in 1996-97, which is partly funded through the LEA, has attracted over 6,000 enrolments, an increase of over 1,000 from the previous year. Of this total, 346 are enrolled on courses funded by the FEFC. The programme is run in 24 outreach centres in addition to the college premises. For young

people the programme includes dance, computing, and a baby-sitting course for teenagers at a local secondary school. The Cedar Club, for those over 50 years of age, offers classes in crafts, French and social activities. The broad languages programme includes opportunities to study Arabic and Japanese. The college music school attracts students from a wide catchment area and offers theory lessons and a comprehensive range of instrumental tuition. The college offers a licentiate diploma course for specialist music teachers, in association with Trinity College of Music (London).

13 Marketing activities in the college are not fully effective. Labour market information is insufficiently analysed. Many staff are unaware of the key features of their local labour market, patterns of growth in local industries or changing industrial practices. Information on courses available in the college is regularly sent to the parents of year 11 students and employers. Promotional activity includes open days, press releases, attendance at carnivals, and bus, radio and press advertising. Faculties are responsible for course publicity and promotion but courses are not promoted consistently across the college. Although individual course leaflets are generally informative, their quality is variable. Some are visually unappealing and not focused on the needs of the particular students for whom they are designed.

14 College links with employers vary in their effectiveness. There are productive employers' consultative panels in science and engineering, information technology, and health and community care, but other panels have only recently been established. There is no overall strategy or system for developing and maintaining links with local employers. There is a small amount of full-cost work for employers which includes training in shorthand, problem solving and foreign languages. The college has used TEC funding to establish a Small Firms Centre where companies can access video and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) training resources. As part of the services offered by Business Link, the college also runs one-day seminars in customer care and presentation skills. The college has overlooked some opportunities to develop closer links with employers, for example in engineering.

15 The college has developed good relationships with Cambridgeshire TEC. Successful training programmes operate through the TEC's youth credit and modern apprenticeship schemes. Training is offered in motor vehicle studies, business administration, hairdressing and accounts. The college secures employment for all its TEC-funded trainees. There are effective links with the Huntingdon Chamber of Commerce. The college produces and prints its newsletter and has started to host Chamber meetings.

16 The development of effective collaborative links with local secondary schools has been limited owing to the highly competitive nature of post-16 education in the area. Wherever possible, the college responds to

invitations to careers events in local schools and is a member of groups set up by the secondary schools in the Huntingdon area for post-16 education in information technology and GNVQs. There are few curriculum initiatives between the college and schools. As part of the community education programme, the college provides tutors for a family literacy project in a local junior school. Within the college there is no overall co-ordination of school links.

17 The college makes clear its commitment to equal opportunities on all publicity material. It makes provision for speakers of other languages and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, there has been little active promotion of the college's equal opportunities policy. For example, there are no staff-development activities or an action plan to help implement the policy. Other than on care courses, there are few curriculum activities at course level to raise student awareness of equal opportunities issues.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 Members of the corporation are well qualified and experienced. The board comprises 12 independent members, the TEC nominee, two co-opted members, two staff and the principal. Many of the governors hold senior positions in local or national organisations, and collectively have professional expertise in accountancy, the law, property surveying and management. Appropriate induction and training is arranged for new members. Members have recently established a statement of purpose and register of members' interests. They are clear about their role and responsibilities.

19 Much of the corporation's business is handled effectively. Comprehensive papers are provided for meetings and well-written minutes are taken. The corporation uses a wide range of committees to carry out its more detailed work; these committees have clear terms of reference. Some corporation members are closely involved with the college curriculum through their membership of employer consultative committees. Members regularly attend college events. The corporation has reviewed only a few aspects of its own performance. It has not set standards by which it can judge the effectiveness of its committee work. Most committees keep track of the college's progress in meeting strategic objectives and report effectively to the corporation. Although employer consultative committees are required to assess students' achievements, not all programme areas have such committees. Lines of reporting on students' achievements are not fully effective. Neither the programme development committee nor the full corporation has undertaken a detailed analysis of trends in students' achievements and examination results for 1995-96. The search committee does not have well-developed criteria for search activities. All committees, except audit, are attended by the clerk to the corporation, the principal, and the chairman.

20 The strategic plan lacks priorities for action and a comprehensive set of targets against which the success of the college can be judged. The college has achieved and exceeded unit targets for growth. The business support services have no established performance targets. Operating statements for departments and directorates have detailed objectives which are incorporated into a performance plan. Although the statements have target dates, the extent to which some objectives are met cannot be easily measured. There are inadequate formal arrangements to monitor the implementation of policy within programme areas. The links between planning and action at subject, faculty and cross-college levels are not always clear and sometimes lack co-ordination.

21 The college has well-developed policies in some areas. The health and safety policy is supported by comprehensive procedures. Staff development and induction have increased staff awareness of safety issues and they have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Expert practical advice is provided by a health and safety officer. Appropriate risk assessments have been undertaken.

22 Some elements of a new management structure are still incomplete. Management responsibilities are unevenly distributed amongst staff. Some elements of the line-management and reporting structures lack clarity. Responsibilities within the structure, for example the roles of senior postholders in managing quality assurance and marketing, are not clearly understood by all staff. The central management group comprises the principal, three directors, three heads of faculty, the director of the school of music and the community education manager. The director of finance and resources is clerk to the corporation. There are clear job descriptions for each member of the management team.

23 Courses are generally well organised and administered. Many aspects of cross-college provision, such as GNVQ information technology courses and access courses, are effectively co-ordinated. There are established procedures for the development of new courses but not all programme area co-ordinators understand the requirement in their role to review new courses. The process involves extensive consultation at several levels. In spite of this, staff involved in the development of new courses do not draw sufficiently on existing good practice.

24 Communication at most levels in the college is effective and staff feel well informed. Course and cross-college teams work closely together. The management team meets weekly. Management team meetings have clear agendas and notes of outcomes are produced but there is no record of action taken from one meeting to the next. The directorate does not meet as a team; directors have individual meetings with the principal. Detailed management memoranda are an important feature of the communications between the principal and his managers. Managers hold weekly meetings with staff to disseminate information but some staff are still unclear about where decisions are made at senior level. In most areas,

part-time staff attend course team meetings. Meetings of the GCE A level co-ordinating team are convened infrequently and poorly attended. A detailed staff handbook produced as an aid to communication was updated in December 1996.

25 The college's management information system is currently unable to provide reliable student data for managers and staff. The information provided cannot be used for internal planning purposes although it can be used to compile satisfactory returns to the FEFC. Programme areas maintain manual records of all aspects of student data, including attendance. This has adversely affected the ability of managers to monitor trends in student numbers and retention. In conjunction with the software providers, the college is making strenuous efforts to increase the availability of information.

26 There is sound monitoring, control and reporting of college finances. Appropriate financial information is provided to the corporation, the management team and budget holders. The college has introduced a number of measures to maintain solvency and clear a continuing deficit. Costs are monitored centrally. Income and expenditure are allocated to cost centres for groups of courses in programme areas and to whole college functions. Resource allocation is clearly understood by staff. Each programme area is allocated a budget for consumable items. Bids are invited for capital items against clearly understood college priorities for capital expenditure. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £19.37 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.97 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 Students have access to comprehensive advice on the range of courses available. One of the directors has overall responsibility for student services. The college prospectus is informative and readily available. Staff participate in careers conventions. The college responds promptly to enquiries and requests for information about courses. The target times between student application and interview are generally met. Course leaders interview prospective full-time students. Students value these interviews. Teachers take great care to register students on appropriate courses.

28 There is a common induction programme for full-time students. This is supplemented by further induction which takes account of the requirements of individual courses. Induction for part-time students is more variable and depends largely on the initiative of individual tutors for its implementation. There is a useful and informative handbook and diary which is valued by students. The part-time student handbook contains relevant information that is easy to understand. Careful and sympathetic guidance is available to individual students who want to change courses.

Systems to accredit students' prior learning are at an early stage of development.

29 Support on mainstream courses for students who need help with basic skills has not been fully effective. Initial screening identified that more than 40 per cent of full-time students needed help with language development and more than 60 per cent with numeracy. Of these, only 15 per cent have taken up the support offered. Although basic skills workshops and classes are available for students throughout their courses, strategies to improve student uptake are not working. Students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including 10 visually impaired part-time students, are well supported by assistants and volunteers. Dyslexic students receive individual, specialist support.

30 The quality of tutorial support is variable. Full-time students have a designated tutor and a timetabled tutorial hour each week. Generally, students' individual progress is effectively monitored. Tutorials are particularly effective on vocational courses where tutorial issues are fully integrated with the programme. The tutorial programme for GCE A level and GCSE classes is unco-ordinated and ineffective. The college has no overall system for evaluating the effectiveness of tutorial provision. There is no college system for recording students' acquisition of key skills. Tutorial arrangements for part-time students are usually informal.

31 Staff do not systematically check class attendance and follow up students' absence. Strategies for dealing with persistent absentees are applied inconsistently by staff and procedures are too slow to be effective. The college is researching the relationship between the attendance of students and their retention on courses.

32 The student services unit provides sound advice on transport issues, grants and financial matters. There is a well-established confidential counselling service staffed by professionally trained counsellors. A 52 place nursery at Huntingdon which caters for about 100 children a week, and 10 places at St Neots meet the childcare needs of most students. Children of students are given priority. No fees are paid by students for approximately 25 per cent of the places. There is a college shop and an active student union branch.

33 There is no overall co-ordination and evaluation of careers advice, guidance and education. Cambridge Careers Service advisers are available in the college for two days each week. College library staff run the careers section of the library and arrange students' interviews with careers advisers. Interviews provide guidance on employment and applications to higher education. Tutors and course managers also support students in planning their careers.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

34 Inspectors observed 189 teaching sessions. In 47 per cent of these the strengths outweighed the weaknesses. This is 16 per cent lower than

the average for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme as recorded in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The average attendance in lessons inspected was 68 per cent. This is below the national average of 76 per cent for all colleges given in the same report. In some engineering and English language classes more than 45 per cent of students were absent. The average number of students in classes inspected was eight. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	0	12	13	2	0	27
GCSE	2	4	8	1	0	15
GNVQ	4	12	16	7	1	40
NVQ	0	2	2	2	0	6
Access to higher education	4	8	6	2	0	20
Basic education	1	4	10	2	0	17
Other	12	24	25	3	0	64
Total	23	66	80	19	1	189

35 In science, lessons were generally well planned. In several lessons teaching materials were used imaginatively to encourage students to analyse topics in depth. In a lesson on an animal care course, adult returners and school-leavers were encouraged to develop their ability to argue a case through the exploration of differing views on animal welfare issues. Practical work was well organised and managed. Laboratory overalls and goggles were available for students and careful attention was paid to safe working. In some lessons, teachers made ineffective use of overhead transparencies. Teachers did not set tasks that would help students to develop their wordprocessing skills. Students did not use computers to log or process results obtained from practical experiments.

36 In mathematics, teachers questioned students carefully to promote their learning and test their understanding. They encouraged students to become confident in handling numbers and ensured that appropriate materials were used for numeracy work. Some teachers made effective use of visual aids. In marking students' work, some teachers made careful comments to help students improve their performance; in some instances, however, the feedback was too brief to be helpful. Some teachers did not check that students completed set homework. In computing lessons, teachers provided good learning materials and supported students well when they were working on their own. On the BTEC computer science course, students developed programming design and development skills but teachers paid insufficient attention to ensuring that they acquired elementary analytical and design skills. The assessment of students' work

in projects and assignments was not always effectively managed. For example, on one GNVQ intermediate course the teacher had failed to follow up students who had not handed in their coursework.

37 In engineering, some schemes of work lacked clear aims and objectives. Many lessons were well planned. For example, in one lesson the teacher used actual engineering components and circuits to illustrate basic principles. In another, the teacher explained clearly the theory of distance-time graphs and then assessed students' understanding of the topic through a series of questions. Some teachers, however, failed to check that students understood the tasks set and did not monitor their progress.

38 In business studies, teachers generally checked that learning was taking place, set assessments at an appropriate level, and conscientiously marked students' work and returned it in good time. Some teachers did not take sufficient account of the needs of students of different ability. In a significant proportion of lessons, teachers provided work which was insufficiently challenging and lacked variety. Some teaching of key skills was unimaginative and failed to interest the students. In secretarial studies, teachers kept accurate records and discussed with students the progress they were making. Work experience was effectively organised and students were well supported by employers. However, most teachers failed to use students' work experiences as source material for teaching. The GNVQ course did not give students sufficient insight into the practice and ethics of business.

39 On leisure and tourism courses, teachers made good use of the information students obtained from educational visits. They also developed a variety of assignments linked to students' work experience and residential and outdoor activities which were appropriate to the level of the courses. Teachers carefully monitored students' progress. Lesson plans were of variable quality and the objectives of sessions were not always shared with students. In a few lessons, the pace of work was too slow and the content made insufficient demands on the students. On some occasions, teachers used questioning methods which were inappropriate for assessing whether students had understood the subject. In some lessons, teachers used poor-quality overhead transparencies which were difficult to read. In a minority of sessions, classroom management was poor and teachers allowed unacceptable behaviour from some students which adversely affected the learning.

40 In health and community care, courses were well planned. In one lesson, a teacher moved deftly between theoretical explanation and practical demonstration and then checked that students had understood both aspects of the work. In another lesson, a teacher promoted successful note taking through the imaginative use of an overhead projector and skilful questioning of students. Some teachers did not vary their teaching methods and gave insufficient opportunities for students to participate in group learning activities. Teachers do not routinely share good practice.

41 Teachers in art and design took particular care in planning courses to offer support to students with low levels of prior achievement. They planned for a wide range of differentiated learning needs even when working with small groups. Photography courses offered relevant training experience which was broadened by students' participation in an imaginative programme of trips and European visits. In some sessions, students were not encouraged to experiment and explore their visual ideas. In many sessions, students were insufficiently challenged by the tasks set and spent too long on one activity. On GNVQ courses, schemes of work were clearly presented but they paid too little attention to the need to ensure that students practised drawing, engaged in visual research and took part in critiques and debate. Teachers provided insufficient opportunities for students to work in groups.

42 In humanities, teachers developed good working relationships with students which promoted their learning. They encouraged students to use primary source materials to develop their research skills. In some lessons, teachers failed to encourage students to make notes of key points and, generally, they failed to monitor the quality of students' note taking. Teachers did not always check students' understanding of topics. Handouts varied in quality. On access programmes, the teaching was well organised and, in some lessons, teachers stimulated oral work of good quality and careful textual analysis. In GCE A level literature, teachers encouraged students to acquire a detailed knowledge of texts and a fluent use of direct quotation. In social studies, teaching was pitched at an appropriate level. Some teachers, however, did not vary their methods and a few relied too heavily on lecturing, making little use of visual aids. Schemes of work made little reference to the development of specific subject skills, or to assessment strategies. English teachers worked well together to ensure that work for GCSE and for English as a foreign language (EFL) was marked consistently. Students' written work was marked particularly thoroughly in GCE A level English literature.

43 Courses for basic skills and for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) were well planned. Teachers kept good records of the work completed. Valuable feedback was given to students about their work experience on the vocational access certificate course. Teaching was particularly good in basic skills groups and in study skills sessions. In the better lessons teachers made effective use of students' experience and explained topics clearly. They set tasks that challenged the students and they expected work of a high standard. Some teaching, however, was dull and unimaginative, and failed to stimulate students. In one lesson the teacher had not checked that the information given on the board was consistent with that on the worksheet and this resulted in considerable confusion. For students with learning difficulties there were no individual learning programmes and initial assessment was undeveloped. Marking of students' work was of variable quality and teachers gave insufficient guidance to students on how they should improve their work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

44 In most sessions, students are well motivated and enjoy their studies. The quality of coursework varies considerably but generally meets the standards required by awarding bodies. Students' assessed work in computing is well presented and science students' projects demonstrate appropriate knowledge. Animal welfare and leisure and tourism students' portfolios are well organised and presented. The quality of adult learners' written work is variable but there are many examples of high-quality work. There is a high standard of GCSE English language coursework. The standard of mathematics work is inconsistent and, in some cases, presentation is weak.

45 Students on most courses achieve appropriate standards in their practical work. Practical work in sciences is of a good standard and students are acquiring the necessary technical skills. During a residential part of their course, GNVQ leisure and tourism students learned the use of co-ordinates to plan and carry out a night walk. Photography and print making students use competent technical skills for creative work but art and design students lack the opportunity to develop their drawing skills.

46 There was considerable variation in the quality of key skills practised by students. Most students made insufficient use of information technology except on courses which include substantial amounts of computing as part of the curriculum. Students' oral work on business studies, GCE A level and GCSE courses varied in quality. In mathematics, animal welfare, access to higher education and science classes, students were generally confident and willing and able to respond to questions effectively. Students aged 16 to 19 demonstrated poor skills in reading aloud and had difficulty with straightforward vocabulary on humanities courses. Students in mathematics and art and design had not developed their ability to work co-operatively in groups sufficiently well. Some leisure and tourism students lacked self-discipline, and were unable to work on their own. Mathematics students kept well-organised note files which comprehensively covered the syllabus. Some art and design students had no knowledge of basic colour theory. Some humanities students lacked the supporting knowledge and vocabulary necessary for understanding key texts. Students' files in social studies courses contained no evidence of independent reading and their work showed a weak grasp of research methods and evaluative skills.

47 In 1996, 40 per cent of the 47 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on the intermediate vocational courses included in the performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) were successful. This places the college in the bottom third of the sector on this performance measure. According to college statistics, students took a total of 2,330 examinations during their final year of study in 1995-96 and 1,506 were successful; an overall pass rate of 65 per cent. Students' achievements on foundation and intermediate

vocational programmes are mixed. Pass rates on motor vehicle studies, a few leisure and tourism courses and some part-time computer courses are high. In 1994 and 1995, pass rates in GNVQ leisure and tourism at intermediate level were good, but in 1996 they were poor. There are high pass rates in computer literacy and information technology courses but on other business studies courses, especially in skill areas such as shorthand and audio-typewriting, results are well below the national average. Students' achievements on mechanical and electrical engineering courses are below national averages. Results on the full-time, two-year computing course are poor; only 45 per cent of students successfully completed their course.

48 In 1996, 69 per cent of the 67 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on advanced vocational courses included in the DfEE performance tables were successful. This places the college in the bottom third of the table of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Pass rates on some courses, for example on BTEC social care, counselling, and GNVQ art and design courses at advanced level, were above the national average. Pass rates on animal welfare courses, and especially on the full-time and part-time veterinary national certificate courses, were well above the national average. Results on the advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism course were below the national average.

49 The 76 students, aged 16 to 18, who entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 2.6 points per subject entry. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector based on the data in the 1996 performance tables published by the DfEE. In the previous year, the corresponding point score was 3.0 points per subject entry. GCE A level results for students aged 16 to 18 at grades C or above are poor and below national averages in most subjects. In 1996, 66 per cent of the students entered for the examination passed and 18 per cent achieved grades C or above. This compares with national averages of 74 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively, for further education sector colleges. Examination results are generally poor in mathematics, science and computing. Results in GCE A level photography are higher than the national average but in GCE A level art they are significantly lower. In GCE A level English literature, psychology and sociology pass rates in 1996 were well below the national average. The results for students on a one-year GCSE programme are well below national averages. Of the 36 students who enrolled for the full-time GCSE programme, 16 completed the course in 1996. Of these, only one student gained three grades C or above. Pass rates were above the national average in six subjects and below in 13 subjects.

50 There is a marked difference between the results achieved by students aged 16 to 19 and those over 19 years of age. In 1996, of the students aged over 19 entered for GCE A levels, 74 per cent passed and 40 per cent achieved grades C or above. This compares with national averages of

64 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively, for further education sector colleges. The results for adult students in English literature GCE A level were excellent, 70 per cent achieving grades C or above. Examination pass rates on EFL courses have risen by 25 per cent over the last year. There is considerable variation in the rates of successful completion on access to higher education courses. Under 50 per cent of students successfully completed access to nursing courses in 1996, compared with over 80 per cent in 1995. There are good results on management programmes at levels 4 and 5 with 75 per cent pass rates in 1996.

51 Individual students have achieved high levels of success in a number of areas. In the school of music, a 16 year old student won the first prize in a national newspaper's open competition for musical arrangement and three students reached the televised finals of the BBC's young musician of the year competition. Several students who came to the college with low levels of previous achievement have had outstanding successes. One such student scored one of the top five marks in a GCE A level biology examination out of over 6,000 entrants. Another student, after a series of initial failures, has acquired a degree in sports studies. A student on a woodcarving course was selected to receive a National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) adult learners award.

52 There are good retention rates of over 90 per cent in provision for students with learning difficulties and for those with basic skills needs. Most students achieve their primary learning goal and at least one nationally recognised qualification. One hundred per cent of those who completed basic skills or ESOL programmes achieved their primary learning goal. Progression to open or sheltered employment for students with learning difficulties is good. Twelve students from the separate specialist course progressed to sheltered work, other work or training credit provision. Although numbers going to open employment and sheltered employment have decreased from 34 per cent to 25 per cent since 1994, the proportion is still relatively high.

53 The college has an overall retention rate of 88 per cent, an improvement on 1993-94, when the overall retention rate was below 80 per cent. However, retention rates vary significantly between courses. On a few courses, for example management and animal welfare, most students regularly complete their studies. However, a significant number of students do not return for the second year of health and community care courses. Withdrawals are particularly high from humanities courses. For example, in psychology up to 40 per cent of students withdrew from courses in 1995-96. There are low retention rates on GCSE mathematics, full-time secretarial and BTEC advanced leisure studies courses.

54 Overall, percentages of students who progress to higher education are low. Figures for 1994-95 show that 16 per cent progressed to higher education out of a total of 312 completing advanced level qualifications. This represents an increase of about 25 per cent on the 39 students who

progressed to higher education in 1993-94. Most students from the 1994-96 GNVQ advanced group in art and design progressed to degree or higher national diploma courses. However, only 20 per cent of leisure and tourism students progress to higher education. Although the college collects data on student destinations, there is no aggregation of statistics and little evidence of systematic analysis. Destination data are not available across the college for students finishing their studies in 1996. Partial returns made by the college showed that destinations were unknown for 60 per cent of leavers.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

55 There is an overall policy for quality assurance but the system is not working effectively in several parts of the college and is not producing significant improvements in services. Procedures are applied differently in various sections of the college. For example, some managers have not produced action plans following an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in their sections. There is a lack of detailed and robust analysis of results and findings in many review documents. A significant amount of information is collected but some is not analysed in time for it to have any impact. The college expresses a formal commitment to improve quality assurance and the strategic plan for 1996-97 makes reference to a plan for managing quality, incorporating relevant policies, systems and procedures and the review of their application. There is substantial documentation on different aspects of quality assurance procedures and these are described in policy manuals, held by college managers, and handbooks which contain summaries for staff and students. There are manuals for key college services such as financial regulations and health and safety. Language and terminology are not used consistently and this causes some confusion amongst staff.

56 Although responsibility for the management of quality assurance is vested in senior managers there are some weaknesses in the structure for the management and co-ordination of quality assurance. The director of programmes has overall responsibility for co-ordinating course monitoring and review, and the director of staffing has responsibility for staff development. The three heads of faculty, the community education manager, and the director of the school of music have responsibility for course review and quality assurance in their areas. Programme co-ordinators and course leaders report to them on quality assurance issues. It is intended that all staff at all levels of the organisation have a concern for quality but this is not apparent in some areas. Not all teachers have a clear understanding of where responsibilities for quality assurance lie.

57 Course review and evaluation is not fully effective. Programme leaders are required to consult with staff and students at course review meetings and to produce an annual written report. Course control files are intended to be monitored by the director of programmes. To improve

the process, the college has recently introduced an interim review at the end of the first term followed by action planning in response to the review's findings. Reports include statistical information on students' enrolments, achievements and retention and comments from students and staff on the course. Outcomes from course reviews vary. A few have led to improvements to course delivery, for example, through changes to timetabling. Generally, the course review process is underdeveloped in many subject areas and reports lack rigorous analysis. For example, the course review for motor vehicle studies provides no clear picture of areas of success and failure. There has been no systematic review of GCSE and GCE A level provision. The academic board receives summaries of course reviews but does not systematically monitor reports and their action plans. Although the views of students on college facilities have been collected for a number of years, their observations about courses have not been analysed systematically. A new computer-based survey of students' views is designed to supplement information gained from students' contributions at course review meetings.

58 There is little evidence of improved student achievement through college quality assurance systems. Targets for retention and students' achievements have recently been set but the process of monitoring the progress made against targets is underdeveloped. There is some work in progress to analyse students' achievements in relation to their previous attainments at GCE A level.

59 The college's self-assessment report has been produced in accordance with the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is insufficiently self-critical and does not explicitly identify strengths and weaknesses as a basis for strategic planning and continuous quality improvement. The college self-assessment report is linked to those produced by programme areas and faculties. Annual self-assessment reports, produced by programme leaders, are largely descriptive and make little use of quantitative data to justify their conclusions.

60 The college charter is well produced, concise, and widely distributed. It contains a number of specified commitments concerning the recruitment and induction of students and aspects of their educational experience. The extent to which standards set out in the charter are achieved is not monitored systematically in all cases. The charter describes the complaints procedure. Complaints are handled by several staff who carry through action on individual problems, but the process is not centrally co-ordinated and there is no systematic analysis of complaints received.

61 The college has effective systems for ensuring that internal assessment of vocational courses, especially GNVQ programmes, is consistent. These are being extended to other vocational provision. The internal verification co-ordinator assists in the standardisation of procedures and spreads good practice across the college. There are sound quality assurance arrangements for the access to higher education

provision and for the college's own higher education courses in collaboration with Anglia Polytechnic University. Effective quality assurance procedures have been developed with off-site collaborative providers, for example the College of Animal Welfare, and there is good practice in monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the provision, including the systematic observation of teaching.

62 There are clear policies for the appraisal of staff. Although new teachers are observed during their probationary period, classroom observation is not a compulsory element of the appraisal process for established teachers. There are examples of direct observation of teaching and feedback to teachers in ESOL and basic skills, where the college has been awarded the Basic Skills Agency quality mark. Good practice from this area is not widely disseminated. Generally, insufficient attention is given to evaluating teaching and learning. Many areas of the curriculum do not apply systematically the procedures that exist for the evaluation of this aspect of the provision.

63 The college does not regularly review and evaluate staff-development activities. The director of staffing is responsible for staff development. The staff-development committee has not met in the present academic year. Staff are able to follow most training programmes that they request. Although individual priorities are clearly identified through appraisal, no system exists to ensure that they fit in with the college's strategic and operational aims. More recently, some attention has been given to the strategic planning of staff development and the prioritisation of college needs. Staff are now required to complete an evaluation form when they participate in external events. A training and development plan has been devised in collaboration with the TEC which includes a commitment to seek the Investor in People award in 1997. The plan has been agreed by the corporation and managers but has not yet been discussed with other staff. The overall planning of staff development at faculty and course programme level is not well co-ordinated. Individual staff are insufficiently aware of college priorities for staff development. The college has committed 0.78 per cent of its budget to staff development in the current year.

RESOURCES

Staffing

64 Most teachers are well qualified for the work they undertake. Almost 75 per cent of full-time and part-time staff are graduates and 65 per cent have a teaching qualification. Approximately 90 per cent of full-time staff have assessor and verifier awards to support NVQ and GNVQ courses. In some areas, such as computing and leisure and tourism, staff have insufficient commercial experience. Basic education staff have few specialist qualifications for teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Volunteer workers in the basic skills and ESOL classes are a valuable resource and all have an initial specialist qualification.

65 Careful checks are carried out to monitor teachers' workloads. Where necessary, timetables are adjusted to make the best use of staff. The student to staff ratio has steadily increased from 12.5:1 in 1994 to 13.2:1 in 1996. In most curriculum areas, there is an appropriate balance of part-time and full-time staff to cover the range of skills and expertise required. There is adequate faculty administrative and technician support in most areas. However, in computing there is insufficient technical support for staff and students. There are well-documented procedures for the recruitment of staff. The college does not have a personnel department and the director of staffing is responsible for all aspects of staff employment.

66 There are comprehensive arrangements for the induction of newly appointed staff. Teaching staff are allocated a mentor who provides help and guidance. Their teaching is observed and helpful feedback is given. Part-time staff are invited to an induction evening before the start of the academic year. All staff are issued with a handbook which acts as a useful reference document. New staff have regular progress reviews with their mentor, line manager and the director of staffing. Part-time teaching staff are allocated a named individual in the college as a first point of contact for support. There is good initial internal training through the provision of the further and adult education teachers certificate course.

Equipment/learning resources

67 In most curriculum areas there is an adequate range of specialist equipment to support learning. Most rooms have blinds and overhead projector screens. The secretarial training office provides a useful, realistic work environment. There is a good range of sports equipment, including kayaks and mountain bikes. In art and design, the specialist areas for ceramics and printmaking, although small, are well equipped. Resources for photography include a good level of traditional photographic equipment. Much of the engineering equipment is old, especially in the machine tool workshop where there is a lack of modern computer numerically controlled machines. For motor vehicle studies there is no garage reception area. There is no travel office for leisure and tourism students.

68 The library and resource area provides a pleasant, spacious environment with good natural lighting. It is an attractive and well-managed facility. Library staff have good links with teachers. Helpful student and staff user guides help promote library services. Surveys of users' views indicate a 90 per cent satisfaction rate. There are 120 study places, including quiet and silent study rooms. Students have good access to careers information, including a selection of computerised careers packages. There are sufficient books and periodicals to support most curriculum areas but there is a shortage of books for travel and tourism. There are a number of out-of-date texts for social sciences. There is an ample stock of CD-ROM disks, audio-visual equipment and over 120 videos.

Staffing levels in the library are low; less than half the number recommended by the Library Association. The St Neots site does not have any library facilities.

69 Students have good access to approximately 160 up-to-date computers with modern software. There has been substantial expenditure to upgrade equipment over the last two years and a clear strategy for future improvements. There are insufficient high-quality printers. Students have controlled access to the Internet. Art and design students have no access to specialist computer hardware and software. There are insufficient computers with specialist software dedicated for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Accommodation

70 The buildings on the main site at Huntingdon were constructed between 1964 and 1972. The library and the main classroom block were built to a high specification. Approximately 15 per cent of the teaching space on the main site is in temporary huts for which planning permission expires in 1998. The site at St Neots was built as a technical college in the 1950s. Both sites are in urban areas and have good parking facilities. Many buildings on the main site, especially the huts, are shabby. As part of a five-year maintenance plan some work has been done to improve the internal appearance of the college. The reception area has been remodelled to make a more attractive entrance for visitors but the main entrance used by students presents a poor impression of the college. The location of student services is not prominently signposted.

71 Most teaching rooms are allocated to faculties and some are inappropriately used. There is no co-ordinated allocation of accommodation for teaching to improve room utilisation. A survey, carried out in 1996, shows that only 30 per cent of the available space at St Neots and 60 per cent on the main site at Huntingdon is used. Much of the teaching that takes place in huted accommodation could be relocated to the main building. On the Huntingdon site, there is no access for wheelchair users above ground-floor level and students with restricted mobility are unable to use the specialist photography and secretarial facilities. The chair lift is not suitable for some wheelchairs. The provision of ramps means that external access around the site and to the huts is generally good. There is good access to all of the St Neots site. The survey of access facilities, carried out in 1993, has not been updated. There are no clear options for the future development of the college property in the accommodation strategy.

72 At the Huntingdon site, there is wide variation in the quality of teaching accommodation. Some computing rooms have been upgraded but not all have appropriate chairs. Rooms generally have a stark appearance and are untidy; few have stimulating visual displays. Furnishings in many rooms are extremely basic and some huts provide an

unsuitable environment for teaching and learning. In some corridors there are unsightly, broken, student lockers. There is no routine monitoring of the standards set for cleaning services and some areas are dirty. Some rooms have inadequate heating and ventilation systems. Most rooms at St Neots have been refurbished and provide a pleasant learning environment.

73 Social and recreational facilities for students are underdeveloped. Refectory facilities are too small for the number of students using them. Because of the lack of a common room, the refectory doubles as a communal meeting area. A hut designated for use as an adult student common room is seldom used. A large hall, also used for examinations, is well used by students for recreational games at lunchtime. There are tennis courts and a playing field.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The main strengths of the college are:

- the responsive programme of community education
- the broad range of courses at intermediate and advanced level
- the efficient student recruitment procedures and effective initial guidance
- an experienced and well-qualified corporation
- effective course organisation and administration
- the provision for childcare
- the well-qualified staff
- some good achievements by students over 19 years of age
- the broad range of provision for students from groups which have not usually been involved in further education.

75 In order to build on its strengths the college should address:

- the limited range of programmes at foundation level and restricted progression opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the underdeveloped marketing strategy
- the limited effectiveness of basic skills support for mainstream students
- the variable quality of tutorial support
- underdeveloped strategic planning and setting of clear targets
- the weaknesses in the management structure
- the further development of its quality assurance procedures
- the limited monitoring and review of students' achievements and teaching and learning

-
- the inconsistent standards in teaching
 - the inefficient use and poor quality of some accommodation
 - some poor achievements by students aged 16 to 19
 - the poor levels of retention and attendance in some areas.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

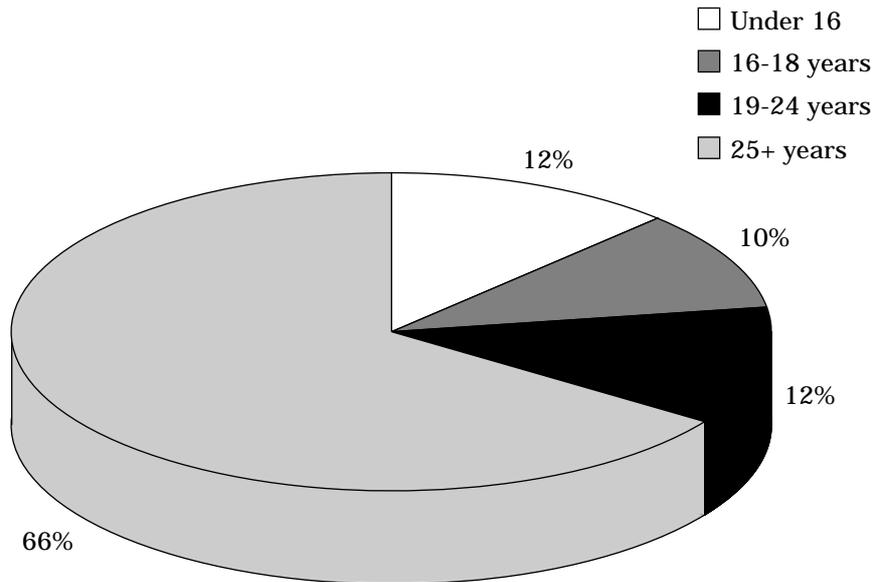
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 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

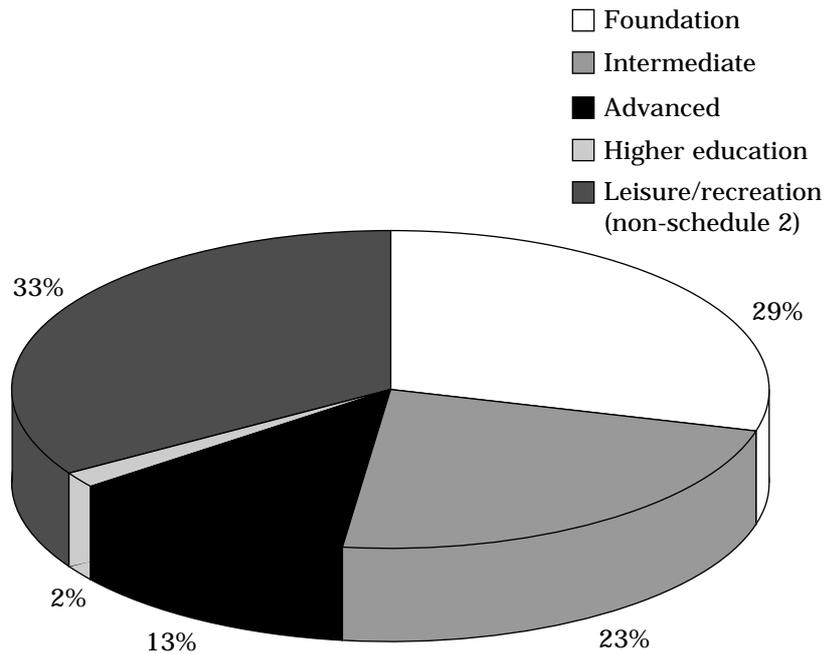
**Huntingdonshire Regional College: percentage student numbers by age
(as at November 1996)**



Student numbers: 8,971

Figure 2

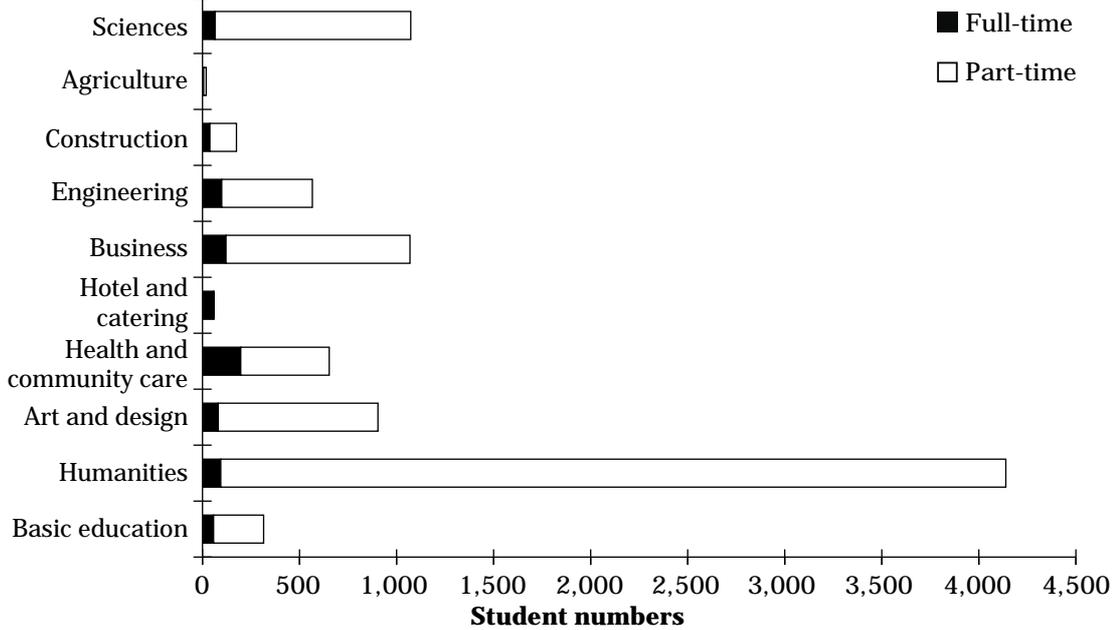
**Huntingdonshire Regional College: percentage student numbers by level of study
(as at November 1996)**



Student numbers: 8,971

Figure 3

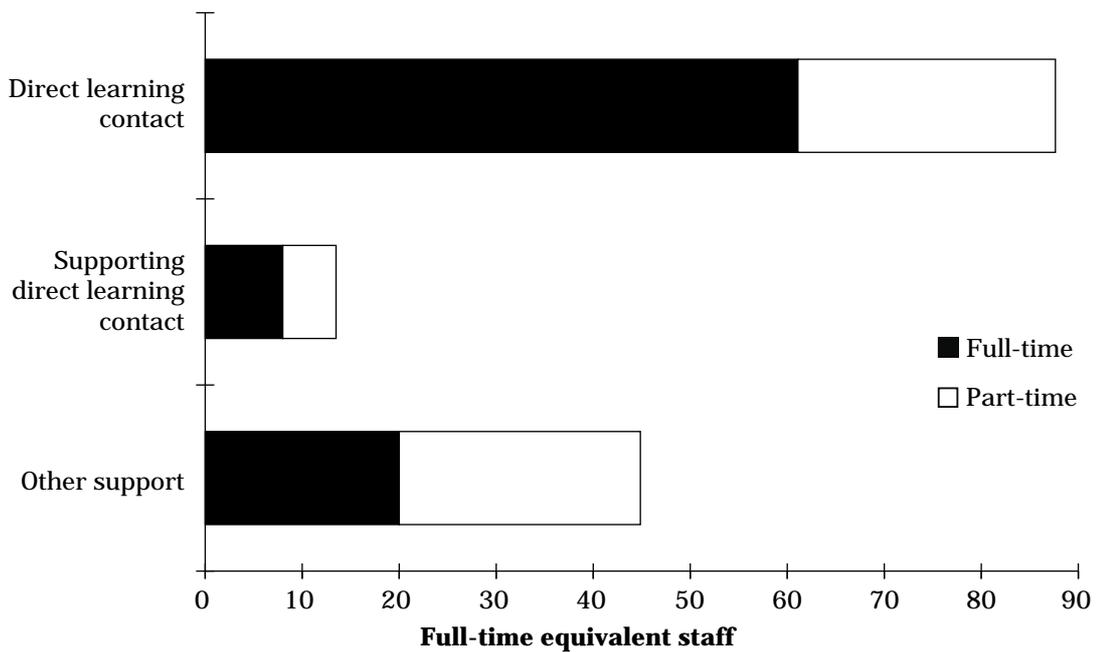
Huntingdonshire Regional College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 8,971

Figure 4

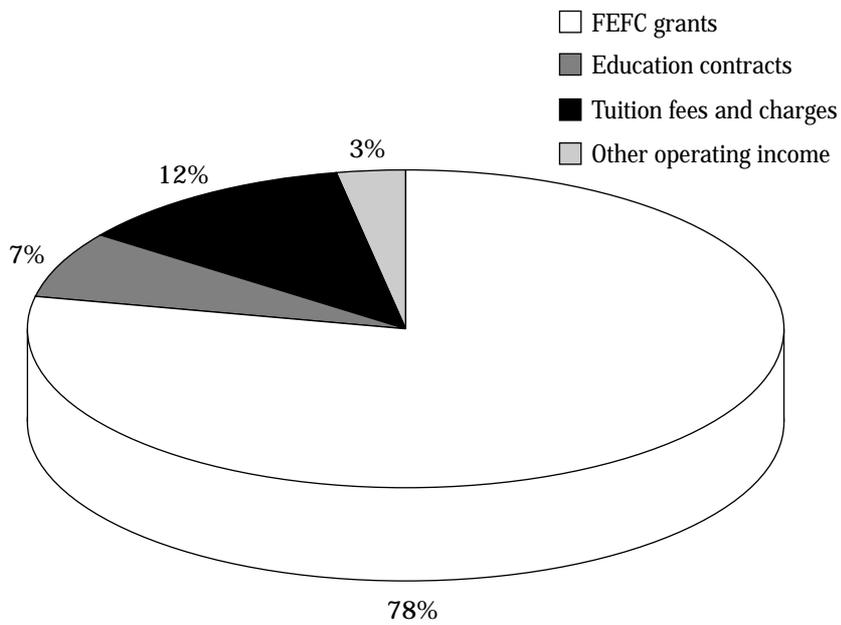
Huntingdonshire Regional College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 146

Figure 5

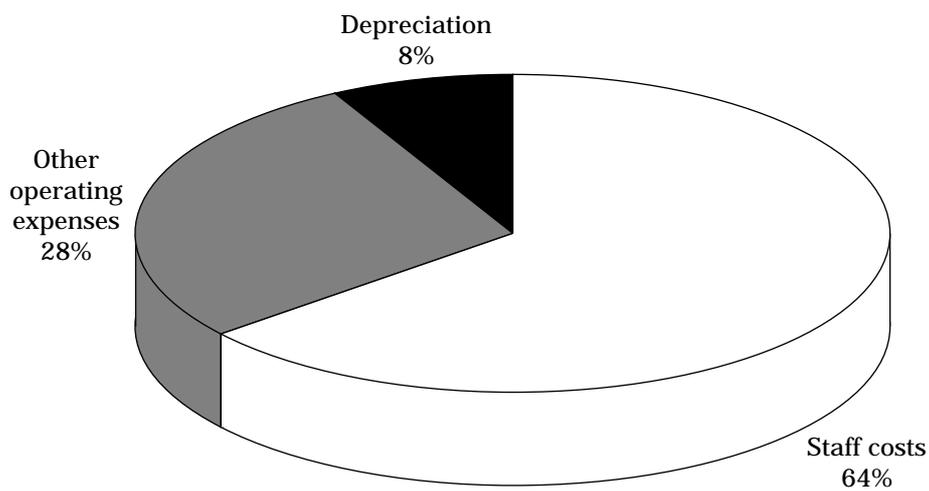
Huntingdonshire Regional College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £4,725,000

Figure 6

Huntingdonshire Regional College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £4,975,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
October 1997