

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Ludlow College

August 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 103/95

LUDLOW COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected September 1994 - May 1995

Summary

Ludlow College is a major provider of post-16 education in South Shropshire. It offers, for its size, an unusually wide range of courses to meet the needs of most age groups in the community. The college's strengths include a supportive governing body, an effective guidance system for students and well-qualified and experienced staff. Relationships with partner schools, employers and community organisations are close. Well managed and good quality staff development ensures that staff remain abreast of curricular developments. Examination results at GCE A level are generally good and students' achievements in vocational courses are high. The programme of sporting and cultural activities is a distinctive feature of college life. The many listed buildings in which the college is housed have been carefully maintained. Information technology and other learning resources are mostly satisfactory. Some teaching groups are small and there is some inefficient staff deployment. The management information system is inadequate fully to support decisions. The college should ensure more consistent implementation of policies; consider the value of establishing an academic board; establish staff-appraisal; implement fully its quality assurance policy and improve standards of work in a few areas.

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

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

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|--|--------------|---|--------------|
| Science | 3 | Art and design | 2 |
| Mathematics and information technology | 2 | | |
| Business studies | 2 | English and modern languages | 2 |
| | | Other humanities | 2 |
| Leisure and tourism | 2 | Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities | 3 |

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INTRODUCTION

1 The college was inspected between September 1994 and May 1995. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the autumn term, specialist subject areas in September and November 1994 and February and April 1995. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in May 1995. In all, 15 inspectors spent a total of 63 days in the college. They inspected 110 classes and scrutinised a representative sample of students' work. Meetings were held with governors, college staff, students, local employers, parents, teachers from local schools, representatives from local community organisations and a representative from the Shropshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Ludlow College developed from the boys' grammar school which existed in the town before 1200 and which became a non-denominational voluntary-aided sixth form college in 1977. With the exception of Bishops Castle Community College, 16 miles to the west, Ludlow College is now the major provider of post-16 education in South Shropshire. It also serves adjoining areas of Powys, and Hereford and Worcester.

3 Shropshire is a large, sparsely populated county which is mostly rural. The average age of the population is rising, especially in the rural areas and it is anticipated that this trend will continue. In South Shropshire 24 per cent of the population is over 65. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic backgrounds is very small. Throughout the rural area, decisions about education are strongly influenced by the availability of transport.

4 Compared with other districts in the West Midlands region, the South Shropshire economy is narrowly based and dependent upon agriculture, a small number of large firms and a large number of relatively small firms. Within the last year three major firms have announced significant job losses. Unemployment in South Shropshire is 10.1 per cent compared with 6.7 per cent in Shrewsbury and 7.9 per cent for Shropshire as a whole.

5 On 1 November 1994, the college had 1,646 enrolments, of which 515 were full time. Enrolments of full-time students have increased steadily since the college was formed. This year, for the first time, there was a downturn. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. There are 40 full-time teaching staff and the full-time equivalent of 14.5 part-time staff. There are 15 administrative and technical staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college provides an extensive adult and community education programme with 810 enrolments in September 1994. This was supported by the Shropshire Education Authority until April 1995.

6 The college's senior management team consists of the principal, vice-principal (curriculum), vice-principal (finance) and the estates manager.

Middle management comprises the heads of the five faculties, the heads of the four halls who have pastoral responsibilities, the head of staff development and the head of resources. One senior manager and four middle managers are women.

7 The college has a wide curriculum range for its small size. This is beneficial for students but is proving expensive to maintain. Seventy per cent of full-time students are on General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses. The provision of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects has contracted, but General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) work is expanding. National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB), City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and RSA Examinations Board (RSA) vocational courses are well established. The most recent additions have been 'second chance' courses for adults and courses for students with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's curriculum includes tutorial support and a programme of recreation and additional studies for all students.

8 The college is experiencing increasing competition from larger colleges in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Kidderminster and also from nearby schools with sixth forms. The college aims to build on its traditions and the strengths of its established links with its five partner schools and with the local community. It seeks to provide everyone in the area over 16 years of age with opportunities for education, training and recreation appropriate to their experience, qualifications and needs.

9 The college has many links with local employers, although given the nature of the South Shropshire economy, most of these are small organisations. To balance the restricted range of local employment opportunities, the college has established substantial links with a wide range of major employers in the North East of England. The local TEC supports this initiative and has also assisted with the provision of business-related courses for Shropshire employees.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college is very responsive to the needs of its client groups which include school leavers, adult students who desire flexibility in the pattern of their attendance at college and evening students. It offers 32 GCE A level subjects, and 10 GCSE subjects. A well-considered programme of GNVQs provides intermediate and advanced level study in leisure and tourism, health and social care, and advanced level study in business. It is planned to introduce advanced level in art and design, and hospitality and catering in 1995. In addition there is a two-year NNEB course and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national courses in performing arts and business and finance. A range of courses using computer-aided design is examined by C&G. Bearing in mind its size, facilities and location, the college has a good record of curriculum and course development.

11 The college's outstanding support studies programme offers 36 sporting, cultural or aesthetic activities ranging from judo and Japanese to

squash and motor vehicle maintenance. The GCE A level general studies course is compulsory for those taking any GNVQ or GCE A level. Basic skills tuition in mathematics and English is also offered. The college has recently developed a foundation course of its own design for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The physical education department plays a considerable part in enhancing the life of the college. As well as offering GCE A level physical education and GCSE outdoor education, it is responsible for many additional activities. The college has regular fixtures for a number of team games, and achieves considerable success. College staff have organised one-day local and national events in rugby sevens, cricket, and men's hockey. Despite the emphasis upon competitive success in these sports, the sporting activities also meet the general needs of individuals seeking leisure and fitness.

12 The college has yet to exploit its potential and expertise in developing distance or open learning which could help maintain provision in subjects with low numbers. Facilities and materials to support these modes of study are only offered in English and mathematics. There is considerable potential for further developments of this type.

13 The college has given consideration to the needs of older students and their preferred attendance patterns. For example, in the business studies faculty, the timetable has been modified flexibly to meet the training needs of small businesses. There is an access to higher education course which offers a choice of four subjects plus numeracy and communication. An evening course in playgroup practice was introduced to meet an identified need for qualifications required by the Children's Act. The college is developing a 'second chance' adult basic skills unit which has established links with a number of caring institutions in the area.

14 Local authority funding for adult education courses has recently suffered a major reduction and will probably cease altogether; this is likely to have a significant effect on the provision in Ludlow, with its tradition of adult education and high percentage of retired people. Courses offered this term on a full-cost basis have been subject to an increase in fees of 90 per cent and there has been a reduction in the number of courses offered from 63 in the summer of 1994 to 23 in the summer of 1995. The college is seeking to transform some of this provision into accredited courses which would attract funding from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

15 There is effective liaison with other educational institutions, the TEC and the local community. Local head teachers' perceptions of the college have changed in recent years. The college is no longer considered to have an exclusively academic ethos, but one which welcomes and values students with a wide range of abilities and aspirations. Local schools with whom there is a partnership agreement consider that the college serves them well as their local provider of post-16 education. A senior member of college staff maintains a regular presence in schools and takes part in

recruitment procedures. Specific initiatives include taking dramatic productions out to schools and staff exchanges. Schools have welcomed the workshop experiences offered at the college by the creative arts faculty. There is less evidence of liaison in some subject areas, especially mathematics, physics and chemistry.

16 A joint foreign exchange to Germany is planned with two local schools. The college has a long-established link with a lycée in France and uses the international bureau in Birmingham to arrange other opportunities. Apart from this, however, there is limited European focus to the college curriculum.

17 The college continues to make use of local education authority (LEA) services for payroll administration. To a lesser extent, it also makes use of the advisory service. There is a service level agreement with the reorganised Shropshire Careers Service. Despite competition, there are some valuable links with other further education institutions. With the help of LEA funds, a joint working group has been set up with other adult education providers. A proposed higher education franchised course with Wolverhampton University did not recruit any students.

18 The TEC reports a good working relationship with the college. In 1994-95, it has funded initiatives which include a course for those seeking to return to work, careers advice, staff development and some capital equipment. The college makes use of employment and demographic data from the TEC to supplement information provided by the county planning department.

19 Staff are aware of, and understand, national policies for further education. In striving to achieve national targets for education and training, steps have been taken to develop GNVQ and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses. The development of the college charter has also increased the focus on national issues. The strategic plan commits the college to diversification, open access and increasing participation.

20 Arrangements exist for identifying and monitoring local employers' training needs, but they are largely informal. There is good liaison with local employers through work placements and other working contacts with the business studies faculty. Despite extensive advertising, two advanced level NVQ courses in supervisory management and customer care were not taken up, but the associated open evening produced links with new employers.

21 Community representatives value the presence of the college in the town centre for its contribution to cultural life and commerce as well as for the education it provides. Dramatic productions are performed regularly in the public assembly rooms and are regarded as an important and valued cultural element in the life of the community.

22 Programmes are effectively marketed, although some of the printed materials lack the style and sparkle seen in other college documentation.

Recent reductions in adult education funding have led to a reduction in the size and quality of the 'Adult Learning in Ludlow' leaflet. The college's marketing strategy relies upon close contacts with individuals and organisations and a range of promotional activities including the use of market stalls in neighbouring towns, advertisements on local radio and in newspapers, open evenings and adult learners' days

23 The emphasis given to the equal opportunities policy varies considerably from one subject area to another. No individual is designated with responsibility for implementing or monitoring the policy. The health and social care department is particularly aware of equal opportunity issues and is planning to feature male students in future displays in order to counter present gender imbalances. The main college brochure depicts only 16-19 year olds, despite the significant numbers of adults currently on roll. Gender imbalance is notable in a number of subject areas, particularly GCE A level mathematics and computing which have few female students.

24 The college is aware of the need to improve access for students with restricted mobility, despite the problem posed by its accommodation. The small minority ethnic groups in the area are well represented in the college.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

25 Ludlow College is a designated institution. Its governing body has a majority of foundation governors nominated by organisations which reflect the tradition of the college and its predecessor institutions. There is no effective distinction between trustees and governors, apart from the keeping of separate trust accounts. The college buildings are partly owned by the college corporation and partly by the trustees.

26 The 19 governors comprise seven foundation governors, six co-opted foundation governors, a nominee of the TEC, two parent governors, two staff governors and a student governor. Five of the 19 governors are female. The principal is not a governor since both he and the governors believe that this preserves the distinction between governance and management. The seven foundation governors are nominated by the Palmers Guild, the King Edward VI charity, the Justices of the Peace, Ludlow Town Council, Balliol College Oxford and the Old Ludlovians Association. The foundation governors have co-opted six further governors in accordance with the Instrument and Articles of government. The governing body has taken care to ensure that they have a wide range of relevant specialist experience, in matters such as property, law and finance. The chairman is a district councillor and a former vice-principal of the college.

27 The governing body is effective and is strongly supportive of the college. It has a clear view of its strategic role in the college's development. It has established five principal committees: policy and finance, staff and curriculum, land and buildings, remuneration, and audit. The staff and

curriculum committee regularly involves some governors in consideration of curriculum matters. Committees meet regularly, have agendas which cover relevant issues and are mostly well attended. There has been difficulty in constituting a fully-effective audit committee. It has met only three times since designation and membership did not originally comply with the Council's financial memorandum. The governing body is aware of this and has recently taken action to rectify the matter.

28 The college's financial stability is kept under continuous review both by the finance committee and the main governing body. On two recent occasions the college has faced significant financial problems and the consequent need to reduce staffing. Once aware of the situation, governors work closely with senior management to ensure speedy and effective action.

29 The governing body and the senior management are at one in supporting the college's statement of purpose in the strategic plan. This aims to maintain high academic standards and to offer the widest possible post-16 curriculum in order to increase local participation in education. The strategic plan was developed by senior management. Governors and some middle management attended a day conference which evaluated the plan. Faculties and departments were consulted and invited to contribute. The strategic plan has relevant labour market information and shows awareness of some of the issues facing the college, although it is less clear in indicating how they might be resolved. There is an overall costing of curriculum development, but few operational targets are costed. Such costing would help college managers to identify priorities. The plan would be improved if all topics were dealt with in equal depth. For example, the major section on students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a commentary on the views of faculties and the problems to be faced by the college in developing this area rather than a strategic analysis which could form the basis of policy development.

30 A particularly challenging issue for the college management is the delivery of a wide curriculum in a small college serving a scattered rural community. Contingency planning to counteract the under recruitment in 1994-95 would also have been helpful in preparation for dealing with the college's current situation.

31 The college has a health and safety policy, approved by the governors, and its implementation is reviewed by a health and safety committee. There is an equal opportunities committee and the college has recently revised its equal opportunities policy.

32 The college's senior management team meets at least weekly. Senior and middle managers meet regularly to discuss the implementation of policy. Heads of faculty, the heads of hall, faculty members and hall tutors meet separately in a four-week cycle. All meetings are minuted but responsibility for action is not always made clear. Communication between middle and senior management would benefit if a common format was

adopted for the minutes of meetings. It is not standard procedure to send all minutes of faculty and hall meetings to all members of the senior management team. The establishment of an academic board could be of value in increasing awareness across the college of links between curriculum development and resource allocation.

33 Teaching staff are line managed by a vice-principal (curriculum) through the heads of faculty. Some staff combine demanding teaching and cross-college roles. The line management of support staff is fragmented. A proposed review of staffing responsibilities and staff management is timely.

34 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The average level of funding in 1994-95 is £20.34 per unit compared with a national average for sixth form colleges of £19.81 per unit. After slightly exceeding its target in 1993-94, the college has so far failed to recruit to target in 1994-95 by 7 per cent for full-time enrolments, 12 per cent for part-time enrolments and 13 per cent in units. This failure has led directly to financial retrenchment and staff redundancies. Overpayment to the college in 1993-94 and repayment of the excess funding in 1994-95 has also led to some redundancies.

35 The management information system is inadequate and the college has had difficulty in using it as a supportive tool for management and, on occasion, for completing returns to the FEFC on time. Financial information produced from the database has to be recast by hand for presentation to the governing body and the senior management team. There have been delays in producing financial information in the past and, because of this, the full implications of the under recruitment in autumn 1994 were not grasped sufficiently quickly. As a result, some inefficient courses commenced, preventing the college from minimising the adverse financial consequences of the under recruitment.

36 Staff are not efficiently deployed. The average teaching group size in September 1994 was 12. Twenty-one of 67 full-time courses are running with less than 10 students. Although some courses are run with small group sizes to preserve curriculum choice, there is scope to increase the size of curriculum groups without loss of quality and to achieve a more efficient deployment of staff. Preliminary work has begun on the calculation of unit costs and the intention is to use these in future as a significant element in deciding which courses to run.

37 A general weakness of management across the college is the lack of consistency in implementing college-wide policies on: retention and enrolment, agendas for action by faculty and hall meetings, the departmental contributions to the strategic plan and quality assurance.

38 Despite awareness of increasing competition, college managers were surprised by the decline in the number of full-time students recruited in autumn 1994 and slow to appreciate the full financial implications of this shortfall.

39 Specific targets for enrolment and retention are not set. Their introduction would be of benefit in alerting all staff to the need for effective marketing and recruitment. The college keeps records of students' withdrawals but analysis of the reasons lacks rigour and does not extend to vocational courses. Recording of withdrawals from individual subjects is left to individual departments and it is unclear how extensive such records are or whether there is a consistent policy for recording retention at this level.

40 Students' destinations are thoroughly monitored. In recent years 50 per cent of students have gone on to higher education, 25 per cent to employment, 10 per cent to other further education and 15 per cent are unknown. There is precise information about the institution or place of destination. It is a particularly helpful feature that this information is shared with partner schools.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

41 Students are grouped in halls for social, sporting and cultural activities. There are clear policy statements on tutorial support and guidance. The policy is managed by the vice-principal (curriculum) to whom the two senior tutors report. They in turn manage the personal tutors and the heads of halls. Most academic staff are personal tutors.

42 There are regular meetings of tutors with senior management and heads of faculty. The minutes of meetings are comprehensive. The lines of management are clear, though complex. Much communication is through personal contact. Every member of the team, particularly the senior tutors, has two or three roles in addition to their normal teaching commitments. The system's success depends on the level of enthusiasm and commitment of the staff.

43 Prospective students receive information through a general college prospectus pack, supported by individual subject leaflets. All year-11 students in the local schools receive this pack. There are separate pamphlets for adults. These give information on entry qualifications, fees, applications, course syllabus and content, assessment, and opportunities for progression. There are strong links with the local community and many students receive information by word of mouth.

44 The college works particularly closely with five partner schools, designated as such under the previous local authority system. The schools value this close relationship and provide a significant part of the college's recruitment. However, they also ensure that information is made available to their students from the larger colleges in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Kidderminster. Students are increasingly prepared to travel to attend a course which precisely meets their needs.

45 Procedures for handling applications are effective. Partner schools are provided with application forms and students wishing to apply to the

college are interviewed promptly in the school by the college link person. The application forms are clear, students receive plenty of information and they find the interviews informal, friendly and supportive. Applicants from other schools and adults are invited to the college for interview. The process of application, speed of response and quality of advice is highly valued by local teachers, students and parents.

46 Recruitment is supported by a series of events that are designed to introduce and guide students to the course most suited to their needs. College staff visit local schools and participate in careers and parents' open evenings. Liaison days with partner schools are organised so that groups of students can visit the college. The college runs open evenings in November and March for all potential applicants. In July of each year a two-day taster course is provided for all students who have been offered a place. The programme involves meetings with tutors and an opportunity to sample up to six different subjects. This event is carefully evaluated through a well-designed student questionnaire. Students' comments are very favourable and report the experience as memorable.

47 Adult students are being recruited in increasing numbers. College policy actively encourages the participation of adults and there is an adult learners' day. However, there are no formal arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning. While the college recognises this as a weakness, a number of non-standard entries are agreed on a personal basis. Two members of staff possess the appropriate Training and Development Lead Body awards to conduct accreditation of prior learning. Students' experience and previous skills are taken into account, particularly in the areas of art and design, and business.

48 A day nursery has recently been opened in well-appointed college premises. Former students of the nursery nursing course have been awarded the franchise to provide a service as a private business, with the college having priority on a third of the places.

49 There is a successful college induction programme. Students quickly feel a part of the college. Individual subject induction varies. There is an extensive induction process in English which introduces methods of study. Students describe this as helping to build confidence. In other humanities subjects, the induction includes a subject-based introduction to the library. In most other subjects, the process of induction was brief but effective. Transfers between subjects are sympathetically handled by the staff. Individual study guides are available in most subjects. There are helpful guides to information technology and the library. All students spoken to were aware of the student charter. Students felt that they had the opportunity to make complaints, initially through the tutorial system. When complaints have been made, they have been acted upon.

50 The hall system and the tutors are the main vehicles for communication with students in the college. Tutors are responsible for developing student profiles, individual course and career plans, and

records of achievement. They are also responsible for keeping records of attendance and overall progress. There is a published programme of events and tasks for tutors throughout the year and clear guidance on all aspects of tutoring. Students are allocated to tutor groups to create a mix from various years and courses. Mature students are organised into separate tutor groups. Students attend tutor groups for a short period every day and on two days a week this period is extended to half an hour. The system is valued by staff and students, and is successful in ensuring that students are fully supported in all aspects of their progress through the college. Some staff and students find the requirement to attend the short tutorial meeting every day unnecessary, particularly since attendance is registered by subject tutors. The average attendance at these short tutorial meetings varies. In those inspected, it varied between 30 and 70 per cent with some students persistently not attending. The college plans to review this system.

51 Entry to employment and applications to higher education through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service is well managed. Students are given plenty of advice and support. The careers co-ordinator, who also teaches, has approximately two days a week for this role. The college is integrating careers guidance well into the tutorial system. Each hall has a tutor responsible for careers advice. There is very close liaison with the county careers service whose offices are within the college. There is a well-resourced college careers office, including access to occupational and higher education information through appropriate software. The four careers staff and the local county careers officer are timetabled in the college careers office on a weekly basis to meet with students. There is a calendar of careers events for each year and a careers month when speakers, such as university admissions tutors, are invited to the college. Ninety-four students recently attended a major careers convention in Staffordshire.

52 The special needs co-ordinator is responsible for liaison with tutors and outside agencies. The co-ordinator arranges and monitors support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The initial assessment of 'second chance' students is clear and helpful. However, there is no screening of students except for those studying GCSE English and only three students are receiving additional support, although more were offered this. The identification of the need for support is not matched by any additional provision. The college recognises the need to introduce more comprehensive screening and provide an appropriate level of support. The availability of funding from the FEFC for learning support needs to be better understood by staff.

53 A student profiling and record of achievement system has been in place since 1991. This involves students commenting on their progress, followed by subject tutor comments written after discussion with the student. Profiles are completed at twice-yearly intervals and, at the end of

a course, tutors and students complete summative profiles. All are completed very thoroughly. Staff comments are detailed and sensitive as are the staff files on students. Students value the interaction with tutors involved in the process of developing profiles. Profiles are sent to parents for comment and each student's personal tutor follows up replies.

54 Most students travel to college from home, though there are an increasing number arranging their own accommodation. The college provides some advice on local rented accommodation and has contact with the South Shropshire Housing Association which provides purpose-built rented accommodation for single people, some of whom are college students.

55 The small access fund for supporting mature students is supplemented by college funds. This is administered by the vice-principal (finance). The majority of support given is for childcare and travel costs. Claims exceed the funds available and are dealt with on a first-come-first-served basis.

56 The college has no personal counsellor although two members of staff have appropriate training as counsellors and the college has access to external professional counselling. Initial student concerns are dealt with through the personal tutoring system and referrals can be made to the appropriate head of hall. Some students are referred to the support worker of the local youth service. Pamphlets on this service and on other local counselling services are made available to students. Students who need advice tend to contact the most sympathetic tutor available.

57 There is a thorough system for recording and monitoring attendance. All subject lessons are registered as are the daily tutorial meetings. A sample of registers showed a high average attendance of 85 per cent; the average for the sessions inspected was 78 per cent. Absence from more than one session in five working days is notified by subject staff to tutors. Tutors ask students' reasons for absence and report this to the subject staff. If the problem persists, the heads of hall are notified and parents are contacted, where appropriate. This system works well.

58 The college has a clear policy for work placements. Employers who have received students on placement describe them as well prepared, professional and helpful in their attitude. The tutor in charge of work experience ensures that students and employers receive clear information from the college.

59 There is a student council comprising representatives from each tutor group. The senior tutor for student services acts as a staff observer to the council. The council meets weekly, organises social functions and is preparing an alternative prospectus on video. The council's activities are well supported and it regularly donates a percentage of profits from functions to local and international charities. Small grants are made to students for overseas visits and special projects. The college organises an

annual activities day which offers an extensive range of visits and events involving the majority of staff and students. These activities create a lively social ethos that complements the academic work of the college.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

60 Of the 110 sessions observed 64 per cent had strengths outweighing weaknesses. There were a significant number of grade 1 sessions in sociology. Seven per cent of sessions had more weaknesses than strengths. The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programmes | Grade 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level | 13 | 31 | 19 | 7 | 0 | 70 |
| GCSE | 5 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| GNVQ | 0 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| NVQ | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Basic education | 0 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 9 |
| Other | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 19 | 51 | 32 | 8 | 0 | 110 |

61 The majority of sessions were well planned and managed. There were clear schemes of work based on the awarding bodies' syllabuses. In most subjects these schemes were set out in helpful course booklets and guides which gave clear advice to students on assignment work and encouraged students to record their own progress. In humanities, these subject guides were of high quality and a model of their kind. There were good relations between staff and students in most lessons.

62 Teachers in most areas were knowledgeable and used a variety of teaching techniques. There were many lessons in which staff skilfully used questioning to challenge students' thinking. There is a commitment to the use of information technology in the college and good use is made of the open-access facilities. Information technology is regularly used for assignment work in a number of subjects. However, the use of information technology is often limited to wordprocessing and a wider use of spreadsheets and databases could be encouraged. The use of other teaching aids is more varied. There was good use of video in geography and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases were used effectively in science and economics. The use of other aids was not always effective. In some GCSE subjects, particularly English and mathematics, some staff did not give sufficient attention to the needs of individual students.

63 The teaching of adult basic education and the foundation programme for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varied in quality.

The initial assessment of students was clear and helpful. In some classes, dialogue between teacher and individual students was of a high quality and learning was reinforced. Many classes were carefully planned and good records were kept. However, in other sessions students were not stretched and often left unoccupied after completing their work. In the 'second chance' classes, students were not expected to keep their own daily records of tasks achieved. In the weaker sessions inspected the teaching style was repetitive and there was little group work. The marking of work of 'second chance' students did not help them to improve their work.

64 In leisure and tourism there were good relationships between teachers and students. Classes were well organised and linked together to provide a systematic framework for learning. The teaching of GNVQ leisure and tourism was given professional relevance through the use of local tourism and leisure locations. For example, the historic sites in Ludlow were used as the base for a student assignment on maintaining health, safety and security for tourists. Teachers gave clear written instructions for assignments. However, in the assessment of these assignments staff could have provided more detailed guidance to students. The teaching of GNVQ leisure and tourism classes would have benefited from a clearer focus with summaries and conclusions given for each lesson.

65 The English staff gave careful thought to the planning of courses. Considerable emphasis was placed on teaching the skills required for the examinations. Some students would benefit from more independent learning approaches. In most GCE A level lessons good staff-student relationships allowed a lively and informal seminar atmosphere. Students responded well to the activities which were often challenging. In one effective class, discussion of the final section of a play was followed by students assuming the roles of characters and answering questions from their group on their actions and motives. Staff need to be careful to ensure that all students play a full part in discussions.

66 There was a variety of learning activities in geography and geology. Effective use was made of rock specimens to illustrate theories and lessons were supported by relevant maps, texts and source materials. There was little emphasis on groupwork and group discussion. Fieldwork provides a good support for college-based learning. Video programmes were well used. In one example of good practice, the programme was frequently paused to allow students to take notes and to test students' understanding of the key issues. The marking of students' work was supportive and accurate but more guidance should be given to students on how to improve the quality of their work.

67 The schemes of work in art and design followed the syllabuses published for GCE A level. In painting, sculpture and pottery these schemes were implemented through well-organised practical projects which had

clear learning objectives and good links between theory and practice. In one class, life drawing was used to explore a particular drawing technique that had been identified in a previous history of art seminar. The organisation of projects in design limited students' work, and gave them insufficient opportunities to explore and experiment with visual qualities. Art and design teaching would have benefited from more integrated teaching, linking the subjects of painting, sculpture, pottery, design and textiles. Students who were following two or three of these GCE A level subjects would have benefited from closer subject links.

68 The teaching of business and administration was of high quality and used a variety of teaching styles. Clear schemes of work underpinned well-structured lessons. The teaching of business computing was particularly imaginative and successful. The students, including a number of adults, were highly articulate and their involvement in sessions displayed considerable maturity. Students made imaginative responses to tutors' questions and were prepared to challenge tutors. In some weaker classes, work was poorly planned.

69 Teaching in sociology was outstanding. It was characterised by helpful and persistent challenges to students from the teacher. The wide range of techniques used to reinforce learning include, information technology, the use of relevant literature, groupwork and audio-visual aids. In one lesson on the introduction of key issues in the sociology of education, analyses of issues drawn from the students' own experiences were skilfully developed through questions to establish tentative ideas. These ideas were explored further by students working in small groups. Different viewpoints were debated with interest and enthusiasm. The tutor then skilfully drew key issues together.

70 History was competently taught. Students experienced a varied range of methods of working. There was an emphasis upon the analysis and understanding of original sources. Students demonstrated good, detailed and general knowledge of historical facts and dates. At times some students were inattentive in class and staff need to ensure that all students were fully involved.

71 Staff teaching modern languages were well qualified, experienced and knowledgeable. Lessons were well planned and involved a variety of activities. Good use was made of texts and recordings drawn from original sources. The development of oral skills was enhanced by staff and students taking roles in simulated situations. Students use audio recordings for individual study in college and at home. Work was regularly set and carefully marked. The staff kept full records of students' progress. The schemes of work needed to be more detailed, setting out clear objectives for students. Some lessons were not sufficiently challenging and staff could have made more use of information technology, video and problem solving in setting students' assignments.

72 The teaching of mathematics and computing at GCE A level was strong. Some outstanding computing sessions were seen. All the lessons inspected were well planned and involved a broad range of activities. Students were well-motivated and were often challenged by the choice of activities. One session involved students presenting their computing project to the rest of the group. Students were able to develop their communication skills and gave confident, clear and detailed explanations of their work. Work is regularly set and marked and staff keep good records of students' achievements and progress. There were a number of concerns related to the teaching of GCSE mathematics. There was no process by which staff could identify individual students' strengths and weaknesses and develop their work accordingly. The non-completion rate is high and absenteeism is a problem affecting the progress of several GCSE groups.

73 Science teaching varied in quality. In biology, there were useful student guides but the teaching schemes in physics and chemistry were poor, being little more than lists of topics. In physics some good practical classes involved students in individual experiments which demanded the safe use of up-to-date equipment. However, theoretical sessions often involved students in continuous note taking over long periods. There was little use of groupwork. Although assignments were regularly set, little of the work seen by inspectors was marked and staff records of work were poor.

74 The teaching of chemistry had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. There were good relations between staff and students but the teaching and learning lacked variety. Some lessons were badly organised. In a revision lesson poor organisation prevented the full achievement of the lesson's objectives and resulted in students' work that contained many errors. The marking of students' work should be more rigorous; mistakes are frequently marked as correct. The teaching of foundation chemistry, which is designed to assist students with problems, was poor and students were left to work on their own.

75 In biology a variety of teaching styles successfully integrated a range of learning aids including information technology into the teaching. The practical lessons were skilfully organised. There was an imaginative range of experiments for students to choose from for their assessment at GCE A level. One session involved the study of aspects of ecology through sampling and analysis of the nearby river. The tutor demonstrated good practice in methods of sampling and provided useful notes to aid classification. Students worked with enthusiasm on their individual analyses.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

76 Students follow an appropriate range of courses and aim to achieve qualifications from foundation to GCE A level and BTEC national diploma level. Most students speak with enthusiasm about their courses and enjoy the subjects studied. This was particularly evident in leisure and tourism,

art and design and language courses. Students are given the opportunity to work in small groups in some areas. They work well in groups in languages, business studies and leisure and tourism.

77 Students in most curriculum areas develop appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of the subjects they study. Students of modern languages develop effective written skills and have opportunities to listen to and speak the language, but these abilities are not consistently reflected in testing under examination conditions.

78 The college has a reputation for success and high achievement in creative arts. In 1994, seven students progressed to further education foundation courses and four students to higher education degree courses in art and design. Students' work in art and design shows clear progression in technical knowledge. More use of computer-aided design in the final presentation of graphic work would improve performance. Design work in particular is put in a professional context and involves thorough research, market analysis and questionnaire surveys. The final realisation of such projects, however, is often unimaginative.

79 English students demonstrate a thorough grasp of texts and their work is well planned and detailed. They are articulate and confident. No clear reason has been identified for retention rates in English which are below those of the college as a whole. In history, work is generally of a high standard and students demonstrate fluent written English and effective oral skills. Business studies students endeavour to include original research in their work. The course is effective in raising their career aspirations and many students go on to either employment or higher education.

80 In science classes practical work is competently and safely conducted and students develop relevant skills. In physics, students are able to apply their theoretical knowledge to both practical and experimental design. There was evidence of some poor English and spelling by students in biology GCSE classes and in chemistry, where students often incorrectly spell scientific names and terms. Some students' written work in geography is weak.

81 Information technology was successfully integrated with other aspects of work in many curriculum areas. In business studies and biology, students showed competence in using information technology. In history students made effective use of CD-ROM database facilities. In other areas, including languages and chemistry there was no evidence of the integration of information technology in the teaching or in students' work and students were not developing appropriate skills. Not all GCE A level students were fully aware of the information technology opportunities available to them. Core skills are being developed in GNVQ and NNEB courses.

82 The college is accredited to deliver a range of national foundation level courses and successful progression is made to training programmes, other colleges and work. However, in the 'second chance' programme

students' progression is poor. Records of achievement are kept for all foundation course students.

83 The majority of students are following GCE A level courses, with 338 students entered for 32 subjects in 1994. Overall the pass rate was 85 per cent with 472 passes from 558 entries. Students aged 16-18 achieve an average point score per entry of 5.3 (where A=10, E=2). This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges within the further education sector, on this performance measure based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education.

84 The GCE A level results in some curriculum areas were well above the provisional national average for sixth form colleges. In art and design, English literature, physical education, politics and psychology at least 50 per cent of the students entered achieved A or B grades. In 14 subjects over 90 per cent of students achieved grades A-E. English results have been consistently high for several years with a 92 per cent pass rate in 1994. Geography and geology results are above the national average. In geology 10 of the 12 candidates achieved a pass at grades A-C. In art and design there was a 100 per cent pass rate at grades A-E in 1993 and 1994. In mathematics pass rates are close to the provisional national average for sixth form colleges. GCE A level results in modern languages have been at or above the national average for several years. In the sciences results have been below national averages with a 72 per cent pass rate at grades A-E, in 1994. In biology results were high with a 87 per cent pass rate in biology and 92 per cent in social biology at grades A-E. Chemistry results are below the provisional national average with 55 per cent achieving A-E grades, compared with the national average for sixth form colleges of 82 per cent. Students' results in chemistry were generally lower than in their other subjects.

85 There were 322 entries for GCSE examinations in 18 subjects in 1994. The pass rate achieved at grades A-C was 61 per cent compared with a national average for sixth form colleges of 49 per cent in 1994. In art and design all 36 candidates achieved grades A-C, with 14 passes at grade A. In English the 1994 results were low with a 38 per cent pass rate at grades A-C. In 1993 there was an 85 per cent pass rate at A-C grades. The difference in the 1993 and 1994 pass rates may indicate difficulties in preparing students for the change in coursework assessment from 100 to 40 per cent. Geology results are consistently high with over 80 per cent achievement at A-C grades. Retention rates on GCSE courses showed a 20 per cent drop in 1994 to 74 per cent.

86 Achievements in vocational courses are high. All BTEC national and C&G courses achieved 100 per cent pass rates in 1994. On intermediate GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism and in health and social care, there were 100 per cent and 70 per cent pass rates, respectively. An adult student on the intermediate GNVQ in health and social care course was one of six people nationally to be awarded an 'outstanding achievement'

certificate at the General Vocational Awards Ceremony 1994 organised by the Tallow Chandlers Company and C&G.

87 The college is very aware of the value of student achievement in areas other than examinations. It actively encourages involvement in sport, music, drama and community work. Students have achieved success in county championships and regional competitions in hockey and netball. College students play for the county in football, netball, rugby and hockey. Individual talents are fostered. There are currently several students who compete at a national level in sport. The college has an annual presentation event where a range of awards are made for academic, sporting and other notable achievements.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

88 The strategy for quality assurance is based upon a policy document, which provides a framework for how to approach quality assurance. Implementation is at an early stage and, despite achieving a good record of examination performance, the college's approach to assuring quality is inconsistent in some subjects.

89 There is a programme of end-of-year course reviews but it is incomplete. The quality of the reviews is variable. The better examples are carefully prepared, thorough and provide an effective survey of performance. They use a variety of criteria, such as student perception surveys and analysis of examination results, to measure and evaluate performance. A number also indicate proposed actions to remedy matters of concern. There are also examples of course reviews which lack rigour and are poorly presented. There is no overall college system for the evaluation of these reports apart from the principal's review and comments. The good practice found in a number of reviews is not, at present, shared across the college.

90 The setting of targets and standards is not well developed. Periodic monitoring and review does occur at faculty, hall, heads of halls and heads of faculties meetings. Some of the outcomes of such meetings, such as the recent review of student profiling, have made a useful contribution to quality assurance. However, the meetings do not effectively address issues such as the link between resources and the curriculum. There is a proposal to establish an academic board to provide a more thorough approach. The existing system for monitoring and enhancing quality, is not developed sufficiently to provide a comprehensive system of quality assurance across the college.

91 There are clear procedures and criteria for responding to reports from awarding bodies. Analysis takes place at faculty level and is reviewed by the vice-principal (curriculum). Action is then taken on the basis of the report and the vice-principal's review. Improvements to the administration of GNVQ were a result of this process. However, the procedures are not always followed.

92 The governors' annual report provides a useful summary of the college's activities in the previous academic year. This is followed up by a meeting with interested parents at the college where the chairman, a group of governors, the principal and the vice-principal (curriculum) answer questions on the report and the performance of the college.

93 The college has successfully informed students about the college's charter. Students spoken to were aware of its existence and significance. This also applied to the national charter for further education. Staff have been consulted on the college's charter and have assisted in its preparation. There is general support for the document and endorsement of its aims and objectives. Staff awareness of the national charter is less extensive.

94 The college produced a self-assessment report using the seven headings from Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Each section is graded. The document provided a helpful and useful portrait of the character and nature of the college. Although the report is not laid out in terms of strengths and weaknesses, judgements are made. In the main, the points made in the report accord with the findings of the inspection, although there is greater emphasis on strengths than weaknesses.

95 The college has been very slow in developing staff appraisal. A system has been designed, there has been consultation with the staff and appraisal has been explained at a recent development day. A schedule for a pilot appraisal programme during the summer term is in place and training for those involved in the pilot has occurred. Progress will be reviewed with the aim of having a full appraisal system in place for the autumn term but at the time of the inspection no staff appraisal had taken place.

96 There are no written procedures for staff induction, although an effective framework of help and assistance is in place, organised by the head of staff development. Each new member of staff is allocated to the relevant faculty where the head provides assistance on curriculum matters. Personal help and guidance is given by the head of staff development. Review is through interview with the head of faculty and the head of staff development. Support for new recruits, in areas such as teaching and learning techniques and classroom management, is also obtained from the Shropshire LEA.

97 There are clear and well-established procedures for assessing staff-development needs for both teaching and support staff. The programme is well structured and organised. Allocation of funds is related to an evaluation of bids in terms of faculty needs and the requirements of the strategic plan. The college is keen to support the professional development of individual staff. There is systematic evaluation of staff development. This is undertaken initially through the participant's review of the development activity immediately after the training. After three months a further review is carried out by the head of staff development and the appropriate head of faculty to see if the development has been useful. The head of staff development evaluates staff development on the basis of effectiveness and value for money, and presents a report to senior managers.

RESOURCES

Staffing

98 Staff are well qualified and experienced for the programmes they teach. Just over 80 per cent of the staff have degrees and 83 per cent have teaching qualifications. Staff teaching vocational programmes possess the relevant professional qualifications. For NVQ and GNVQ provision the college has been particularly successful in training teachers for the Training and Development Lead Body awards, D32 and D33. This has also been repeated with the D34 award for internal verification. Two members of staff have obtained Training and Development Lead Body award D36 for the accreditation of prior learning and experience. Many staff also have useful experience outside education.

99 There are 40 full-time teachers and the equivalent of 14.5 full-time teachers engaged in part-time contracts. Since incorporation the use by the college of hourly-paid teachers has grown. However, the present financial position at the college is leading to a reduction in the number of teachers. This difficult matter has been handled in a sensitive manner.

100 The college has been successful through its recruitment policy in creating a balance between men and women on the teaching staff. There are sufficient support and technician staff, apart from art and design where more technician support is required. Since incorporation there has been planned growth in this area by 50 per cent to cope with a greater administrative load and to free teachers to concentrate on teaching. Support staff play a key part in the work of the college but at present there is no cohesive management of these staff. The college has recently produced a staff handbook which contains useful information about college policies and procedures.

Equipment/learning resources

101 Faculties and other budget holders bid for new capital equipment and replacements. Each bid is checked against the college's strategic plan. Capital equipment funds are controlled centrally with the senior management team approving expenditure. Furniture and teaching aids in classrooms are generally adequate. Overall, the range and quality of specialist equipment and materials is adequate to support the curriculum although the acquisition of printing equipment would enhance the teaching of textiles. Equipment is well maintained. The provision of general learning resources is satisfactory. Most departments are well equipped with books. Audio-visual equipment is readily available.

102 Specialist computing students have good access to appropriate hardware and software during formally timetabled periods and on an open-access basis. There is a consistent range of hardware and software throughout the college. The ratio of computers to students is satisfactory, although some sites have more computers than others. Provision of CD-

ROM databases is good. The cross-college policy on information technology is well co-ordinated and monitored centrally. The college is well placed to increase the number of computer workstations in line with demand and also to network them as appropriate.

103 The library provides a pleasant working environment. There is a useful range of CD-ROMs, videos and other information technology facilities housed in adjacent rooms, to avoid disturbing library users. Some library books are out of date. The library catalogue is computerised and this is proving to be useful for the librarian. The library provides a good induction to students, with individual follow up and advice. The librarian has good informal links with teaching staff. A library committee consisting of faculty heads, the resources manager and the librarian meets to consider priorities for library funding, including the ordering of periodicals. There is only limited monitoring of the use, quality and effectiveness of the library and the information technology provision. The college's strategic plan makes no reference to the role or planned development of the library.

Accommodation

104 The college has a rich variety of buildings, from fifteenth century grade II listed buildings to a modern sports centre. All four sites are located in pleasantly landscaped areas, three of them within the old town of Ludlow. Over the last few years, the college has undertaken a range of work that has resulted in the improvement of the condition of nearly all the buildings. Most rooms have been refurbished and decorated. The notable exception is the refectory block which is in poor condition. Sports facilities are well developed. Good use is made of local playing fields for winter and summer activities.

105 The college has a comprehensive procedure for allocating rooms following an annual space-utilisation audit. A further review each September makes appropriate adjustments according to student enrolments. Existing room allocations are adequate for current class sizes, as most rooms can be organised to facilitate the required learning activities through the flexible use and layout of furniture. The accommodation for each department is grouped more or less together.

106 The college provides a welcoming environment, conducive to the promotion of learning. Examples of students' coursework are displayed throughout the college, together with stimulating wall displays of published materials. Each room is allocated to one or more members of staff who are responsible for overseeing that area. Corridors and common areas are well decorated. Car parks, driveways and grounds are kept in good order. The college is kept clean and tidy throughout.

107 Access to many college buildings is difficult for those with restricted mobility, particularly in High Hall. The college is aware of the problems of access but is restricted by the planning conditions that apply to most of the college buildings.

108 The college commissioned a professional survey of the condition of its estate. Together with the Hunter report, a comprehensive schedule of accommodation has been drawn up and this has formed the basis for a detailed maintenance schedule. The college's accommodation strategy has taken into account the existing land and buildings and assessed them against the strategic plan. Short to medium-term plans have been drawn up. The college will have to consider the long-term implications of its accommodation strategy taking account of future student numbers and the restrictions imposed by the grade II listing of many of its buildings, as well as its location within a conservation area.

109 Maintenance is effectively planned to minimise disruption to the students and staff. Major works are carried out during vacations. Health and safety has a high priority within the college and the county council is contracted to undertake an annual survey. Departments are required to respond to any findings while also undertaking their own detailed risk analysis.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

110 The strengths of the college are:

- a broad and responsive curriculum
- effective liaison with partner schools, employers, the TEC and the community
- well-developed marketing
- an effective and supportive governing body
- comprehensive information on students' destinations
- an effective tutorial system
- clear procedures for handling applications, interviews and induction
- effective careers advice and guidance
- good teaching in many areas
- good examination results in many subjects
- an effective staff-development programme
- well-qualified and experienced staff
- well-cared for and efficiently used accommodation
- good access to information technology for students.

111 If the college is to raise standards further, it should:

- improve its management information system
- consider whether efficiency gains can be made by reviewing the deployment of its staff
- ensure greater consistency in the implementation of policies
- consider the establishment of an academic board

-
- reconsider student counselling support
 - address weaknesses in the teaching and internal assessment of some subject areas
 - consider the greater use of independent learning methods including open and distance learning
 - establish an effective system of quality assurance
 - establish staff appraisal
 - improve unsatisfactory refectory facilities.

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)

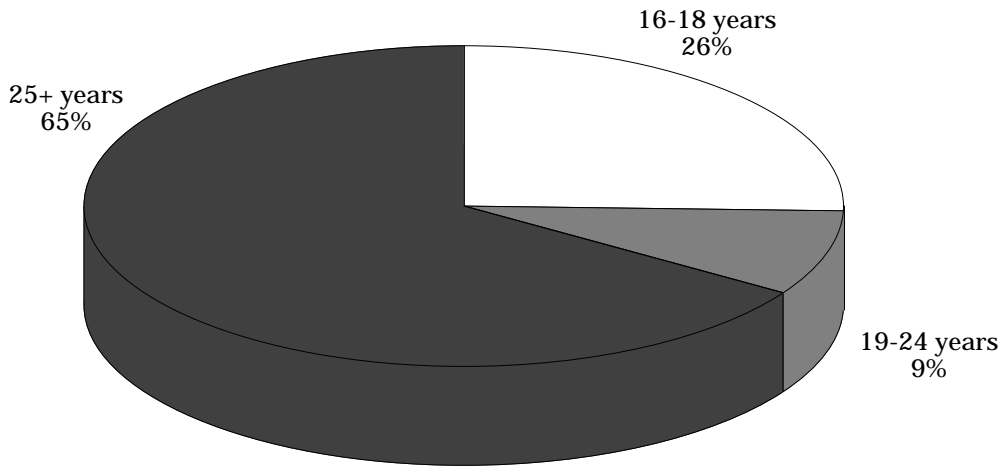
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

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

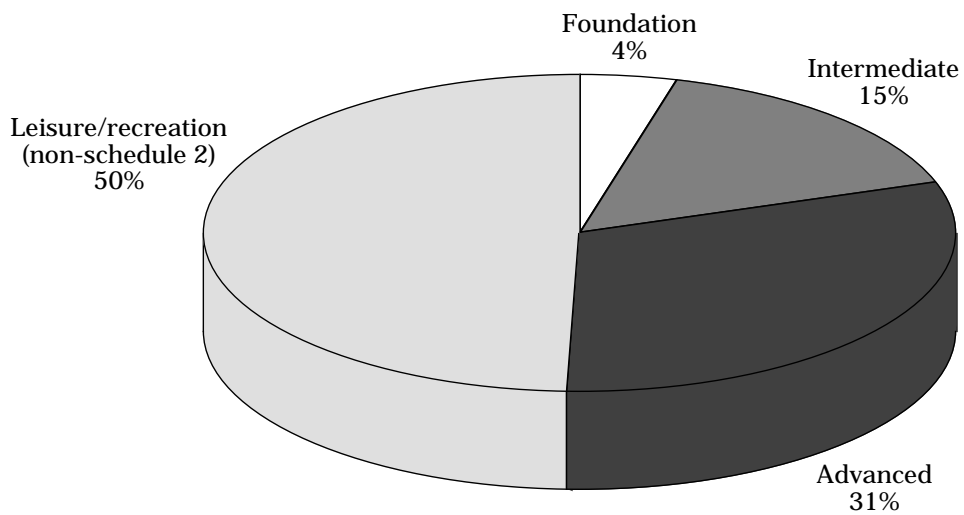


Enrolments: 1,646

Note: this chart excludes six enrolments aged under 16.

Figure 2

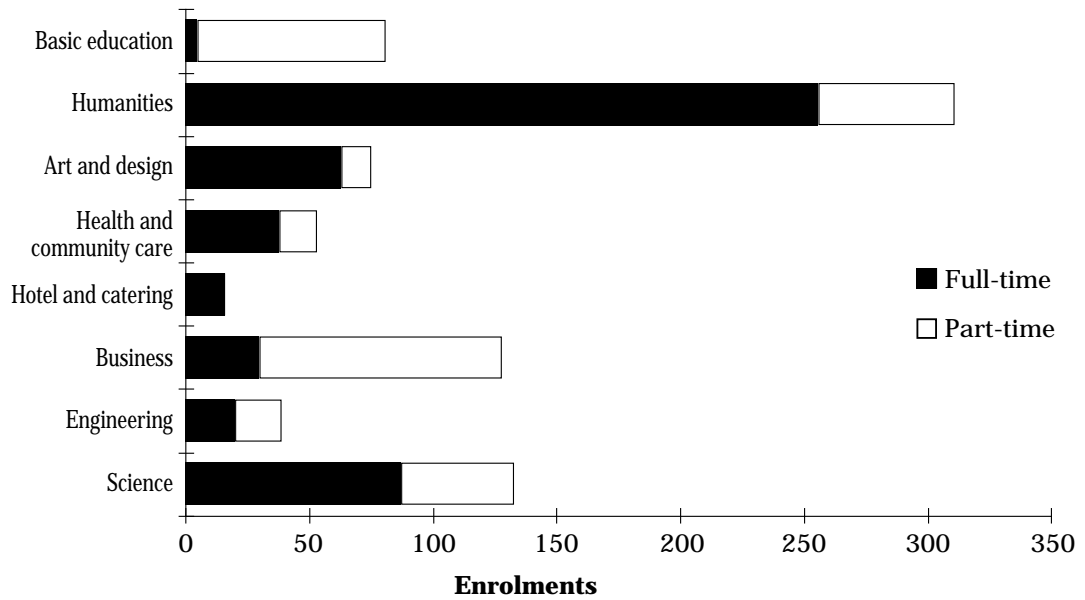
Ludlow College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,646

Figure 3

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

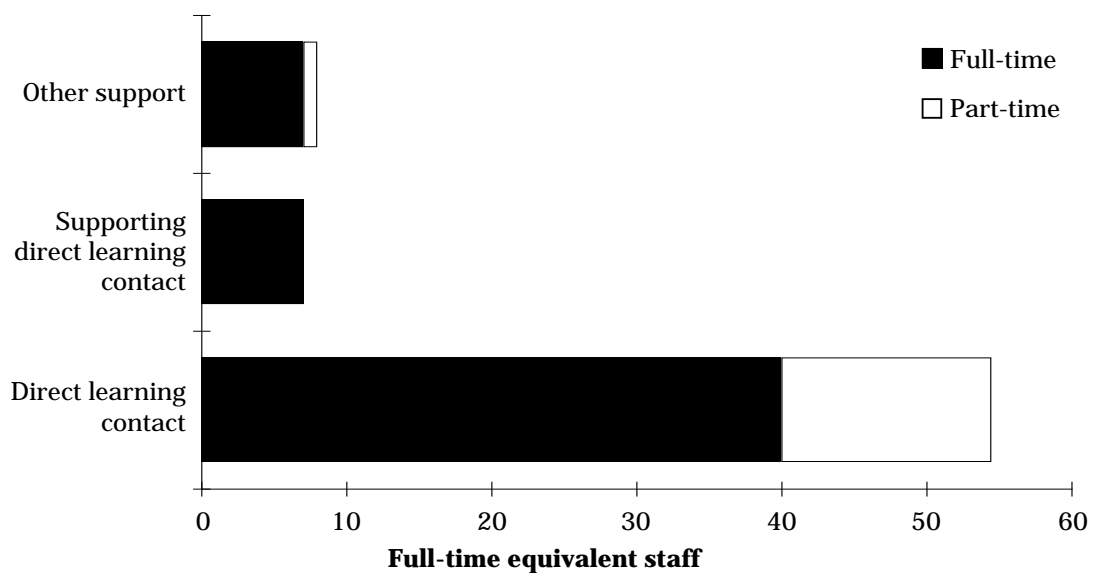


Enrolments: 836

Note: this excludes 810 non-schedule 2 enrolments.

Figure 4

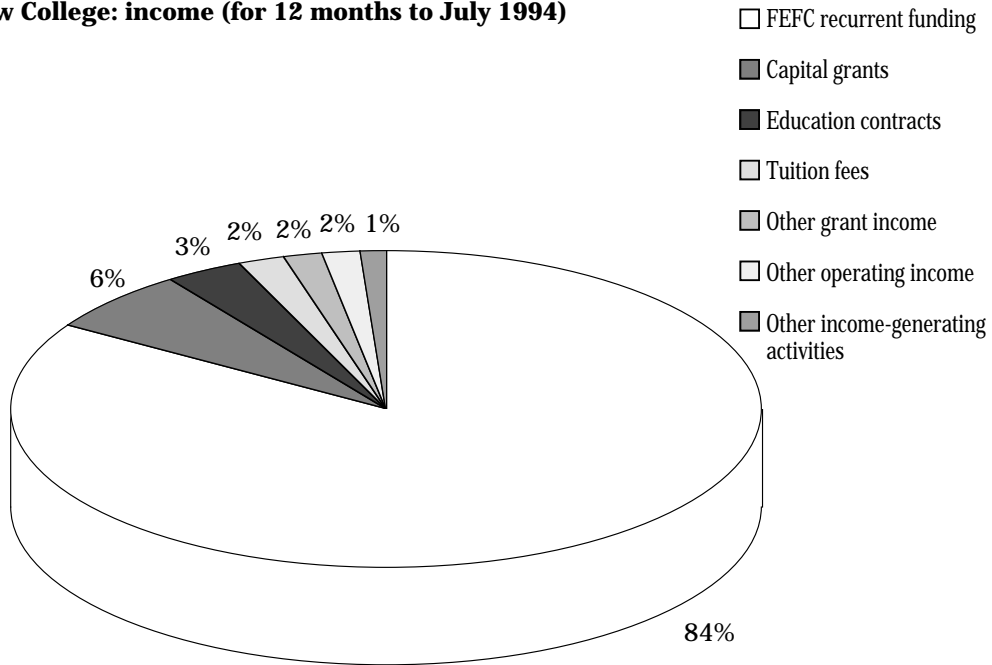
Ludlow College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 70

Figure 5

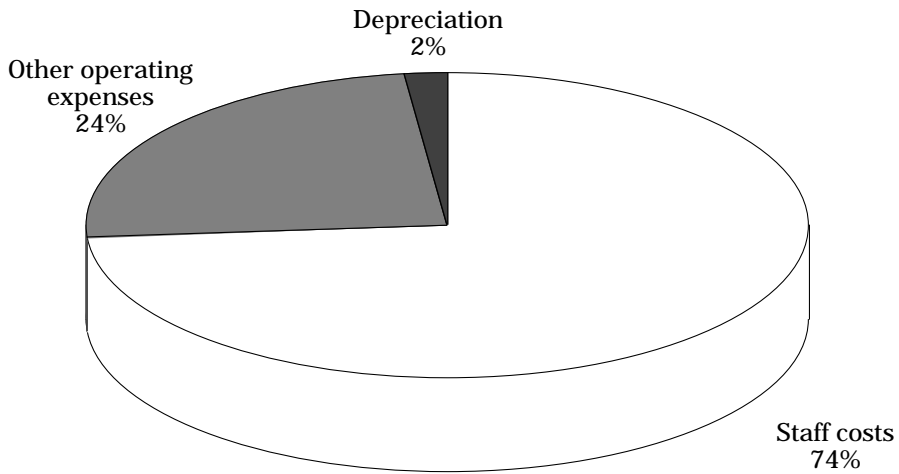
Ludlow College: income (for 12 months to July 1994)



Income: £2,092,000

Figure 6

Ludlow College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £2,160,000

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